



The FEI (Felt, Expressed, and Identified Emotions) Three-Dimensional Analytical Model: A Methodological Proposal for the Sociology of Emotions

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Abstract

The present article introduces the Analytical Three-Dimensional Model FEI (Felt, Expressed, and Identified Emotions) as a conceptual and methodological instrument for the study of emotions from a sociological perspective. In contrast to approaches that have considered emotions as universal reactions or physiological responses, the model is based on a social and contextual conception, inspired by recent contributions from social neuroscience and a rich sociological tradition that has interpreted emotions as symbolic practices, normatively regulated. The FEI model posits the distinction between felt, expressed, and identified emotions, with the objective of facilitating more precise access to affective processes within social contexts. Each dimension is associated with varying degrees of reflexivity, intentionality, and modes of empirical access. These dimensions are accompanied by critical reflection on interpretative risks and appropriate methodological protocols for their analysis. This organization facilitates observation by recognizing the hermeneutical burden and analytical responsibility of the researcher. In essence, it is a three-dimensional framework designed to provide sociology with a robust tool for the study of emotions as experiences shaped by context, regulated by social norms, and expressed, felt and identified in concrete situations of interaction.

Keywords Sociology of emotions · Emotion analysis · FEI model · Emotional expression · Cultural variability · Interpretive methodology

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Emotions as an Object of Sociological Analysis

From an epistemological point of view, understanding emotions has come a long way. From early physiological and philosophical explanations to contemporary social and cultural interpretations, this trajectory has been essential for sociology to incorporate emotions as an object of analysis, thus recognizing them not only on an individual level, but also as constitutive elements of social interaction and symbolic order.

In classical Greek thought, emotions (*pathē*) were generally understood as disturbances of the soul that clouded rational judgment. The Stoics proposed their suppression through the ideal of *apatheia*, considering them forms of cognitive error. Aristotle, on the other hand, especially in *Rhetoric*, recognized the functional role of emotions in political persuasion and their link to value judgments (Knuuttila, 2004). In modern times, Descartes (1649/1964) contributed to a dualistic conception that separated mind and body, influencing the dichotomy between emotion and reason in later science. Spinoza (1677/1985), on the contrary, argued that rationally understanding our passions was the path to freedom, integrating affection and reason into the same natural logic. Hume (1739/2003), later and from another perspective, asserted that reason is at the service of the passions, placing moral motivation in sensitivity rather than in rational judgment.

In the 19th century, William James and Charles Darwin contributed to consolidating a biological paradigm: for James, emotion was the result of physiological responses; for Darwin, it was a universal evolutionary adaptation (James, 1884; Darwin, 1872). This tension between reason and emotion persists in Cartesian dualism and is consolidated in the paradigms of modern science, powerfully influencing 20th-century psychology and neuroscience. Damasio (1994) demonstrated through his famous study of the Phineas Gage case that emotions are regulated by different areas of our brain. This contributed to establishing a kind of unique emotional fingerprint for human beings, a claim that was later criticized by Feldman Barrett (2017).

As we have seen, emotions have historically been placed in a dichotomy between rationality and impulsivity (Bericat, 2016; Weber, 1978). However, fundamental aspects such as their supposed universality, the normative differentiation between emotions considered good and bad, or the prevailing idea that they are mere reactions to the world based on internal neurological or physiological processes (Kemper, 1978; Hochschild, 1979; Scheff, 1979) have rarely been questioned. This perspective, rooted in biologism and instinctive determinism, long relegated the sociological analysis of emotions to the sidelines. However, in subsequent decades, sociology moved towards a conception of emotions as cultural constructs, collectively regulated and shaped by social structures (Bericat, 2016; Hochschild, 1979; Elias, 1939/2000; Goffman, 1967/2017).

In the 21st century, developments in neuroscience have provided new points of contact with sociological approaches. Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) challenges this universalist framework by showing that emotions are active constructions of the brain in interaction with the social context. Without denying that the brain is an active agent in the emotional mechanism, experience and contextualization are at the origin of emotions, reversing the perspective of the process (Illouz, 2007, 2012; Prinz, 2007).

From Feldman's perspective, there are no fixed emotional circuits: emotions do not respond to fixed or universal brain circuits; they are not automatic responses to the world, but active constructions that we make based on previous experiences, cultural learning, and situational contexts. This postulate places emotions as processes with high social content and, moreover, contingent. This approach also implicitly calls for their study by sociology, which opens the way to their interpretation and observation from symbolic practice and contextual analysis. Lisa Feldman Barrett's theory of socially constructed emotions is in line with recent sociological thinking, which holds that emotions are not only present in collective life, but also constitute it (Lively & Weed, 2021). These ideas come from the studies of Prinz (2004, 2007), Russell (2003), Scheff (1979), and Hochschild (1983), who have shown how emotions are socially organized and regulated through norms, bonds, and roles, reinforcing the idea that their expression and recognition are cultural as well as biological products. All of them contribute to a constructionist and contextual perspective on emotions, consistent with Feldman Barrett's proposed reversal of the classic universalist model.

Turning our attention to sociology, emotions were also taken into account in explanations and interpretations of society before the so-called affective turn. However, emotions were not given an explanatory centrality and were even named in many other ways (feelings, sentiments, passions, etc.) (Cerulo & Scribano 2022, Scribano, 2021). In this regard, it is imperative to acknowledge the contributions of Karl Marx, who addressed the concept of resentment in the context of class conflict. Additionally, the works of Durkheim, who examined emotional solidarity and suicide, are noteworthy. Max Weber's inclusion of affects in his typology of action is a significant contribution, while Simmel (1997) and Scheler's (1954) and reflections on emotions such as sympathy are noteworthy (Cerulo & Rafaele, 2022). Goffman's research on interactive rituals is also relevant in this context (Barbalet, 2001).

At the end of the 20th century, the sociology of emotions was consolidated as a sub-discipline within the field of sociology. (Bericat, 2016). The emotional sphere was a focal point in analyses by prominent authors such as Hochschild, Kemper, Scheff, and Turner.

However, this consolidation of the sociology of emotions has not been accompanied by a stable theoretical consensus (Barbalet, 2002; Turner & Stets, 2005; Wetherell, 2012; Scheer, 2012). The field exhibits a notable heterogeneity of approaches, which, while enriching, also complicate the delineation of the object of study. This is not an argument for the uniformity of doctrine; theoretical plurality is both desirable and productive. Rather, it is a cautionary note that, in the absence of a certain systematicity, this diversity can lead to an arbitrary application of the concept of emotion. This lack of systematicity can result in an absence of a varied but structured conceptual apparatus to guide its analytical systematization, a characteristic of more mature subdisciplines.

In contrast to other areas of sociology that have achieved stability in their conceptual frameworks despite the presence of divergent theoretical orientations, such as action theory and stratification studies, the study of emotions has exhibited a more pronounced oscillation between biologicistic models derived from evolutionary psychology and constructivist approaches that accentuate their social determinism

(Barbalet, 2002; Wetherell, 2012). Nevertheless, there is evidence of a growing solidity in the sociology of emotions, which has been generating significant contributions in recent decades. A diverse array of researchers is undertaking studies from a sociological vantage point, employing robust interpretive frameworks, whether drawing upon overarching theories of emotion or meticulously analyzing particular emotions. However, these elaborations coexist with a pervasive tendency to initiate empirical research without a clear conceptual delimitation. That is to say, research is initiated without specifying what is meant by emotion, from what epistemological framework it is approached, and with what methodological consequences. This absence of a unifying theoretical framework has been identified by numerous scholars as a contributing factor to the proliferation of disparate studies, frequently grounded in decontextualized emotional categories derived from other disciplines, with minimal foundation in sociology, yet nevertheless presented as sociological (Scheer, 2012; Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005).

How can Emotions be Measured from a Sociological Perspective?

Given their central role in social life, the primary challenge for sociology in analyzing emotions is not so much to justify their relevance as to develop tools that allow them to be observed in a manner consistent with their epistemological assumptions (Scherrer, 2005). As Reddy (1997) observes, the investigation of emotions can be likened to the interpretation of phenomena that are inherently subjective and not directly perceptible to the researcher, thereby hindering the objective analysis of the subject's emotional state.

Despite the challenges posed by this subjective nature, social sciences have developed a range of methodologies for their observation. These methodologies include in-depth interviews (Hochschild, 1983), surveys such as those conducted by Gallup or the World Values Survey, the analysis of survey data (Segado et al., 2023), and surveys on emotions by researchers (Sotomayor & Aguiar, 2020). As Bericat (2012) noted, ethnographic studies (Shabel, 2020) and epistolary analysis (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918) have been adapted to capture a broad spectrum of discourse, ranging from explicit expressions to latent emotions. This methodological repertoire has been instrumental in exploring affective dimensions in areas such as stigma, inequality, and the migrant experience. Emotions manifest themselves in myriad ways: through verbal and nonverbal language, rituals, narratives, images, and also silences. Some of these phenomena are not expressed in words, while others have no equivalent in other languages (Lutz, 1988; Wierzbicka, 1999). This approach necessitates the interpretation of both explicit content and implicit elements, such as omissions, representations, perceptions, and emotions. The crux of the matter pertains to the nature of the information, opinions, or sentiments imparted by the informants, as well as the manner in which these emotional elements are deciphered. It is acknowledged that emotions are not always expressed overtly. It is important to note that individuals do not always verbalize emotions such as sadness or fear. These expressions may be implicit, manifesting as silences, nuances, or explicit facts, deeds, or human landscapes. Consequently, it is imperative to exercise caution and be mindful

of the context and the cultural connotations that accompany them. Consequently, a connection exists between the internal emotional state and its outward expression. The interplay between subjective feelings, their articulation, and their manifestation in behaviour has been a subject of enduring discourse within the domain of emotional studies (Sotomayor, 2023a).

Naming and labeling emotions is an interpretive act unique to each individual and beyond the control of the researcher. Wouldn't it be great if we could directly access the thoughts of our study participants? Nevertheless, the process of expressing discrete emotions is particularly revealing. It's important to remember that some emotions have no direct equivalent in other languages or cultures. Authors such as Wierzbicka (1999) and Lutz (1988) have documented emotional concepts such as *liget* (Philippines, a kind of ritualized anger), *kizginlik* (Turkey, a type of anger triggered by offenses) and *amae* (Micronesia, a kind of fear in the face of social hierarchies) that are not easily translated. These concepts are not uniformly understood or translatable from different cultural perspectives. Nor are they expressed uniformly in form or intensity. Consider, for example, the differences in mourning rituals around the world. Some people dress in white, while others dress in black. Some funerals are marked by silence, while others are accompanied by music and ritual expressions of joy, restrained crying, or extreme expressions of grief. Suffering, grief, and longing are not expressed—nor probably felt—in the same way by different individuals. However, it is possible to identify certain cultural patterns shared by people living in the same geographical area, belonging to the same religious group, speaking the same language, or occupying similar socioeconomic positions.

On the other hand, the second limitation refers to the set of concepts used by sociology to describe emotional processes: affects, emotions, and feelings. Are they the same thing? Interdisciplinary research has helped clarify their differences. Generally, emotion is an automatic, spontaneous psychophysiological response to a stimulus, while feeling is the subjective, conscious experience that arises from interpretation and emotional reflexivity. Emotions have been explained through three dimensions: cognitive-subjective, behavioral-expressive, and physiological-adaptive (Lang, 1968). Feelings, on the other hand, have been approached as awareness of an emotional state. From a phenomenological perspective, it is considered that, through feelings, the subject understands and positions themselves in the world (Sartre, 1939; Elpidorou & Freeman, 2014). From a sociological perspective, Hochschild (1983) points out that feelings are also influenced by social norms that guide behavior and interaction.

“Affect” is a broader, more general term that, according to some theories, precedes and gives rise to emotions and feelings. Affect manifests in verbal and nonverbal expressions and is central to sociological studies of how bodies, masses, and collective actions are mobilized, even before subjects can name their feelings. Tomkins (1962) defined affects as universal biological mechanisms that trigger positive or negative emotional responses such as interest, fear, or disgust. These responses function as the motivational basis of human behavior.

Regardless of whether the terms “emotion” or “feeling” are used, sociology seeks to observe emotional processes in a dynamic, relational context of human affects. Thus, although the term “emotion” is retained, contemporary sociology strictly

investigates and analyzes a complex, situated, and historically conditioned process: the emotional process, that is, the dynamic set of physiological, cognitive, behavioral and social changes that are triggered by a stimulus or significant situation (social in our case), and that shape an affective experience felt, expressed or identified with meaning in a given context. This requires a rethinking of the researcher's role, as measuring emotions implies accepting an interpretive burden, embracing emotional reflexivity, and acknowledging that analysis is always a construction. The goal is not to neutralize subjectivity but to make it explicit and methodologically conscious.

This leads to a key question: What exactly are we measuring when we say we are “measuring” emotions? Verbal discourse, emotional labels, collective symbols, or institutional practices? In reality, all of the above. Emotions, as sociology understands them, can be felt, expressed, or identified in human objects or actions. Each of these dimensions requires a different form of observation. This brings us to the next section, where I will present the FEI Model and explain how it helps organize and make sense of emotional analysis from a sociological perspective.

The FEI Model: Access to Emotions as they are Felt, Expressed, and Identified

In addressing the challenge of empirically accessing emotions in sociological research, a classification system is proposed that categorizes emotions into three distinct types: felt emotions, expressed emotions, and identified emotions. This distinction does not constitute a taxonomy of emotions. Rather, it responds to the need to analytically segment the ways in which emotions can be observed and interpreted. The proposal's central theme is the varied manifestations and accessibility of emotions to empirical observation. Despite the absence of a physical location for emotions, this classification enables social researchers to methodically situate them according to their manifestation: in subjective experience, in verbal or gestural expression, or in individual or collective human productions.

Furthermore, the three dimensions complement each other, ensuring that the observation of an affective domain is not partial and encompasses all the nuances of emotional expression. The theoretical underpinnings of the FEI Three-Dimensional Analytical Model underscore the aforementioned conception, positing emotions as intricate, multidimensional, and socially mediated phenomena.

Feldman's approach entails a shift in the prevailing understanding of emotions from a mere reaction to the world to an interpretation as processes constructed from previous experiences, bodily signals, social context, and cultural frameworks. The constructionist theory, empirically substantiated by neuroscientific methodologies, enables the compartmentalization and classification of emotions according to conceptual frameworks that the brain utilizes to anticipate and interpret sensory experiences. As previously mentioned, this conception positions emotions as relational and contextual processes, aligning with sociological approaches that accentuate their normative, symbolic, and structural dimensions (Ruiz-Rico et al., 2023; Sotomayor, 2023b).

According to Bunge (1967), a model is defined as a structured representation that facilitates the simplification, description, and analysis of aspects of reality. Thus, in the context of constructing a conceptual system that partially and operationally rep-

resents an empirical phenomenon, the FEI model functions as a device that reduces emotional complexity to make it empirically analyzable. In this vein, the epistemological framework draws inspiration from two antecedents. The present study will examine two theories: Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) and Serge Moscovici's model of social representations (1961). The former takes the three-dimensional structure that divides communicative action into objective, subjective, and intersubjective spheres. For the latter, it is crucial to discern the distinction between anchoring and objectification. Anchoring is defined as the process that links a novel phenomenon to existing structures of meaning, while objectification is defined as the process that converts abstract concepts into concrete and socially comprehensible images.

Applied to the domain of emotions, the FEI model posits that emotions can be observed and analyzed from three interrelated dimensions, which will be elaborated upon in the ensuing sections.

Felt Emotions (S): These phenomena pertain to internal, implicit, and subjective experiences that may or may not be verbalized by the subjects. These elements are accessed through various means, including narratives, open interviews, biographical accounts, and personal discourses. These phenomena entail a substantial degree of interpretation by the researcher, as the subject does not always explicitly articulate their emotions.

Expressed Emotions (X): These emotions are verbalized or explicitly expressed by subjects through language, gestures, surveys, or social media. These emotions are articulated through statements such as "I am afraid" or "I feel hope." The onus for interpretation rests primarily with the subject, though it is invariably influenced by cultural codes.

Identified Emotions (I): These phenomena do not directly refer to the content of an individual's discourse or affect, but rather to the emotions that the analyst identifies in objects, discourses, norms, symbols, or rituals. These emotions are collective in nature and may be institutionalized or symbolically represented.

These three dimensions facilitate a comprehensive observation of the collective emotional state. These tools can be utilized either autonomously or in conjunction, depending on the analytical objective. In this sense, the model is defined as three-dimensional because it articulates three forms of appearance of the emotional phenomenon; analytical because it breaks down a complex object into observable dimensions; and systematic because it provides a framework that can be replicated in different research studies.

To clarify the model's theoretical anchors, Hochschild's seminal contribution is to show that emotional life is normatively organized through feeling rules and emotion work, thus linking emotions to roles, interactional expectations, and moral evaluation. Other authors, such as Wetherell (2012), in turn, shift the focus from emotions as inner entities to affective practices, emphasizing the flow of meaning, embodiment, discourse, and context in how emotions are made actionable in social life. The FEI model builds on these insights but makes a distinct contribution: it does not propose another general theory of emotion; it offers a methodological architecture for empirical access that separates (S) inferred affect in narratives and contexts (felt), (X) self-categorized and publicly expressed labels (expressed), and (I) affec-

Table 1 The three-dimensional analytical FEI model (felt, expressed and identified emotions)

Emotions	Felt	Expressed	Identified
Nature	Implicit emotions	Explicit emotions	Implicit emotions
Locus	Individual	Individual	Individual/collective
Responsibility for interpretation	Researcher	Sentient subject	Researcher
Intention to communicate emotion	No	Yes	No
Indicator (I)	(IA) Arousal; Hormonal and neurotransmitters; Facial Expression; Written, visual or oral expressions. Narratives	(IB) Categories (emotions). Geneva Emotions Wheel (GEW) Plutchick's wheel of emotions	(IC) Human works (artistic, normative, icons) Paintings, sculptures, architecture, urban planning Human actions (donations, help)
Transmission routes	Verbal expression, written language (testimonies, speech), digital communication, non-verbal language.	Verbal expression, written language (testimonies, speeches), digital communication.	Collective human actions (donations, charity, art)
Data collection techniques (T)	(TA) fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). Documentary analysis, epistolary analysis. Discourse analysis; In-depth interviews; Life histories; Focus groups; Joint interviews; Memory work.	(TB) Survey Test of emotions Experience Sampling Method (ESM)	(TC) Observation and documentary recording Visual techniques Media analysis Analysis of a legislative text Analysis of Photographs
Channels	Social media Letters Oral expression Narrative Discourse	Verbal or written expression of an emotion Social media	Legislative texts Urban architecture; Art, NGO Collective human action
Analytics risk	Normative projection. Misinterpretation. Interpretative anticipation	Semantic divergences	De-contextualization Universalist readings Normative projections
Correction techniques	Framing protocol Neutralizing emotional expectations Cross-validation	Semantic control	Triangulation

tive inscriptions in material, institutional, and symbolic productions (identified). By distinguishing who carries the interpretive burden (researcher vs. participant vs. collective objectifications), and by pairing each dimension with specific hermeneutic risks and corrective instruments (triangulation, semantic control, framing protocols), FEI turns constructivist premises into an operational research workflow.

Thus, the study methodically analyzes emotions according to eight distinct parameters: (i) the nature of the emotion; (ii) the locus; (iii) the responsibility for interpretation; (iv) the intentionality of expression; (v) the indicators for observation; (vi) the channel of transmission; (vii) the moment at which it is observed; (viii) the analysis techniques used to measure it and the precautions to be taken into account (see Table 1).

The model can be represented by combining the three dimensions, where each emotion (E) is a vector composed of the three characteristics (S=felt, X=expressed, I=identified):

$$E(t) = \alpha S(t) + \beta X(t) + \gamma I(t)$$

Location:

E(t): The emotional process is defined as the psychological response to a specific event or situation experienced at a particular moment in time.

S(t): The magnitude of emotions felt is measured using IA indicators and TA techniques.

X(t): The magnitude of emotions expressed is measured using IB indicators and TB techniques.

I(t): The magnitude of identified emotions is measured using IC indicators and TC techniques.

The Greek letters α , β , γ are, as usual, the weights assigned to each dimension determined by its relevance in the context of the study.

It is imperative to refrain from perceiving this formula as a rigid mathematical equation. Rather, it should be regarded as a structural representation that facilitates the visualization of the amalgamation of emotions experienced, expressed, and identified. It serves to guide empirical analysis according to the relative importance given to each dimension in a given study.

Table 1 will examine in depth each of the dimensions described in the formula.

In applied research, FEI can be implemented through a six-step protocol: (1) define the empirical object and the unit of analysis (individual, group, institution); (2) decide the relative analytical weight of S/X/I for the research question (α , β , γ); (3) collect data aligned with each dimension (e.g., narratives for S; closed emotion labels for X; documents/objects/rituals for I); (4) code each dataset within its own interpretive rules (S=inferential coding; X=semantic stability checks; I=contextual objectification/anchoring analysis); (5) apply the corresponding corrective instruments (triangulation, semantic control measures, framing protocol); and (6) integrate findings by comparing convergences and systematic discrepancies across dimensions.

Emotions Felt

The discursive and performative dimension of emotions are not always presented as fixed or categorizable entities; rather, emotions are presented as social practices that must be interpreted in their narrative and cultural context (Wetherell, 2012; Rau, 2020). Conversely, an exclusive emphasis on explicitly verbalized emotional processes would constitute a substantial epistemological constraint. Sociological research recognizes that discourses contain not only rational propositions and overt expressions, but also latent affective dimensions that are not always recognized by the subject or accessible through closed categories. These non-verbally coded forms of affectivity are referred to as “felt emotions,” defined as internal emotional experi-

ences that are not explicitly labeled in language but are detectable through discourse analysis, narrative, or situational observation (Apresjan, 1997).

These implicit emotions are primarily accessed through qualitative methodologies, which include in-depth interviews, narrative analysis, and participant observation. These phenomena are designated as “felt” due to their absence of emotional coding by the subject, signifying that they have not been designated according to a conventional emotional category, despite their presence in the subject’s account. For instance, a migrant who discusses their children, living conditions, or dashed expectations may be experiencing emotions such as nostalgia, guilt, or sadness without explicitly articulating them. In such cases, the onus falls upon the researcher to decipher the underlying emotional framework by examining linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural clues. To illustrate, in the event that an individual evades verbalizing their discomfort in the presence of individuals with intellectual disabilities, yet articulates uncertainty regarding their actions or insinuates potential violence, the researcher may deduce emotions such as fear or rejection, despite the subject’s verbalization of compassion or tenderness. This approach enables the exploration of the affective dimension without the necessity of self-labeling (see Table 1).

It is important to note that felt emotions are not inherently imperceptible; however, they are characterized by a state of pre-reflective or pre-discursive consciousness. That is to say, they have not yet undergone the process of conscious emotional regulation, nor have they been influenced by social norms of expression (Hochschild, 1979).

Precautions and Instruments for Analyzing Felt Emotions

Accessing felt emotions requires a complex analysis. The most obvious risks are: (i) Projecting the researcher’s own emotional norms; (ii) misinterpreting narrative ambiguities, and (iii) interpretive anticipation due to generalized affective stereotypes.

To mitigate these risks, researchers can implement a framing protocol based on the framing concept developed by Goffman (2013) and Jameson (1976). This protocol considers the contextual factors that influence interpretation. For instance, crying can have different meanings depending on the context; the emotional expression of happiness, for example, can be rendered meaningless in a context of conformity. A woman’s account collected in the *Encyclopedia of Migrants* expresses this complexity. Although happiness is the only emotion mentioned, the story conveys loneliness, disappointment, and relief.

There is also a risk of interpretive projection, which is the tendency to interpret the world through one’s own emotional, cultural, or biographical frameworks. This distortion can manifest as involvement (Elias, 1987), loss of evaluative neutrality (Weber, 1922), lack of reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990), or presupposed understanding (Garfinkel, 1967). Overcoming this bias requires distancing oneself, being aware of one’s own frames of reference, and clearly delimiting the theoretical and methodological point of view from which emotions are observed in social life.

Another frequent risk in analyzing felt emotions is anticipation due to generalized affective stereotypes. This form of hermeneutic automatism occurs when the

researcher identifies certain narrative content (e.g., migration, loss, or exclusion) and immediately attributes emotions considered typical or expected by the cultural context (e.g., nostalgia, sadness, or guilt). This bias does not stem from subjective projection but rather from previously socialized interpretive frameworks that operate as “emotional expectations of the object.” In the case of migration stories, for instance, family separation or abandoning one’s place of origin may lead to the assumption of nostalgia or pain, even when the subject’s narrative does not express or suggest such emotions.

A neutralization exercise would help to unanchor dominant affective explanations and encourage open interpretations that respect the plurality of emotional experiences while remaining vigilant about subjective emotional biases, which are often more subtle than ideological or opinion-driven biases.

Cross-validation between emotional dimensions is also proposed as a methodological strategy to strengthen the analytical consistency of the FEI Model. This technique is based on Denzin’s (1984, 2017) work on triangulation, Mason’s (2002) criteria for interpretive coherence, and the warnings about interpretive biases of emotions by Barbalet (2002) and Wetherell (2012). Cross-validation involves triangulating sources, which may include emotions identified using other techniques, contrasting coders, or validating the interpretation with another researcher. Internal corroboration involves checking whether other parts of the discourse confirm or contradict the evidence.

Expressed Emotions

These are emotions that have been verbalized through linguistic categories. They result from an emotional labeling process in which individuals transform their feelings into symbolic units, such as standardized emotional terms (e.g., “fear,” “anger,” “shame”). According to Wetherell (2012), this process involves emotional reflexivity in that the individual selects and communicates a representation of their internal state based on contextual normative frameworks and their own life experience.

Although labeling may seem neutral and transparent, it is not: it is influenced by socially defined feeling rules and emotion scripts, as referred to by Hochschild (1979). Therefore, expressed emotions should be analyzed as acts of emotional framing that articulate what subjects take to represent their affective processes, in all their variety. It is important to emphasize that, as with any sociological category based on self-report, such expressions are inevitably shaped by what subjects are willing and able to disclose; this is a structural feature of social research rather than a limitation specific to the study of emotions. In this sense, researchers should not assume an isomorphism between labels and emotional experiences. At the same time, these labels are analytically valuable precisely because they reveal how subjects name, classify, and express their emotions within the culturally available vocabularies.

The analysis of expressed emotions is usually carried out using more invasive techniques, such as surveys, which encourage individuals to identify with an emotion. For example, “Are you happy?” or Did you feel longing? Another method is

observing gestural and prosodic repertoires in interviews, discussion groups, and other observations.

Precautions and Instruments for Analyzing Expressed Emotions

Naming an emotion is not a neutral act. It is influenced by cultural norms, linguistic conventions, and the context in which it is expressed. However, unlike felt or identified emotions, researchers must assume that subjects have carried out the interpretive process themselves. One of the most significant risks in analyzing expressed emotions is assuming that all respondents attribute the same meaning to an emotional label, such as “happiness,” “fear,” or “compassion.”

This apparent homogeneity can mask significant semantic differences between social, cultural, or generational groups, affecting the comparative validity of the results. Emotions are social constructs that interpret the world and cannot therefore be treated as universal categories. Without prior verification, researchers risk projecting a normative or academic definition onto these labels that does not coincide with respondents’ declared and communicable interpretations of those terms (Wierzbicka, 1999; Kövecses, 2000).

To reduce this interpretive bias, we propose using a complementary instrument called semantic control measures. These measures are aimed at verifying the meaning subjects attribute to emotional labels they use or select. This can be achieved through preliminary definition questions, subsequent verification, or semantic differential scales. These tools allow us to detect whether terms such as “happiness,” “compassion,” or “respect” are understood uniformly, or whether they vary significantly across social groups. In doing so, they strengthen interpretive validity without interfering with participants’ emotional self-definition.

For instance, the term “compassion” may be interpreted differently depending on the cultural context. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is associated with pity; however, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, it is more closely linked to empathy (Gilbert, 2017; Nussbaum 2001). Therefore, if a survey asks about “compassion,” it is advisable to first check what respondents understand by this term using other techniques or an exploratory survey. This tool reinforces interpretive validity without interfering with the subject’s emotional self-definition.

Consider a survey item on “compassion” (X). Semantic control can establish whether respondents associate the term with pity, empathy, duty, or moral superiority. In parallel, interview narratives may reveal felt compassion (S) through accounts of discomfort, responsibility, or proximity to suffering even when the label is avoided. Finally, identified compassion (I) may be traced in institutional texts or public campaigns that encode compassion as a civic virtue (or, conversely, as paternalism). The analytical payoff lies in comparing these three layers rather than treating any single one as exhaustive.

Identified Emotions

These are emotions that are recognized and labeled because they are reflected in human creations or collective actions. They reflect the feelings of an individual or community. Rather than referring to what someone says or feels directly, they refer to the emotions that social scientists identify in actions, objects, discourses, norms, symbols, or rituals. Unlike emotions expressed through explicit techniques for gathering emotional expressions through interaction between the researcher and the individual, they are not collected. They may be institutionalized or represented institutionally through colors, symbols, or verbal expressions. For instance, historical memory laws, monuments, flags, and media campaigns can convey emotions such as grief, pride, and compassion.

Donations may represent social love or compassion; a wall may represent hatred or shame; and a funeral march or festival may contain collective emotions such as mourning, pride, or patriotism. These acts constitute interpretation and contextualization, as Ahmed (2015) recognizes that emotions circulate not only between subjects but also between material, political, and public things.

This level of analysis is based on the sociology of social representations, particularly Serge Moscovici's (1961) notions of anchoring and objectification, and Arlie Hochschild's (1979) critical reading of institutional emotionality.

At this level, researchers interpret how emotions are inscribed collectively in norms, murals, urban architecture, or public policies. This level is not accessed through individual discourse but through the symbolic and structural interpretation of human forms of affective production.

Precautions and Tools for Analyzing Identified Emotions

Analyzing identified emotions requires paying particular attention to the symbolic systems and cultural contexts in which these emotions acquire meaning. For instance, interpreting a flag, commemorative architecture, or an artistic object as an emotional expression requires considering the cultural framework that imbues it with emotional significance. For instance, emotion in art does not reside in the object itself but rather in the shared experience of the body, culture, and perception (López Fernández Cao, 2008).

This type of analysis requires interpretive methodologies combining the study of material objects and an analysis of institutional, political, and community contexts. In architecture, for instance, studies have shown that the design of spaces can evoke collective emotions such as pain or rootedness. However, it is crucial to contextualize these interpretations within memory, ritual, or shared identity (Álvarez & Sánchez García, 2020; Cañada & Montes, 2020). Therefore, emotional attribution is not automatic; it requires a situated reading attentive to the cultural codes that transform an object or gesture into an affective sign.

The analysis must consider the religious, political, or normative mediations that structure these emotional inscriptions. In the legal sphere, for instance, normative language can incorporate non-explicit emotional dimensions through visual expres-

sions or institutional rituals (Rodríguez Morató & Pardo, 2018). Similarly, in religious rituals, identified emotions do not depend solely on the symbol but on a signification process that gives collective meaning to the experience (González, 2017). To mitigate the partial view of an identified emotion, triangulation between symbolic objects or events and personal testimonies is recommended as a methodological tool. This strategy prevents interpretative projection and oversimplified universalist interpretations.

Conclusions

At first, the FEI model may be difficult to accept. However, this difficulty usually stems from a fundamental misunderstanding. The model does not segment emotions themselves but rather the ways in which they are accessed. In other words, it is the methodological paths that allow emotions to be identified, interpreted, or reconstructed. This methodological distinction is linked to the sociological task, which is understood as an inquiry situated in social contexts, structures, and networks, as well as as an exercise in accepting the subjects' interpretations.

Therefore, the FEI model does not seek to artificially compartmentalize affective experience. Rather, it offers researchers a framework that allows them to situate themselves temporally in one of the three proposed dimensions (felt, expressed, and identified emotions). This helps avoid confusion between analytical levels during the observation process. Once the investigation is complete, the different dimensions can be brought together to construct robust and integrative interpretations adapted to the methodological path taken and the empirical findings obtained.

During fieldwork, the narratives of the people interviewed reveal an extraordinarily fertile amalgam of emotions for sociological analysis. The difficulty lies not in capturing these emotions, but in labeling them, that is, converting them into discrete emotions without losing their contextual richness. The sociological profession requires this effort of concretization. We cannot claim that a story contains guilt, shame, or hope if we do not analyze how these emotions manifest within the narrative, symbolic, and historical context. We must also situate ourselves from a position of active emotional reflexivity that incorporates structured hermeneutic action. Only then can we speak of felt emotions.

In other cases, we analyze the emotions expressed, i.e., those that the subjects name directly. For example, when interviewees say they feel respect for a vulnerable group and not compassion, they are engaging in explicit emotional categorization. In this case, the researcher cannot substitute or reinterpret that expression arbitrarily; their role is not to claim to feel love if the interviewee says they feel respect. Here, the context is not actively interpreted; rather, the way society verbalizes or manifests its emotions toward certain groups or situations is documented.

Finally, emotions are sometimes not expressed through words or gestures but rather contained in objects, structures, and human practices. Here, we discuss identified emotions: the mistrust permeating an immigration law, the implicit humiliation in the design of a border wall, and the gratitude inscribed in the practices of a humanitarian organization. These emotions are not verbalized but are present as institutionalized messages and affective atmospheres encoded in colors, architecture,

norms, and interaction rituals. In this dimension, sociological analysis does not start from discourse but from objectified human action.

In short, just as neuroscience looks for emotions in areas of the brain or bodily physiology, sociology looks for them in narratives, socially shared emotional expressions, and institutionalized forms of action. The FEI model does not replace this complexity; rather, it offers a conceptual and methodological framework for delving into it and constructing a more structured analysis. Analyzing emotions from a sociological perspective requires moving between empathetic listening, critical interpretation, and paying attention to symbols, bodies, and structures. The FEI model is a proposal for navigating this path with greater clarity and coherence.

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