Is Guilt an Emotion?

Andrew Ortony

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.

When unequivocal examples of emotion adjectives occur in the linguistic context of "being" (e.g. being angry) they can be seen to refer to emotions as readily as when they occur in the linguistic context of "feeling" (e.g. feeling angry). This is not true of poor or non-examples of emotion words. A psycholinguistic analysis of this phenomenon is proposed, in the light of which it is suggested that words such as "abandoned" and "guilty" do not refer to emotions. The possibility that the word "guilty" has a distinct emotional sense meaning "feeling guilty" is discussed, and the implications of this proposal for theories of emotions are examined. Also discussed are the implications of the inclusion of poor or non-examples of emotions in lists of "basic" emotions. Data are presented indicating that many of the states that emotion theorists have included as emotions, and in some cases as "basic" emotions, are not generally rated as such, and that they fail to exhibit the patterns using the feel-be test that characterise unequivocal examples. It is suggested that a problem in delimiting the domain of theories of emotions may reside in a confusion between emotions on the one hand, and their typical causes and concomitants on the other.

INTRODUCTION

Whatever emotions are, most people would agree that not all states are emotions. For example, it is difficult to imagine anyone maintaining that living in Hawaii, or being rich are emotions. Nor is it likely to be too difficult to convince people that being careless or being stupid are not emotions. Yet, all of these can be considered states. At the same time,

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while none of them are emotions, it is very easy to imagine that under certain circumstances, all might be *causes* of emotions.

Ordinarily, we have no difficulty in distinguishing things from their possible causes. If, on some particular occasion, an airplane crash is *caused* by the pilot having a heart attack, we understand the relation to be one of causation not identity; we do not say that the crash is the heart attack, nor would we expect those experts who study airplane crashes to suddenly start studying heart attacks instead. This all seems so obvious as to not be worth saying, yet it needs to be said because some of the assumptions that underlie quite a lot of emotion research are of just this kind: They involve the identification of certain common causes or concomitants of emotions with the emotions themselves. As a result, some of the stimuli emotion researchers use are poor examples of emotions, and sometimes not even examples at all (Shields, 1984). For instance, many of Russell's scaling studies include words like "sleepy", "tired", and "bored" as items (e.g. Russell, 1980), and an interesting study by Smith and Ellsworth (1985) included boredom, challenge, interest, and surprise among the 15 "emotion" stimuli. In fact, two of these, interest and surprise, are widely held to be in a small set of "basic" emotions (e.g. Campos & Barrett, 1984; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1982; Frijda, 1987; Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980; Tomkins, 1984). It certainly would be paradoxical to discover that everybody's favourite "basic" emotions were not in fact emotions at all.

One of the purposes of this paper is to advocate a more critical approach to the prior question of what should be included in the domain of emotions. I shall do this by looking closely at two examples of states that are often included in comprehensive lists of emotions (e.g. Averill, 1975; Bush, 1973; Dahl & Stengel, 1978), but whose status as emotions can be legitimately questioned. I shall argue that the sense in which the corresponding terms refer to emotions is quite different from that which is presupposed by current research. In this context, I shall discuss some of the consequences of such confusions for emotion research. My first example is *abandoned* (in the sense of foresaken, rather than in the sense of unrestrained). I use this example because I think that it makes the point very clearly. I shall then go on to argue that the same kind of analysis can be applied to less obvious cases, such as, for example, *guilt*.

Analysis of Putative Emotion Terms, Example 1: "Abandoned"

Many of the words that find their way into lists of emotion terms do so because investigators obtain their emotion stimuli from linguistic generation tasks. These tasks are usually quite unconstrained, allowing subjects to
list words and phrases that, in fact, refer to emotions only when they occur in a particular linguistic context, specifically, the context of "feeling so and so". However, there is an important difference between the two principal linguistic contexts in which putative emotion words commonly appear—those of being x and of feeling x. Failure to notice this difference can result in inadvertently attributing to non-affective conditions properties that belong, not to the conditions themselves, but only to the associated (affective) feeling conditions. Thus, for example, it can lead to attributing to the (non-psychological) state of being abandoned, properties that properly only belong to the associated (psychological) state of feeling abandoned. Certainly, "feeling abandoned" refers to an emotional condition. However, equally certainly, "being abandoned" does not. Moses was abandoned, but this was not a fact about a psychological state of Moses at all, let alone about an emotional one. He was too young to know or care. What the linguistic context "feeling" does is to import psychological and affective properties that do not necessarily belong to the state in question, so that words are more likely to appear to refer to emotions when considered in the feeling form that when considered in the being form. For clear cases of emotions, both forms obviously refer to emotions (compare "feeling angry" with "being angry").

How can it be that the English expression "feeling abandoned" refers to an emotional condition while the expression "being abandoned" does not? The answer is that the feeling form is an elliptical way of expressing a more complex idea. As argued in Ortony, Clore, and Foss (1987), in the context of the language of emotions, "feeling x" can be expanded into something like "feeling as one typically feels when one believes that one is x, and cares that one is x". If this is right, then there must be inference rules that enable expressions that refer to non-psychological conditions, such as the condition of being abandoned, to be used to refer to emotional states such as the state of feeling abandoned. First, there has to be a general rule for ellipsis that has something like the following form:

Rule 1. To feel x = To experience the feelings typically associated with being x

This rule has the effect of focusing on the phenomenological experience of being in certain sorts of situations. When these situations are psychological states, emotional or otherwise, the effect of the rule is relatively modest. For example, because the most salient feelings typically associated with being confused or angry are feelings of confusion and anger, Rule 1 does not tell us very much. However, it can tell us something—one is often distressed at being confused or angry, so additional feelings typically can be associated with psychological states. Nevertheless, the potential effect of Rule 1 is much greater when it is applied to non-psychological situations
(such as the state of being abandoned), where, rather than augmenting already identified feelings, it serves to introduce feelings, thus capturing the emotional implications of the situation of "being x". In order to do this, however, a second, emotion-specific, rule of metonymy is required:

Rule 2. The feelings typically associated with being $x = \text{The emotions one has when (a) one believes that one is } x; \text{ and (b) one cares that one is } x$

Thus, Rule 1 tells us that to "feel abandoned" is "to experience the feelings typically associated with being abandoned", which, by Rule 2 is "to experience the emotions one has when one believes that one is abandoned, and cares that one is abandoned". This, in turn, suggests that the emotional content of feeling abandoned is contained in the feeling part by virtue of its implicating caring rather than in the abandoned part.

Whereas Rules 1 and 2 have been presented as linguistic rules of pragmatic inference, it is important to realise that they are grounded in (non-linguistic) facts. In other words, Rule 1 also constitutes a description of what it is to feel something or other, and Rule 2 describes the conditions under which such feelings arise. Notice that Rule 2 does not assert that people care that they are in an emotional state, but rather that when they have emotions that result from believing that they are in some state, emotional or otherwise, they necessarily care about the fact that they are in that state. They must have a valenced reaction to it. Thus, the force of the caring requirement is that people cannot both be in an emotional state and be indifferent about the situation that causes it. The degree to which they care is determined primarily by the subjective importance they attach to the emotion-inducing situation (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, in press; Roszman, 1984), although a discussion of the cognitive appraisal mechanisms underlying the perception of importance is beyond the scope of this paper.

From what has been discussed so far, it seems that a person who reports feeling abandoned is not reporting an emotion of abandonment but rather is reporting the occasion or cause of some emotion or emotions, and is assuming that the hearer will apply the appropriate rules of inference. Exactly what emotions people who feel abandoned typically experience is not the issue. They might experience sadness, sorrow, or even a phenomenologically unique experience for which the language offers no alternative to "feeling abandoned". In the latter case, it might be that what is experienced is a unique pattern of other emotions. Whatever it is, the general point is that whereas with adjectival forms of genuine emotion words, one can report an emotion by saying I am $x$, this is not possible with a word like "abandoned". Notice that one can report an emotion by saying I am feeling abandoned, which is as strong evidence that "feeling aban-
doned” refers to an emotion as is the fact that one cannot report an emotion by saying *I am abandoned* is evidence that “abandoned” does not.

The fact that *I am abandoned* does not report an emotional state is one of several reasons why we can conclude that being abandoned is not an emotion. A second reason is that whereas there can be variations in the intensity of the feeling that may result from some particular emotion-inducing situation such as being abandoned, it is not usually the case that there can be corresponding differences in the emotion-inducing event itself. A person either is or is not abandoned. This does not mean that the degree of belief that one is abandoned cannot vary (one can suspect it, be fairly sure of it, or be quite confident of it). However, given that a person is confident that he or she is abandoned, variations in the intensity of the associated emotion complex of feeling abandoned can only be a function of how much he or she *cares* about the fact. It cannot be a function of the degree of abandonment because abandonment does not come in degrees. One cannot be slightly abandoned, or somewhat abandoned, or extremely abandoned. This argument is a little less robust than the argument based on the feel-be distinction, because it is open to the objection that at least in some cases, there *can* be varying degrees of emotion-inducing situations. For example, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that one could be ignored to different degrees. However, the main point is that the intensity of any emotion that might result from being abandoned or being ignored depends ultimately on the degree to which one *cares* rather than the degree to which one (believes that one has been or) is abandoned or ignored (when such degrees are possible). Of course, one might care more about being completely ignored in some situation than one would about being largely ignored, but what is *necessary* for the emotion is that one cares. One could be completely ignored and not care at all (in which case one would not be in an emotional state as a result of being ignored), or one could be largely ignored and care a great deal (in which case one would be in an emotional state). It is quite clear in the case of Moses that the main reason why he was not in an emotional state when he was abandoned was that he did not care. In his case one assumes that he did not care because he did not know, but in principle, he might have known and still not cared.

I have used “abandoned” to make three main points. First, being abandoned is not a psychological state, and therefore it cannot be an emotion. Secondly, whereas one can report genuine emotions by saying *I am x* (where x refers to an emotional state), one cannot report an emotion by saying *I am abandoned*. This too indicates that the word “abandoned” does not refer to an emotional state. Thirdly, whereas genuine emotional states are susceptible to variations in intensity, one cannot be abandoned to varying degrees, a fact that also suggests that being abandoned is not an
emotion. I think that these conclusions are fairly easy to accept for abandoned. They are less easy to accept for guilt and guilty, although in fact the situation is substantially the same.

Analysis of Putative Emotion Terms, Example 2: "Guilt" and "Guilty"

Just as a person can be abandoned without there necessarily being any attendant emotional state, so too can a person be guilty without there being any attendant emotion. This is impossible in unambiguous cases of emotions—a person cannot be ashamed without being in an emotional state because shame is an emotional state. That there can be guilt without emotion is evident in the shameless display of righteousness demonstrated by Bernhard Goetz, the so-called "subway vigilante" in New York. Goetz might well acknowledge his guilt, but there would presumably be no attendant emotion—no shame, remorse, or regret. Guilt is not an emotion, it is a socio-legal or socio-moral status having to do with the transgression of certain rules. Even if a person subscribes to the rules, his knowing violation of them may not be sufficient for him to experience an emotion. Emotion from guilt has other preconditions which include such things as acknowledgement of culpability. The most general statement of these preconditions can be derived from Rule 2, namely that one believes that one is guilty and cares about it. Furthermore, a person can easily be guilty without realising it. It is often said that "ignorance of the law is no excuse". The point is that one can violate rules, laws, and moral codes without knowing that one has, but they have nevertheless been violated. One who so violates a rule, law, or moral code is usually considered to be guilty by definition. This is basically the same point as was made about Moses being abandoned. The status is independent of what the person knows about it. It is perfectly possible for a person to be guilty, ignorant of his guilt, and not even blameworthy, but guilty he remains. Guilt is not a psychological state.

Second, a person who says I am guilty is not and cannot be reporting an emotion. Such a statement merely reports the acknowledgement of some rule violation. Of course, guilt-induced emotions are reportable by saying I feel (extremely) guilty, or I am feeling guilty, but as discussed above, it is the caring about the guilt that makes this an emotion, not the guilt itself. When people feel guilty, Rules 1 and 2 imply that they feel as they would feel if they believed they were guilty and cared about it. Again, just as with feeling abandoned, exactly what emotion or constellation of emotions people feel when they feel guilty is not the issue. They might experience shame or remorse, or some emotion complex which can only be characterised using an expression like "feeling guilty". The key point is that unlike the case of, say, feeling angry in which one can describe the emotional state
as one of “being angry” one cannot describe the emotional state of a person who feels guilty as being one of “being guilty”.

Finally, guilt does not vary in intensity, although, of course, concomitant emotions such as those associated with feeling guilty can because their intensity depends upon the degree to which one cares (see Rule 2), given that one believes that one is guilty. Thus, one cannot report an intense emotion by saying I am extremely guilty—such a claim makes as little sense as saying I am extremely 6 feet tall. One either is or is not guilty and one either is or is not 6 feet tall. How one may feel about being guilty is another question, but how one feels about being guilty is not itself guilt. Genuine emotions do vary in intensity.

In spite of these arguments, which are identical to those offered for the less contentious example of abandoned, one might still have a nagging feeling that guilt must be an emotion. It may be that the tenacity with which one maintains that guilt is an emotion is related to the degree to which one supposes that all guilt situations are accompanied by corresponding guilt-induced emotions. However, even a very high correlation between the two would not justify equating them. This can be seen by considering the following analogy. If a person reports that he has just cut off his finger, we can distinguish the report of this fact from the reasonable and justifiable inferences that we make about his pain. So, even though one presumes that virtually all such situations are accompanied by pain, it would clearly be an error to claim that I have cut off my finger is a report of pain. It is a report of an event that is almost certainly accompanied by pain, but the report of the physical event is not the same as the report of the psychological event that it causes because the physical event and the psychological event are different events. However, it might be insisted, since I have admitted that feeling guilty is an emotion, there really is no problem—theorists who include “guilt” and “guilty” as emotion terms are merely using these terms as a shorthand for “feeling guilt(y)”, just as speakers of English apparently do. In other words, there are two meanings of “guilt”, one being the socio-legal meaning, and the other being the emotional meaning. In a sense this is a fair objection, but such a conclusion has troublesome consequences for theories of emotion.

**TYPES OF EMOTION**

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there is a relatively small number of distinct emotion types. The notion of an “emotion type” is intended to exclude emotion complexes, and it is meant to exclude the different tokens that refer only to different intensity levels or other facets of the same type. So, to return to our earlier example of abandoned, suppose that when people feel abandoned they experience an emotion
complex, that is, some particular mixture of emotion types (say, distress, disappointment, and resentment; it does not much matter which) in some unique combination of intensities, so that the particular feeling of being abandoned has a distinct phenomenological flavour. Still, the feeling of being abandoned would not count as a distinct emotion type, because it is reducible to other emotion types. Nor would rage count as a distinct emotion type because it is basically an intensity-specific token of the type anger. This concept of an emotion type is more liberal than the traditional concept of "basic" emotions. Ortony et al. (in press) identify 22 distinct emotion types,\(^1\) whereas adherents of the "basic" emotion view usually postulate fewer than 10.

Surely a major goal of a theory of emotion is to determine the answers to a number of key questions, if not about a restricted set of "basic" emotions, at least about a broader set of distinct emotion types. One of the reasons that this is an attractive strategy is that there is a finite number of emotion types so that an analysis of them, taken together, might allow a fairly comprehensive treatment of the domain. The alternative strategy is to acknowledge that there is an indefinite number of emotional experiences and then to turn one's analytical attention to whichever small subset of them one chooses. The problem with this latter strategy is both that it is arbitrary, and, related to this, that it offers no prospect of an organised coherent treatment of the domain. The danger of uncritically accepting a state like guilt as an emotion, if in fact only feeling guilty is an emotion, is that a proper analysis of guilt may involve the specification of characteristics that are not in fact characteristics of emotions at all. Similarly, a proper analysis of feeling guilty might well reveal that it is not a distinct emotion type, and that once one has accounted for the distinct emotion types there really is nothing more to be done apart, perhaps, from determining which of them (e.g. shame?) typically arise in guilt situations. If one simply assumes that guilt is an emotion, this latter possibility is not likely to even be considered. Only by viewing the emotion of feeling guilty in terms of some sort of analysis such as that proposed in Rules 1 and 2 can one even begin to entertain the possibility that feeling guilty is not a distinct emotion type and in no more need of explanation by a theory of emotion than are

\(^1\)The 22 distinct emotion types identified in Ortony et al. (in press) are characterised in terms of their eliciting conditions rather than in terms of emotion words, although the specifications do list lexical items associated with each type, sometimes only one or two, and sometimes as many as 20. The following list uses one reasonably representative word or expression as a gloss for each type: joy, distress, happy-for, pity, gloating, resentment, hope, fear, satisfaction, relief, fears-confirmed, disappointment, pride, shame, admiration, reproach, gratification, remorse, gratitude, anger, love, and hate.
expressions like "feeling abandoned" or "feeling cheated". All are emotional feelings, but also, all might be reducible to unique emotion types, and it would be these that would be doing the phenomenological work and that would be first in line for theoretical analysis.

I do not want to equate the emotion types to which emotion complexes such as feeling abandoned might be reduced with the traditional notion of "basic" emotions, because there are too many problems with the notion (see, for example, Mandler, 1984). In the present context, one of the most serious is that many of the states proposed as basic emotions seem not very compelling as examples of emotions, let alone, basic ones. In addition, there is too little agreement between different lists of basic emotions for the notion to be coherent, and the criteria for their selection, when specified at all, appear to be defeasible.² How could the answers to important questions about emotions be meaningful if, in fact, not even the states proposed as basic emotions are unequivocal cases of emotions? For example, Ekman (e.g. Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1982), Izard (1977), and Tomkins (e.g. Tomkins, 1984) all include interest and surprise in their lists of basic emotions (although it should be acknowledged that Ekman, 1984 seems to back-off from this claim a bit). Izard also includes guilt, while Plutchik (e.g. Plutchik, 1980) includes acceptance and surprise among his set of basic emotions. Yet, not many people judge states like interest and acceptance to be good examples of emotions, and I have argued that guilt may not be. This means that there is a prima-facie case for supposing that some of the "basic" emotions in some theories may not be emotions at all, in which case there is no onus on a theory of emotion to account for or explain them. In view of this possibility, I am suggesting that we develop and use independent criteria about what is to count as an emotion before developing theories, conducting experiments, and drawing conclusions on the basis of them (Ortony et al., 1987). Without such criteria one is likely to inadvertently include all kinds of bogus states, and the resulting theories are as likely to reflect characteristics of these non-emotions as they are to reflect characteristics of whatever genuine emotions happen to have been included. The goal of a theory of emotion is surely to explain various facts about emotional states, not facts about non-emotional ones.

²The most explicit criterion proposed is that the basic emotions are those for which there are distinctive universal facial expressions (e.g. Ekman, 1984), assuming that the expression is neither suppressed nor feigned. Yet a distinctive universal facial expression resulting from, say, extreme physical exertion (e.g. lifting a very heavy object) would not license the inference that physical strain is an emotion any more than the absence of a distinctive universal facial expression would establish that, say, shame is not a (basic) emotion.
The Distinction between Feeling and Being

I propose that the distinction between feeling and being may constitute a reasonable heuristic criterion for distinguishing emotions from non-emotions. Data from a recent study (Clore, Ortony, & Foss, in press) lend support to this view. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relation between the feeling and being forms of nearly 600 putative emotion words by having subjects indicate how confident they were that “feeling x” and “being x” referred to emotions. In the case of adjectival forms, these were exactly the judgements that subjects made. Variants of the task were used to accommodate different syntactic forms. For nouns, the judgements were made using “x” and “feeling x”, and for verbs the judgements were made on “being xed,” “feeling xed,” and “xing someone or something”. Subjects used a 4-point scale in which 1 indicated certainty that the state in question is not an emotion and 4 indicated certainty that it is. Table 1 shows the mean ratings for the “feeling” forms (column 1), the “being” forms (column 2), the sum of these ratings (column 3), and the difference (column 4) of representative examples of different kinds of words often included in studies of emotion.

First, we found a significant main effect for linguistic form. Overall, subjects were more confident that feeling forms referred to emotions (mean = 3.0) than they were that being forms did (mean = 2.2). In fact, as shown in the bottom row of Table 1, the overall means indicate that on balance subjects suspected that feeling forms did refer to emotions but that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Being</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abandoned</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<td>Interested</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bored</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepy</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overallb</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Judgements: 1 = certain stimulus is not an emotion; 2 = suspect stimulus is not an emotion; 3 = suspect stimulus is an emotion; 4 = certain stimulus is an emotion.

*bPooled across three subsets of 150 affective words each (n = 20 per subset).
being forms did not. This clearly shows that the “feeling” context adds emotional content to whatever there is in the stimulus itself. It also suggests that many of the terms do not refer to emotional states in the being form, but only in the feeling form. And, more specifically, the data presented in the table support my claim that states like abandoned and guilty are poor examples of emotions, and that most of their emotional force is inherited from the emotional nature of feeling (as opposed to being) them.

Consider first the two unequivocal examples of emotions, “angry” and “afraid”. As mentioned earlier, words that refer to genuine emotions are judged to do so regardless of whether they occur in the context of “feeling” or “being”, although as we just saw, the feeling form generally receives higher ratings than the being form. In any case, these two states show high ratings both for the feeling form (means of 3.9 and 3.7 out of a maximum possible of 4.0, based on the data of about 20 subjects), and for the being form (3.4 and 3.3 respectively). In fact, a reasonable metric of the goodness of exemplar is provided by the sums and differences of the ratings of the two forms. For good examples, the sum should be high and the difference small. Clearly this is true for “angry” and “afraid”. The difference between the ratings of the two forms is of the order of half a scale point, which is about as small as it gets. In other words, this can be thought of as the base rate of the extra emotional content that the feeling form contributes to an already emotional state.

The next pair of terms are those upon which I have focused in this paper, namely, “guilty” and “abandoned”. Here, the pattern is quite different: Not only is the sum of the ratings much lower, but the difference is much higher. Thus, while the feeling forms are rated as being emotions to a degree comparable to “angry” and “afraid”, there is a significant reduction in the ratings for the being form, with the difference being nearly one-and-a-half scale points. Apparently the subjects shared our belief that being guilty and being abandoned are not emotions—the means are below the mid-point of 2.5 suggesting more confidence that they are not emotions than that they are. At the same time subjects appear to agree with us that “feeling guilty” and “feeling abandoned” do refer to emotional states.

Next, Table 1 shows the ratings for two of the more popular “basic” emotions, namely, surprise and interest. Clearly, subjects generally agree that feeling surprised refers to an emotion. However, their judgements about being surprised reveal less confidence—they suspect it is, but they are not at all sure. In fact, it is quite likely that these data exaggerate the degree to which subjects consider surprise to be an emotion. This is because when subjects make their judgements they are likely to implicitly bring to mind a surprise-inducing situation, such as an unexpected birthday party. In many cases, surprising situations are also, independently of their surprisingness, emotion-inducing situations, so that a common reading of
"surprise" is something like "pleasant surprise". However, the stripped down notion of surprise is affect-free, as can be seen by considering that one might be surprised to learn of some improbable fact (for example, that the temperature in Montreal rose to 100°F one January day) without having any valenced reaction to it. Further evidence that surprise is not a very good example of an emotion comes from a study reported by Fehr and Russell (1984) which revealed that fewer than 10% of subjects listed it in an emotion generation task. This figure is in marked contrast to the 75% of subjects who listed "anger" and the 50% who listed "fear".

If surprise is questionable as a good example, interest appears to be a non-example. Table 1 shows that subjects were barely willing to acknowledge that "feeling interested" refers to an emotion, and they were certainly not willing to acknowledge that "being interested" does. This is consistent with the fact that the word "interest(ed)" is not even listed as one occurring twice by the 200 subjects from whom Fehr and Russell elicited emotion terms. If surprise and interest are basic emotions, one would expect them to be judged as good examples of emotions, but the data in this respect are not at all impressive. Of course, it is entirely possible that surprise and interest play a basic role in emotion, for example through their effects on arousal, but this does not make them basic emotions any more than arousal is a basic emotion.

Finally, the data for two states that repeatedly appear in emotion studies are presented. They show that subjects suspect that feeling bored is an emotion but that they are quite unsure whether being bored is. Fehr and Russell's subjects did not seem to view it as a very good example; only 4% of their subjects listed it. Furthermore, the case for sleepy is clear. Subjects are confident that "sleepy" does not refer to an emotional state in either form.

It should perhaps be mentioned that our data are quite compatible with the findings of other researchers, although the conclusions that we draw from them are different. I have already suggested that the frequency of mention of words in Fehr and Russell's study were consistent with our data. So too are the results reported by Averill (1975) in which, among other things, subjects indicated for nearly 600 words how confident they were that each referred to an emotion, and judged their "emotionality" on a bipolar unemotional-emotional scale. Averill does not report the data for "sleepy", (which he included, interestingly, as a non-emotional control), but the rank ordering for the other seven words presented as examples in Table 1 is identical to that found in Averill's data.

It is certainly not my intention to suggest that these data establish conclusively that some particular word or words do refer to emotions and that some do not. My own view is that a theory of emotion should not take emotion words as the central phenomena to be explained. Rather, a theory
of emotion should focus on identifying and analysing emotion types with a view to subsequently accounting for emotion words in terms of such an analysis (Ortony et al., in press). However, whether one starts with emotion words, or ends with them, it is still going to be helpful to have some criterion for identifying them. In this connection, the data I have presented establish two things of interest. First, there are some words for which there is almost universal agreement that they refer to emotions, and these words show a consistent pattern on the feel-be test (Clore, Ortony, & Foss, in press). Secondly, many of the words that emotion theorists include in their studies, and some that they even claim are “basic” emotions, neither follow this pattern of ratings on the feel-be test, nor enjoy wide agreement as to their status as emotions. My explanation of this troublesome result is that researchers have failed to distinguish between the objects of scientific interest (emotions) and other states that either cause them, or frequently co-occur with them.

DISCUSSION

We are now in a position to discuss what appear to be some of the key characteristics of emotions. First, emotions are certain kinds of psychological states. States such as being abandoned and being guilty lack this characteristic. Secondly, it is not normally possible for a person who is in an emotional state to be unaware of it. States such as being abandoned and being guilty lack this characteristic too. Thirdly, emotions can be experienced at different levels of intensity. One can be slightly in love, or deeply in love, slightly afraid, or terrified, but one cannot be slightly guilty or intensely abandoned. Finally, English words that refer to emotional states appear to do so with comparable ease both in the linguistic context of “feeling” and of “being”. Thus, both “feeling afraid” and “being afraid” refer to emotional states. This is in contrast, first, to words that refer to other kinds of states such as “sleepy”, which is a physical and bodily condition, and “bored”, which, although a psychological state, is a cognitive rather than an emotional one (see Ortony et al., 1987). Such words are never judged to refer to emotions in their being form, and are rarely so judged in their feeling form. Secondly, it is in contrast to words that refer to what might be called external conditions—that is to conditions that the person is in only by virtue of external factors and, in particular, ones of which the person might be quite unaware. These are conditions such as

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3 Even Freud denied that it made sense to talk of unexperienced emotions (Freud, 1915, p. 110). In his essay, “The unconscious”, Freud wrote: “It is surely of the essence of an emotion that we should feel it, i.e. that it should enter consciousness. So for emotions, feelings and affects to be unconscious would be quite out of the question”.
being abandoned and being guilty. In such cases, I have argued that in their feeling forms these words certainly refer to emotional states but that in their being forms, equally certainly, they do not. One might argue about one or other of these criteria, but two things seem to be indisputable: Good examples of emotions (e.g. anger, fear) usually have all of these characteristics, and bad or non-examples (e.g. abandoned, guilty, sleepy, interest) have few or none of them.

The analysis that I have proposed can perhaps be summarised in terms of three broad classes of emotion-related expressions in English. First, there are expressions such as “being abandoned” and “being guilty” that have no emotional content in themselves, but that refer to particular states and conditions that often constitute eliciting conditions for emotions. Secondly, there are expressions such as “being angry” and “being embarrassed” that refer directly to emotional states while presupposing the satisfaction of their eliciting conditions. Finally, there are expressions such as “feeling abandoned” and “feeling guilty”, which acquire their emotional force from the fact that they explicitly report a feeling, while at the same time indicating a causally related eliciting condition which need have no emotional content at all. With these distinctions in mind, we can now return to the issue of whether guilt is as an emotion. Let us grant that the noun “guilt” has two readings in English, an emotional reading, and a socio-legal reading. The question then becomes, to what kind of psychological condition does the emotional reading refer? The answer that I find most attractive is that in its emotional reading “guilt” refers to the same kind of state as does the expression “feeling guilty”, which is consistent with the fact that the mean rating for “feeling guilty” and for the unmodified “guilt” were 3.7 and 3.5 respectively (Table 1). However, and this is the important point, the emotional sense of “guilt” does not refer to the state of being guilty (this is reserved for the legal sense of “guilt”). This structure of referential relationships between nouns and adjectives is different from that which normally holds for good examples of emotions. For example, one can sensibly claim that the kind of emotional state referred to by the noun “anger” is the same as that referred to by the expression “being angry”. The fact that the noun “guilt” is allied to feeling guilty but not to being guilty suggests that it acquires its emotional force in just the same way as does the expression “feeling guilty”, namely, by the implicit involvement of a rule like Rule 2 relating the non-emotional state of guilt to an emotional feeling. On this analysis, guilt is an emotion in the sense that it is the emotion that results from a person’s believing in his or her (socio-legal) guilt, and caring about it, but it only has this emotional sense because of its dependence on the fact that the non-emotional sense of guilt can, but does not always, constitute the cause of (emotional) guilt. This is in contrast to, say, anger, which refers quite directly to an emotional state,
namely the emotional state a person is in when he or she is angry, without
the need for intervening (albeit implicit) rules of inference.

In fact, the point of this paper has not really been to force an answer to
the question "Is guilt an emotion?" nor to legislate about which words do
and which do not refer to emotions. The point has been to suggest that it
may be a wise research strategy to employ a heuristic like the feel-be
distinction to help distinguish words that refer directly to emotions from
words that do not. Of course, there will be some who object that the
criterion is inadequate, perhaps because it suggests that some of the
emotions that they consider to be "basic" might not be emotions at all.
Such critics would be right that the criterion might be imperfect, but it
seems better to employ the best explicit criterion that one can find than to
employ a weak criterion, or no criterion at all.

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