Emotions and Society

Special Issue: Call for Papers

Fear: Perspectives from the Social Sciences

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It seems that fear has returned with particular force to the different areas of our everyday lives and societal fields such as politics, media, religion, and economics (e.g. Stearns 2006). Phenomena such as globalization, renationalization, right-wing populism, migration, digitalization, changes of welfare systems and work conditions, the erosion of traditional gender roles or the current COVID-19 pandemic are regularly apostrophized under the sign of fear. Perhaps, more than ever before, we live in a "society of fear" (Bude 2018) today, characterized by the pervasive and "liquid" nature of fear (Bauman 2006), and indeed our understanding of the world and our practices may be particularly embedded in a "culture of fear" (Furedi 2018; Glassner 1999).

However, it is only recently that the social sciences have rediscovered the fear topos for themselves, despite the relevance of the sociology of risk especially in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Beck 1992), current efforts towards a sociology of (in-)security (e.g., Stampnitzky & Mattson 2015), and the rise of social scientific work on securitization (e.g. C.A.S.E. Collective 2006). These research traditions primarily conceive of risk, security and appurtenant emotions as societal phenomena of the present rather than as general societal phenomena. In contrast, the works of early classics (Weber, Durkheim, and later, for instance, Elias and Merton) suggested that fear can be understood as a constituent of human and social existence.

With the new Millennium, we saw a considerable rise in both theoretical contributions and empirical investigations on fear, anxiety, panic, and similar feelings (e.g., Quarantelli 2001; Tudor 2003; Wilkinson 2001). Some authors see fear as a central moment of late-modern socialization and subjectivation (e.g., de Courville Nicol 2006; cf. Faircloth & Murray 2015), others as a dominant principle of late-modern world relations and government (e.g., Massumi 2010), or as an all-pervading societal discourse (e.g. Furedi 2018). Empirical studies have begun to shed some light on the causes, the phenomenological dimensions, the social distribution, the societal consequences, and the functions of fear (e.g., Eckert 2019; Gill & Burrow 2018; Schmitz, Flemmen & Rosenlund 2018; Schmitz 2019). On the basis of various theoretical and methodological approaches, scholars have also provided essential insights into current socio-political contexts by identifying fear as one of the pivotal emotions. They examine fear in climate movements (Kleres & Wettergren 2017), or the rhetorics and politics of fear with regard to minority discrimination (Ahmed 2004), the rise of right-wing populism (Wodak 2015), and social control in the "war on terror" (Altheide 2017).

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On the one hand, overall, this recent work has illustrated how the social sciences can enhance our understanding of fear—an emotion that is often considered as a merely (neuro-) psychological and personal, if not a pathological, issue. On the other hand, this vital research direction is still in its infancy. Fear as an everyday and fundamental, rather than an extra-ordinary and peripheral phenomenon of the social, is only conceived in a rudimentary way. Furthermore, the various fields of empirical studies are largely unconnected. This situation makes generating a comprehensive discursive context an urgent task for the contemporary sociology of emotions.

Hence, crucial key questions remain unanswered: How can we theoretically understand fear and associated feelings? In which ways is fear socially (trans-)formed? How is fear implicated in and intertwined with the central social science categories such as power, meaning, or social practice, and how does fear become explicable through these categories? What is the place of fear within the sociology of emotions? How can we methodologically conceptualize and empirically investigate different types of fear or, for that matter, its relationship to anxiety, panic, and related phenomena?

In this special issue, we want to bring together different approaches that reflect on the complex of fear in its societal dimensions applying foundational theoretical perspectives. Approaches that empirically examine various types and aspects of fear based on a systematic theoretical approach or that offer new methodological strategies of capturing fear are likewise welcome. Thus, the purpose of this special issue is to make a significant contribution to the theoretical and empirical conceptualization of fear as well as to the exchange between the different approaches of different paradigms.

Possible areas of study include but are not limited to the following issues:

- Fear in the view of classical and contemporary sociological theories
- Interrelations of societal structure, societal change, and fear
- Production of fear in different social fields and discourses
- Culture and fear and fear cultures
- Representation and portrayal of fear
- Fear and its relevance for political control and relations of domination
- Affective, bodily, and material dimensions of fear
- Material, technological, and spatial aspects of fear
- Fear in everyday and liminal situations
- Effects of fear on social practices
- Fear-induced social group formation
- Fear and social (dis-)integration
- Individual, collective, and societal ways of coping/dealing with fear
- The role of fear for historical and recent phenomena

Please send your proposals (about one page) by May 17th 2021 to the guest editors. Feedback on the acceptance of proposals will be provided by June 21st 2021. In case of acceptance, full papers are to be submitted by October 15th 2021.

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