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Emotional Style: The Cultural Ordering of Emotions

DEWIGHT R. MIDDLETON

Our emotional lives, ordered by culture, contribute greatly to our sense of identity, our motivation to act, and our interpretation of the acts of others. Our emotions are historically shaped sociocultural constructions more than they are personal possession. They are processual events tied fundamentally to other domains of culture. Emotions, like culture, are organized in distinctive patterns.

These statements represent both the guiding theoretical stance and the principal findings of an emerging literature devoted to discovering the influence of culture in ordering our emotional experience. Lutz and White (1986) recently contributed an excellent survey of this literature. There is insufficient space here to explore in appropriate detail the historical development of the current theoretical perspective, but Lutz and White deal with this topic as well as a number of other important issues. This paper benefits generally from their review, while drawing more directly on arguments developed by Scruton (1986) and Middleton (1986) with particular reference to fear, buttressed by Westen's (1985) general model of self and culture[1] and by discussions of issues raised in the recent compendium by Shweder and LeVine (1984).

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The emerging literature demonstrates clearly the need to focus directly on the sociocultural nature of emotions and to explore the interrelationship of culturally shaped emotions with other elements of culture. The literature underscores human problems of grappling with morality, reason, feeling, and act in daily life. It casts new light on the dynamic tension between personal needs and group needs, and poses new challenges to the interpretations of ethnographers. It counterbalances our past preoccupation with cognition, rationality, and calculation by restoring the centrality of feeling and motivation and by demonstrating the processual and interactive relationship between cognition and affect.

Given the recent surge in the size of a relevant body of data, it seems appropriate now to begin to sharpen our modeling of cultural and emotional processes by developing conceptual language that identifies the basic dimensions discovered thus far. The concept of *emotional style* is intended as a contribution toward this goal.

EMOTIONAL STYLE

The organization of our emotions bears the stamp of time and place. Emotional style connects individual experience with historically derived group cognitive and moral structures which, in turn, supply the meaning and motivation by which individuals enact and interpret style and self in their daily lives. The concept of style reflects the formative and regulative role of culture in furnishing us with ordered emotional experiences. A culture, then, may be described in part by its characteristic organization of emotions.

Emotional style is the normative organization of emotions, their indigenous classification, form of communication, intensities of expression, contexts of expression, and patterns of linkage with each other and with other domains of culture.[2] This concept obviously requires a reasonable isomorphism between the organization of self and the organization of culture, but it does not require an extreme goodness of fit. We know that most individuals internalize most of their culture, just as we know that the socialization process is imperfect. Even in the case of imperfect socialization, however, individuals tend to conform to public norms regardless of internal feelings that vary from them. It is the overt, public side of emotions that occupies our interest.

The elements of emotional style delineated below best identify and mark the dimensions of emotions as sociocultural constructions. It should be noted that these elements do not represent discrete, unidimensional properties of emotional experience and are unlikely to satisfy the methodological purist. Indeed, the literature suggests, if anything, that indigenous emotion terms and categories are often ambiguous, situationally influenced, and probably refractory in most cases to componential analysis. A frankly interpretive approach will prove generally to be more productive than the misleading rigor of experimental science. The concept of emotional style is accordingly offered as a set of guidelines to facilitate discovery, description, and discussion rather than as bases for operational definitions and experimental manipulation of discrete phenomena.

ELEMENTS OF EMOTIONAL STYLE

Constitutive Rules

John Searle (1969), a philosopher of language, proposed two types of rules applicable to linguistic analysis that promise to gain wide acceptance in studies of culture and emotions (Averill 1984:31–35; Gerber 1975:20–26). Using games as an analogy, constitutive rules define the nature of a game—its identity—that distinguishes it from all other games, for example, checkers from chess. The definition of the game sets in motion behavior characteristic of that game and no other. Constitutive rules, in other words, generate new forms of behavior. Applied to emotions, such rules define the emotions characteristic of a given culture and its people. They establish the identity of that culture with respect to emotions from which specific behavior flows. Thus Gerber, in her landmark study of Samoan emotions, notes that the anger of Samoan males in certain contexts is morally justified because appropriate anger is an integral part of the identity of a dominant male Samoan. The recipient of anger, wife or child, may not enjoy it, but will recognize such display as appropriate and, in fact, may feel unloved if anger is not expressed on occasion (Gerber 1975:6, 26). Appropriately expressed anger is part of being a male Samoan, and part of Samoan emotional style.

Anger is a salient emotion in Ilongot culture, and is linked closely to sex role prescriptions, stage of life cycle, and headhunting prac-

tices. Young, unmarried Ilongot men are thought to be filled with anger; middle-aged men will exhibit a balance between anger and knowledge; elderly men are empty of anger but full of knowledge. Because young men are *heavy* with anger, they take heads to cast off the burden of anger and feel *light* again. Middle-aged men combine passion and reason to produce excellent oratory. Elderly men, knowing much but lacking anger, are neither headhunters nor orators. These fundamental Ilongot beliefs connect anger, knowledge, and action in patterned ways that characterize that culture's emotional style. What Ilongot believe and know about themselves generate their emotional behavior.

Constitutive ideas are about morality as well as identity. Myers (1986:124) observes that "the cultural meaning for the Pintupi of the emotions can be read as a moral text against the wrongness of a private willfulness." An ideal Pintupi person is one who values relatedness as it is expressed in feelings of compassion for others. Compassion, as moral principle, generates specific nurturant behavior toward others. Briggs (1970:332) reports that the central moral among the Utku Eskimo is control of emotions. Angry thoughts are tantamount to angry deeds. Anger and hostility should not be expressed; people should be suffused with laughter and good will. Even such "positive" emotions as affection and protectiveness should not be too strongly expressed for fear of intruding on the value of personal independence. In these respects, Utku style is similar to Tahitian style, which also emphasizes avoidance of anger and a high degree of control over emotions in general (Levy 1973). Personal timidity is valued in an atmosphere of happiness.

Constitutive rules define for people who they are and how their emotional lives are related to their identity. Such rules derive directly from systems of morality and belief that serve as constant points of reference as people act and interpret acts.

Regulative Rules

In Searle's view, regulative rules are those practical understandings that derive from constitutive rules and guide emotional expression in specific, mundane situations. Once we know that we are playing checkers instead of chess, we know the rules that dictate the movement of pieces and to what end. Regulative rules are rules of application. For example, a dominant male Samoan cannot act in anger with socially equal males but must exercise competence in

identifying culturally appropriate settings for expressing anger. Such learned competence requires the actor to calculate a number of situational variables that vary in reality from the ideal.

Similarly, Ilongot anger is not unrestrained. Egalitarian values temper the expression of anger even among volatile youth. A male does not command another male because, in doing so, he might arouse the anger that always lies in a male's heart. Further, the strategy of Ilongot oratory requires that one refrain from sudden outbursts that might provoke the anger in a listener's heart. The measured pace of oratory reflects the value that Ilongot place on emotional control—particularly the suppression of anger in certain contexts. The anger of youth is both admired and feared; it is beautiful but dangerous.

The Ilongot seek to regulate this strong emotion on a daily basis by "talk of the heart," and its relative heaviness or lightness, during which personal relationships with the group are reviewed, identity reaffirmed, and morality reinforced. As youth mature they are encouraged to accumulate knowledge and, thereby, to control anger and to learn to negotiate and interpret—to talk.

Pintupi compassion is communicated daily in acts of nurturance, sharing of manual labor, and expressions of concern for the welfare of others. One should avoid the appearance of private willfulness, egotism, or self-assertiveness. The Pintupi give careful attention to emotional tone and attitude—a coordination of personal style with cultural style. "[T]he most salient aspect of living in Pintupi communities is its affective basis, the reliance on emotional criteria rather than on rules as the framework of action" (Myers 1986:18). It comes as no ethnographic surprise that face-to-face interaction among kinsmen is carefully mediated by prescribed emotional tone. A breach of etiquette, by improper act or by inappropriate emotional display, produces a feeling of shame or embarrassment. Myers further observes that shame objectifies the strain between personal needs and group needs. Shame is a

> metasentiment defined only in relation to other emotions and evaluating the self as a totality with respect to positively valued qualities. It coordinates the demands of relatedness with personal autonomy. [Myers 1986:121]

A Pintupi child learns how and when and with whom to be compassionate; a child learns constitutive and regulative rules that gen-

erate behavior while at the same time learning a folk theory of motivation in order to interpret the behavior of others.

The Utku stress control over communicating strong emotions, and the failure of adults to act accordingly places an offender's action in the category of childish behavior. In practice, people adhere to this principle with consistency, particularly among close kin. Those further removed in kinship are more likely targets of gossip about their greed, bad temper, or unhelpfulness. The intensity of these accusations is, however, also carefully controlled.

Tahitian displays of anger and hostility are met with gossip, teasing, and a tone of coolness (Levy 1973:279). Although not employing Searle's terminology, Levy draws a clear distinction between constitutive and regulative rules as they relate to anger:

> Such intuitions about "the way things are," amplified by doctrines concerning anger and violence, lead to strategies for coping with anger; try not to get into situations which will make you mad. Don't take things seriously or withdraw if possible. If someone else is mad at you, try not to let it build up. If you do get angry, however, express it by talking out your anger, so that things can be corrected and you will not be holding it in. Express your anger, if possible, by verbal rather than physical means. If you use physical means try to use symbolic actions, not touching the person. If you touch him, be careful not to hurt him. [1973:287]

Avoiding situations that might arouse anger includes reducing ambition and thereby diminishing the potential for frustration and anger. Levy's list of regulative rules guides individual efforts to realize a valued emotional stance on a daily basis where ideals collide often with the strains of mundane group life.

Communication

Emotions are sociocultural creations that are necessarily communicated routinely through a variety of channels. The communication of emotional states among members of a culture serves to clarify intentions, attitudes, identity and meaning. Communication facilitates the social coordination of personal moods with those of the group. Daily discoursing about morality and identity, however oblique, is an integral element of personal adjustment to normative standards. Herdt's (1981) study of ritual homosexuality, feelings, and identity formation through idiomatic expression illustrates this point quite well.

Each culture produces a lexicon of emotion words that orders the emotional experiences of individuals. Compiling a list of emotion

words and specifying their contextual use is fundamental to any inquiry into the domain of the emotions, but Gerber's (1975) pioneering analysis of Samoan emotion terms cautions us on two critical points: (1) the analytical isolation of terms from their contextual applications leaves understanding incomplete; and (2) emotion terms may prove not to be amenable to componential analysis.

Ilongot "talk of the heart" illustrates well the metaphorical devices that aid in transforming personal feelings into social constructions. Ilongot think of the heart as "the source of action and awareness, vitality, and well-being. . . . [It] establishes the self to the social process" (Rosaldo 1980:36).

> Thus, talk of the heart is, much as we would expect, talk of "interior experience," but it is also talk of social life and public situations. [Rosaldo 1980:38]
>
> In short, [it is] a sense of dialectic or dynamic tension between a state of sociality, and one of opposition and withdrawal, between a self at ease with its environment and one that stands apart. [Rosaldo 1980:44]

Ilongot ceremonies and songs offer other means by which to work out personal needs and group elements of emotional experience.

Ceremonies are public events that communicate emotions and guide their expression along the desired channels. Pintupi compassion is communicated routinely by acts of sharing and caring. Not acting in the prescribed manner is interpreted as dislike. When compassion is manifest people feel happiness. When, on the other hand, too many disputes and antagonisms surface, people hasten to call for a ceremony whose enactment restores their happiness because it discharges bad feeling and recreates a sense of community. It restores the priority of the public good over individual willfulness.

Pintupi grief is communicated by wailing at news of death and by self-inflicted injuries such as gashing the head. Indeed, scars become a historical record of symbols denoting grief- and sorrow-related events; people recall the occasions associated with scars and, thus, individual acts leave social marks.

Adult Utku commonly express strong emotions toward children in conversation and play contexts, but not toward other adults. Male protectiveness of family and spouse is interpreted as much as an expression of affection as it is a required performance of a social role. These acts are interpreted on the basis of a lifelong immersion in Utku culture where acts, facial expressions, and gestures become second nature. As Herdt observes (1981:61), people know not only more than they can tell, but more than they *need* to tell. Relying

chiefly on verbal behavior and facial expression, Briggs (1970) became frustrated partly because of her inability to tap the shared but unspoken experience of the Utku and, thus, to decipher facial expressions (and emotional intensities) with confidence.[3]

As in all ethnographic encounters, interpreting emotional messages can be treacherous because of the bias of past experience. Levy (1973:97–100) writes that Europeans were confused by what they perceived to be Tahitian "shallowness" of feeling, "surface" feelings, and deception. Tahitians seemed to be able to turn on and off strong emotional expression with remarkable ease. This perception led Europeans to conclude that Tahitians did not truly feel what they displayed. Misunderstanding sprang in part from the fact that Tahitians, in contrast to Europeans, stress actions, not intentions (Levy 1973:98). Tahitians do not consider the discrepancy between group held and individually held emotions to be a case of deception, nor even particularly noteworthy. Americans like to speak, they believe, with an "open heart" which reveals their honest intentions, but in fact we often mask our feelings in order to blend in with our social surroundings. We are a more egocentric people, while the Tahitians might be best described as sociocentric in outlook. In sociocentric cultures there is no deceit implied in giving priority to the group over the individual.[4]

It is in the act of communication in its various forms that individual "interior" experiences become objectified and observable as social phenomena and, thus, a subject of ethnographic scrutiny. It is through communication of emotional messages in mundane experience that we catch people in the act of trying to reconcile social and personal needs (Herdt 1981; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986:175).

Linkage

The domain of the emotions is a fundamental and integral unit in the cultural system that is interlinked with other domains. The concept of emotional style assumes that some of these linkages are more important than others in the dynamics of a particular cultural system. One obvious and well-documented example of linkage in the ethnographic literature is that between sentiment and kinship structure.

With respect to linkage, it would seem useful to distinguish between two kinds of attachment. *Primary linkage,* the first order of attachment, refers to the connection of emotions with the primary pos-

tulates that drive systems of cognition and morality, that is, beliefs about the nature of the world, the identity of a people, and how these concerns influence thought, feeling, and action. Anger, for example, has been labeled the moral emotion (Tavris 1982:23, 82, 144). Anger does not have to be strongly salient, as in the case of the Ilongot, to be moral; it can be expressed in various forms and strengths as a grievance against injustice. Specifying constitutive rules should provide much of the information necessary to establish primary linkage.

Secondary linkage refers to relatively important attachments between the domain of the emotions and other system domains. We find secondary linkages by discovering which connections among domains are the most instructive in understanding how emotions are integrated into cultural beliefs and practices. The display of anger in Samoa, for example, is intimately tied to a hierarchical family system, while Ilongot anger is closely associated with age differences and headhunting among males. The past experiences of anthropologists with kinship systems suggest that systems of role relationships would generally be a good place to initiate a study of emotions because indigenous concepts of emotional linkage furnish actors with critical points of social reference regarding their acts, and the acts of others.

Rosaldo's work with the Ilongot illustrates the attachment of anger to other domains in secondary form.

> The *liget* that Ilongots associate with youthful powers and, for them, with the universal agitation that makes young men want to kill, takes on reality and significance because it is bound up not in mystery or cosmology, but in three forms of relation central to Ilongot social life. *Liget* is transmitted through a hierarchy, cross-generational tie between "sons" and their "fathers"; it is activated in the symmetrical relations that distinguish tiers of "big ones" or "fathers" from unmarried youthful peers, "quick ones," or "sons"; and finally "angry" killing delineates a contrast between Ilongots as headquarters and a disapproving world. [Rosaldo 1980:138]

Rosaldo describes what may be termed a *cluster* of secondary linkages that is critical to understanding some core features of Ilongot culture. Although it was not until her return to the Ilongot that she came to focus on the importance of anger to understanding Ilongot cultural dynamics, she stresses continually that affective life is not just a servant of society but, in fact, actively enters into the process of forming the way people feel and act in groups.

The Pintupi emphasis on compassion and shame is linked primarily to the Dreaming, a set of master beliefs that also tends to

contain the Pintupi preoccupation with daily situational adjustments to each other as individuals. In other words, the Dreaming serves as a constant reference point that prevents ideological drift as individuals confront daily problems of cultural practice. That shame and compassion are linked in important ways with kinship structure is hardly surprising, but the focus should not be on sentiment as a supportive, functional element. We need to examine emotions as a formative, motivational, and explanatory force in ordinary life.

It would not be unreasonable to assume that critical linkages would often be more easily discerned in more simply organized cultures, but change and an increase in complexity present a different set of circumstances. Levy (1973:3) argues that in a steady state system people tend to fit smoothly into familiar contexts—shame and embarrassment have to do with presenting self in conformity with a smoothly functioning society. The European perceptions of shallow emotions among Tahitians were a result of the latter's focus on actions instead of intentions. In changing cultural systems where situations appear ambiguous, where rules are changing and individuals may be undecided between traditional behavior and change confirming behavior, criteria for interpreting behavior may necessarily shift to the intentions that lie behind questionable acts. In the context of change, the consequences of behavior often cannot be reliably judged by traditional standards. One would anticipate change processes to generate conditions where emotions are redefined, linkages reconfigured, and the emotional idiom recast.

Issues regarding continuity and change in emotional styles lead logically to questions about group emotional patterning in complex cultures, particularly how effectively one might study emotions and their linkage in complex systems. While this problem is beyond the task at hand—and I have addressed it elsewhere (Middleton 1986)—I see no inherent theoretical or methodological obstacles to prevent such inquiry. The principal methodological problem is mainly one of reducing the scope of study to more easily observable units such as the institution of *geisha* in Japan (Dalby 1983), the training of flight attendants for an American airline (Hochschild 1983), or the dynamics of ethnic groups in Florida (Middleton 1986).

SALIENCE

Salience refers to the relative importance and visibility of some emotions over others in a given emotional style. Cultures differ in the degree to which they encourage or suppress the display of emotions in general. Further, some emotions that may seem to be the same cross-culturally may, in fact, be defined quite differently and therefore carry diverse meanings. That anger is a moral emotion is an important, but ordinary, observation that raises other questions about how anger and morality are conceived, linked, and enacted in particular cultures.

Levy's (1973:324, 1984:219) concepts of *hyper-* and *hypocognized* emotions introduce descriptive language that should be useful in clarifying the idea of salience.

> Various forms of anger, for example, are named; there are separate words for irritability, for rage, for the "ordinary" feeling of anger. There is much doctrine about what stirs anger up in personal relations, how it works in the individual, what to do about it, and how to evaluate it. Anger is, relative to some other emotions, "hypercognized"—that is, there are a large number of culturally provided schemata for interpreting and dealing with it. [Levy 1984:219]

One should be cautious here not to oversimplify the notion of salience by searching for *the* most salient emotion in an emotional style. Tahitians hypercognize anger, but this emotion is subject to the check of shame, which is also salient. Hence, the more likely circumstance is that one will discover *sets* of hyper- and hypocognized emotions. Compassion and shame are hypercognized in Pintupi culture, but they form an *opposite set* where compassion maintains relatedness and shame appears when disruptive acts threaten this ideal. Happiness is also salient and derives from the ideal of compassion. With compassion, happiness forms a *complementary set*. How many emotions might be included in a set is obviously an ethnographic problem.

Hypocognized emotions should not be ignored simply because they are less visible and, thus, seem less important. Indeed, their relatively low profile might tell us much about underlying tensions and conflicts that drive group behavior. In American culture, for example, death and its attendant emotions have been hypocognized. The low salience of death-related emotions such as grief probably has something to do with our deeply held beliefs in personal growth and future orientation.

Dynamics

Emotion domains and other cultural domains stand in dynamic relationship to each other, even in a relatively steady state. Oratory, "talk of the heart," gossip and teasing, reminders of the goodness of reciprocity and compassion, and ceremonial reductions of emotional intensity, are ingredients in the daily dialectic among affect, cognition, and morality. Individuals negotiate, manipulate, and reinterpret interests and emotional expressions through the daily round. Hochschild (1983), and Gerber (1975) note the contextual manipulation of emotions by oneself and by others. Tavris (1982:132) observes that individuals "discover" their emotions in dialogue with each other, and Bailey (1983) examines tactical uses of passion in the rhetoric of persuasion. Politicians the world over are expert at attaching issues to valued emotions and traditions (see, for example, Douglas and Wildavsky 1982).

Acculturation, development, ecological pressures, and internal system stresses and strains are potential sources of change in emotional style. Because emotions are so fundamentally attached to basic values, however, they also present sources of resistance. Styles may be altered at great psychic costs to individuals and groups.

Cultural contact usually entails a clash of emotional styles and generates a measure of misunderstanding. Both dominant and subordinate cultures may misread each other's emotional styles. Dominant groups may feed back to the subordinate group their interpretation of the latter's style and identity. The subordinate group may play to the false image. Levy provides us with a convenient example of this phenomenon.

> In short, the early Europeans perceived Tahitian personal style and a Tahitian presentation of self which they found graceful, gentle, expressive, superficial, casual, and sometimes deceptive.
>
> These were images growing out of the interaction of two greatly different cultures. They were a murky mixture of the special perceptions of the Europeans, the special situations involved in Tahitian-European contact, and of Tahitian personal style and integration. The deductions the Europeans made from their images helped determine the meaning and interpretations of the Tahitians for Europeans, and helped determine their plan for dealing with the Tahitians. The images were reflected back to the Tahitians themselves, entered into their self-interpretation, and are still important in the identity of contemporary Tahitians. [Levy 1973:99–100]

Subordinate groups, however, do not always accept reflected images of themselves, and may choose to adhere to traditional emotional style, identity, and values. Such a decision may be sufficient to sustain ongoing efforts to defend against outside forces (Whitten 1985).

Dissonance

Because cultural systems and socialization processes are imperfect, one would expect to find cases of individual and group mismatches in emotional style, that is, a difference in the emotion actually held compared to that considered to be the norm. The relationship is one of *emotional dissonance*. This term is derived from the familiar idea of cognitive dissonance which is used to identify mismatches between the cognized world and the actual world. Aside from occasional references to individuals who do not seem to feel as they should in particular contexts, the literature cited does not systematically treat dissonance phenomena.

The notion of dissonance provides an opportunity to recall that the concept of emotional styles assumes that individual emotional styles will not match perfectly the norm but will approximate it generally. Although we take as our subject the sociocultural aspects of emotions, cases of dissonance, like hypocognition, may help us to understand group style dynamics better and may point us toward problems in cultural transmission and the acquisition of emotional style and personhood. It might prove quite instructive, for example, to observe how dissonance arises and is handled in contexts of change or in errors in context identification.

Distancing

We recognize that individuals tend, at times, to distance themselves from strong and unacceptable emotions. Distancing mechanisms operate, as well, at group levels. Utku and Ilongot emphasis on knowing and controlling, while normative, is a strategy to place routine distance between strong emotion and daily activity. There appears to be a panhuman tendency to draw a fundamental distinction between emotions/passions on the one hand, and reason/knowledge on the other. The data gathered for this study indicate that socialization is often seen as a process in which children learn knowledge and reason in order to exert increasing control over their emotions.

The Pintupi employ avoidance language and emotional restraint in the presence of a wife's parents, other affines, and the circumciser (a wife-giver), the latter of which is related to shame over private sexuality, and the former to potential social disruption. Pintupi avoid landmarks associated with death because an encounter would arouse too much sorrow. They distance themselves from unhappiness and hostility by performing ceremonies that restore them to a state of happiness.

Levy (1973:495–497) cites a number of distancing techniques used by Tahitians, including sleep, not caring, not knowing, and conformity. These strategies are certainly not unique to Tahitians as we well recognize, but the patterned ways groups use such techniques are integral parts of their emotional style.

CONCLUSION

The concept of emotional style, and its eight elements, offers descriptive language and an interpretive regimen intended to facilitate discussion and understanding of the role of culture in ordering our emotional lives. It is intended to underscore the vital ways in which the domain of the emotions is linked with others in the cultural system. And it is intended to deepen our grasp of the daily dialectic among thought, feeling, act, and morality. The present study indicates that sufficient ethnographic literature on culture and emotions exists to permit further conceptual development of the topic.

NOTES

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[1]I especially value Westen's persistent reminders that emotions, not cognition, drive individual and group behavior.

[2]Berry (1967) and Witkin (1967) are appropriate sources to consult for early formulations of cognitive style on individual and group levels of analysis, and both have continued their work in this area.

[3]I choose not to cite the literature on facial expression in communicating emotions because the ethnographies upon which this study draws do not treat the subject consistently.

[4]Hochschild (1983:198) argues that the search for individual authenticity among contemporary Americans is driven by a trend in which the self and emotions belong to more organizations than to the individual.

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