

PSYCHOSOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON SOCIAL DIMENSION OF EMOTIONS

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Abstract: *In this article is analyzed the role and importance of emotions taking into account the cultural meanings. The study of emotions gives us a pretty clear picture of the „changes” that occur in society, both individually and socially. Considering all this, we can highlight the following implications that emotions have: 1) they give an image about our health, 2) they are a component and an expression of the human structure but also the animals (see Charles Darwin, 1872/2009), 3) the fundamentals (primary emotions) are part of our DNA and the secondary ones complement our image in the social and private background, 4) they manifest differently in degree and intensity due to the situation we are facing with, directly and indirectly or due to the physiological states we find ourselves into at a given time, and 5) they give an insight on the norms and cultural values, our beliefs and customs.*

Keywords: *emotions, feelings, passion, honor, fobias.*

What are emotions? A question frequently met in university textbooks and generally in the academic literature. The analysis take into account, as shown in the majority of the cases, several approaches such as the psychoanalytic, psychological, bio-psycho-sociological, philosophical, anthropological, medical, historical but also evolutionary. All these bring together and simultaneously distinguish between emotions, feelings and affect. Jonathan H. Turner (2007, 2) stressed the fact that three approaches are dominant when defining emotions: biological – changes occurring in the autonomic nervous system endocrine, muscular are discussed, cognitive – “emotions are conscious feelings” in relation “to self and the objects found in the environment”; cultural - emotions “are the words and lables that humans give to particular physiological states of arousal”.

Mark Pettinelli (2009, 1) proposes a “logical-emotional” approach for understanding emotions and feelings: “some things in life cause people to feel, these are called emotional reactions. Some things in life cause people to think, these are sometimes called logical or intellectual reactions. Thus life is divided between things that make you feel and things that make you think. The question is, if someone is feeling, does that mean that they are thinking less?” Apparently, the answer is simple. The man, as a rational being, can feel and think at the same time though, there are situations when certain personal experiences, social and intercultural determine him to act a certain way, taking into account the circumstances he finds himself into. Also, routine, care and daily concerns, but mostly indifference and selfishness contribute to our emotional cap. Charles Lindholm righteously added, that “instead of ‘thinking animals’ we see ourselves as ‘feeling machines’”. Accordingly, we say that people who are cerebral and unemotional

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are 'inhuman' and 'heartless'. We want our friends and lovers to be compassionate and ardent, not rational and calculating. For the same reason, our leaders never portray themselves as logically minded technocrats, but as empathetic individuals who 'feel our pain' (Lindholm, 2005/2007, 30). Carl Ratner (2000, 6) summarizes Mark Pettinelli's above mentioned idea, saying that "emotions are feelings that accompany thinking" but, we add, not always.

Over time, the number of studies, analyses and research on emotions and feelings have systematically increased. This has been demonstrated by John Humrichouse, Michael Chmielewski, Elizabeth A. McDade-Montez și David Watson (2007, 13) after a PsycINFO database search taking into account the following keywords "*affect, emotion, emotions, emotional states, and mood*". This search generated 7.083 hits during the 5-year period from 1980 to 1984. Since 1984, the number has increased dramatically, rising to 11.374 (1985-1989), 16.478 (1990-1994), 24.602 (1995-1999) and finally to 33.828 during the most recent 5-year period (2000-2004)".

Emotions, Feelings, Affect

Unlike other researchers Steven L. Gordon (1990) rejects the biological explanation, considering the cultural aspects of emotions much more edifying in showing their origin. According to his theory, emotions "emerge from situations that are intimately social, with individuals learning the appropriate emotions and how to use them in different types of relationships" (*apud* Turner și Stets, 2005/2007, 2). Magda B. Arnold (1960) mentions that emotional expressions are accompanied by "specific physiological responses". On the other hand, biological processes are the ones that determine the intensity and the physiological changes of the body as noted by William James (1884) in the article entitled "*What is an emotion?*" from the famous magazine *Mind* and, later, Jonathan H. Turner and Jan E. Stets (2005/2007) in their work *The Sociology of Emotions*.

Jacques Cosnier (1994/2002, 17-18), professor at the University Lumiere (Lyon 2), defines emotions as a connection of four key elements: "events or conditions" closely correlated with the individual's emotional nature "characterized by specific psychological experiences (emotions). In this context, the presence of "physiological events" (hidden and visible) and "behavioral" (along with the verbal ones) is inevitable. Long-term affect, according to the noted professor, are described as feelings. In the literature acknowledged in this field, terms such as *emotion*¹ (lat. *emotion – movere*, „to move”), *feeling* and *emotion*² (lat. *sentire*) are given different meanings though, Dylan Evans, has demonstrated the interchangeable use of the terms emotion and feelings: "The word feeling is going through hard times. It is scarcely used today, and its relative emotional has negative connotations. Two and a half centuries ago, to the end of Enlightenment, things were very different. Then, the word feeling meant what today means emotion" (*apud* Chelcea, 2008a, 18).

For example, the verb *to feel* or the noun *feeling* are directly related to the touching one. More specifically, according to the expression "to feel an object", the person comes into contact directly by touching (or to be touched) with an "object" molding a certain perception related to it. Thus, it is about getting perceptions through the means of experiences (Gardiner, 1906, 57). Oftenly, the concept of *feeling* is used with the same

¹ In the *Dictionary of Psychology*, Ursula Șchiopu (1997, 262) defines emotions as: "Bipolar expressions dependent on the subjective semnification of the situations but also on the status, role, inter-relationships characteristics they are expressed in [...] The classification and pluritonicity of the various states that are related to emotions are determined by the motivational tensions and by the complexity of the educational and subjective relationships".

² The term feeling refers to a "complex emotional process, combined with the intellectual elements (representations) and general stable volitives, that persist in the absence of all stimuli" (Mureșan, 1997, 634).

meaning as premonition. We say that “we have a *feeling*”, a premonition that something good or bad will happen. However, this feature differs from the meaning given to this concept when it comes to feelings and perceptions resulting from direct contact with an object or person.

Perspectives on emotions

Kenneth T. Strongman (2003, 3) righteously noted, the multiple perspectives and dimensions of understanding the emotion. This “permeates life, it is there as a subtext to everything we do and say. It is reflected in physiology, expression and behaviour, it interweaves with cognition, it fills the spaces between people, interpersonally and culturally. Above all, emotion is centred internally, in subjective feelings. Like physical pain, emotion provides us with personal informations that is integral to our well-being or, in the extreme, to our survival”. In terms of theories that analyze emotions, there are some conceptual clarifications which we can not ignore. According to Robert S. Lazarus (1991ab), a theory of the emotions must bring into discussion the following aspects: “1) definition; 2) the distinction between emotion and non-emotion; 3) whether or not emotions are discrete; 4) the role of action tendencies and physiology; 5) the manner in which emotions are functionally interdependent; 6) the links between cognition, motivation and emotion; 7) the relationship between the biological and sociocultural bases of emotion; 8) the role of appraisal and consciousness; 9) the generation of emotions; 10) the matter of emotional development; 11) the effects of emotion on general functioning and well-being; and 12) the influence of therapy on emotion” (*apud* Strongman, 2003, 3).

Summarizing the main areas of thought and emotion analysis (evolutionary, psychologist, cognitivist and culturalist) François Lelord and Christophe André (2001/2003, 334), emphasized that “each of these theories distinguishes from the others by the importance a certain aspect gets regarding emotions, but without denying the interest presented by the other aspects”.

In the analysis and differentiation of the *primary emotions*³ from the secondary ones, interchangeable terms are used such as *fundamental* emotions or *basic*. The context for their use was to show the reference point from which other emotions are derived then called secondary, and by the implications they have in their private and social life, a distinction is made between negative and positive emotions⁴. Charles Darwin (1872/2009) has discussed for the first time the universality of emotions in the work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Based on the work of the famous naturalist, several specialists (Ekman, 1973; Ekman și Friesen, 1975; Ekman *et al.*, 1972) have presented the following emotions as universal: *happiness, anger, sadness, surprise, disgust and fear*. Theodore D. Kemper (1987, 268-276) noted that *happiness, anger, fear* and *depression* can be included under the primary emotions because they “have an evolutionary survival value”, they appear in interpersonal relations in particular, and in the social relations in general, the resulting facial

³ Seymour Epstein (1984, 67) note that a primary emotion is “a complex, organized response disposition to engage in certain classes of biologically adaptative behaviors...characterized by a distinctive state of physiological arousal, a distinctive feeling, or affective, state, a distinctive state of receptivity to stimulation, and a distinctive pattern of expressive reactions”.

⁴ The analysis of positive and negative emotions starts from the idea according to which “both types of emotions have an adaptive function, but fundamentally differ depending on the order of occurrence in the human’s evolution, on consistency and on specifics”. For example, “shame and guilt fit in the category of negative emotions. They prepare the withdrawal action from the public space (when the individual feels the emotion of embarrassment) or perform prosocial behaviors, for the compensation of pain and displeasure caused at any time” (Chelcea, 2008b, 39, 40).

expressions are considered to be “unique” and fit for all cultures, also present in human development.

Other classifications include, in addition to the already mentioned emotions, others as falling within the primary category such as *pleasure* (Sroufe, 1979), *contempt*, *shame*, *shyness*, *guilt*, *distress*, and *interest* (Izard, 1977/1992). Primary emotions are also considered to be *panic*, *sorrow*, *loneliness*, *grief*, *expectancy* (Panksepp, 1982), *joy*, *anticipation* and *acceptance* (Plutchik, 1980), *anxiety* (Gray, 1982) or *satisfaction* (Kemper, 1987). On the other hand, Christophe André (2009/2010, 41) makes a distinction between primary emotions and moods, saying that the last are “a sort of evolved and civilized cousins of our emotions, the latter remaining older and more rustic: so to speak, they are subtle emotions. In contrast with the great emotions, they are called ‘primary’, ‘elementary’”. According to the author mentioned above, unlike emotions, moods:

“a) They are lasting and less intense;

b) They are more influential: the force of what is weak and unobtrusive, which we forget and whose power we underestimate (how slight culpability can ruin the day);

c) They have a more extensive impact, for it is not just a response to a given situation (“starter situation” of a powerful emotion), but strictly related to our whole connection with the world;

d) They do not have a specific object as emotions do; however, they have sources though, even if they are not always clear. Emotions are in general, a “response” to something that is “happening” to us; moods, are not always this way, they can come from within, can be self-made; emotions radicalize and simplify our perception on events, moods make it complicated, but, in contrast, make it more subtle; emotions are “social agitators”, that change our relationship with others and with the world, and moods are rather “internal agitators”, that change the way we relate to ourselves and our vision towards the world (that can also push us to change many things, but slower); emotions push us rather towards the external action, while moods push us first, towards the reflection from within;

e) They can persist following powerful emotions, like a drag (the state we found ourselves in after a great joy or deception). They can also represent the ground that promotes them: the grumpiness enables bad mood and sadness. Spite serves as a ground for anger flames. Panic, explodes on an anxiety background. Thick clouds before the storm, then dark sky...” (André, 2009/2010, 41-42).

Unlike primary emotions, secondary emotions are socially determined, deriving from those considered crucial. Based on the example of Robert Plutchik on combining primary colors from which secondary colors result and its transposition in the context of analysis and emotions differentiation (regarding the emotions, the discussion focuses in other direction, for it involves aspects of neurological, hormonal, social and cultural level), Theodore D. Kemper, believes that the same “theory” implicitly with the “private matters” that can be raised, can also be applied where secondary emotions are concerned (“for example, fear and anger can lead to secondary emotions of hate, jealousy, and envy”) (Turner și Stets, 2005/2007, 18-19).

Through the conducted tests, Paul Ekman (1992) showed the universality of emotions identifying, however, several of their characteristics: “1) are present in other primates; 2) have a distinctive physiological response; 3) have distinctive universal antecedent events; 4)

show coherence in autonomic and expressive responses; 5) are quick in their onset; 6) are brief in duration; 7) generate an automatic (vs. deliberate) appraisal of the stimulus, and 8) are experienced as events happening to self, beyond one's full control" (*apud* Turner & Stets, 2005/2007, 12-13).

From cultural perspective, Carl Ratner (2000, 9) identifies five defining characteristics of emotions (quality, intensity, behavioral expression, the manner they are managed and their structure) mentioning at the same time that "an emotion occurs under several considerations such as understanding the immediate stimulus (the event, the object, the person as well as the needs and the individual's abilities)" (Ratner, 2000, 10). On the other hand, from a sociological point of view, according to Jonathan H. Turner and Jan E. Stets (2005/2007, 9-10), the study of emotions can be approached considering several levels. First, the biological aspects can be taken into account as triggers of the body as a whole. It is an approach that can not be denied or interpreted for the human body reacts instinctively and has an "universal language". It is a base level, and an approach based solely on the stimulus-response reaction in the biological context. Thus, emerges the consideration of the elements that relate to the individual socialization, culture and values that enable or not "externalizing emotions triggered by situations or biological reactions". In other words, we speak, in view of the two authors mentioned above, of the cultural emotions that "label from a linguistic point of view" (*idem*, 9). Moreover, a question is raised regarding the analysis in the context of quantified emotional expressiveness, through the means of "physiognomy", "voice intonation" and "paralinguistic movements". Monique Brillon (2009/2010, 23) concluded that "human emotions are many and varied. There are several criterias that can serve as reference points if they are subjected to be classified. Some are based on the impact of emotion on the body's energy balance-homeostasis. Others are being classified according to their individual character, such as fear, surprise or relational, like love, compassion and anger".

In our lives there are times and situations that make us feel fear⁵, jealousy, shame guilt. As proven, emotions are part of our lives. They define us. They say a lot about our behavior, attitudes, what we are thinking, feeling or what we want to pass on to those around us or to those we come in contact with. Many times, we feel overwhelmed by these. They influence the decisions we take, making us ponder, sometimes extensively, on our past, present and future actions. If embarrassment is a "social control emotion", (Goffman, 1967; Parrot și Harré, 1996; Jderu, 2008, 2010), shame, according to Elspeth Probyn (2005, x), "goes to the heart of who we think we are. In this sense, shame puts one's self-esteem on the line and questions our value system". In addition, Monique Brillon (2009/2010, 47-48) specifies that shame is an emotion that is "closely related to the physiological reaction to stress. She informs us on the disturbing effect of a social encounter on our body. It is about a state of physiological hiper activity signaled by hiper sweat, profound consciousness of the body, intensifying perception, erroneous motric

⁵ Many times, it is associated to phobia, anxiety and restlessness. However, in literature terminological differences are identified regarding these concepts. For example, François Lelord and Christophe André, *op. cit.*, p. 235, present, in comparison, fear and anxiety. If fear involves, "a reaction to social danger", it is on "short-term", it brings into discussion the existence of a "real motive (I know what my fears are)", "predominant physiological manifestations (tensions, shivers)", anxiety supposes an "anticipation of imminent danger or supposed one", "it may become chronic", it does not have a "specific motive (it does not know what form danger has)", in this context appear, "manifestation of psychological level (fear, restlessness)". Also, the mentioned authors note that, on one side, where fear is concerned, there is "a derived mental condition, phobia (uncontrollable fear under different circumstances), and on the other side, where anxiety is concerned", "a derived mental condition, called general anxiety (uncontrollable daily worry)" (*ibidem*). Recently, Septimiu Chelcea (2010, 3-18) examined fear and its social implications mentioning its defining elements in proportion to phobia, anxiety and unrestlessness.

coordination, decreased effectiveness of the cognitive functions that results in an often erroneous interpretation of the feelings and reactions of the others, avoiding the look of the ones around. It reflects a homeostatic lack of balance”.

Nowadays, shame is no longer in the public space a “fixing force” of the individual’s behavior. This is also noted in the Romanian society when we address the relationships between individuals or institutions. We can rather discuss of a shame freeze. Who still “feels” shame or embarrassment, becomes ridiculous, is marginalized. Serge Moscovici (1994/1998, 62), noted by analyzing current society, that selfishness represents what is „normal” and evident in a society, while altruism (as a subspecies of the prosocial behavior) a behavior less and less common, more exactly “deviant”. Making an analogy of what Serge Moscovici alleged, we can state that to feel shame or feel ashamed or embarrassed transforms you into a “different” individual from the ones who “think and act alike” according to some inoculated principles. The lack of common sense (impertinence), ignorance and mechanical thinking transformed into a fake perception of reality and into an “emphatic image” proportionally to the ones around, put a hold on the individual nature.

Like many other emotions, shame and embarrassment have cultural meanings. Inmaculada Iglesias (1996) showed this, based on what is *vergüenza ajena* to Spanish culture and, implicitly, to the latino one. In Spain, like in many countries where Spanish is being used, emotions such as shame and guilt bring into discussions certain particular situations. *Vergüenza ajena* also comprises of empathic embarrassment, the embarrassment felt towards another person or towards the behavior of another person (*vicarious embarrassment*) or social embarrassment (Iglesias, 1996, 125). In *Dictionary of the Real Academia Espanola* (1992), *vergüenza* is defined as “mental confusion, mental fluster, accompanied frequently by blushing caused by a committed offense, or by a dishonorable, disgraceful, shameful or humiliating action, either one’s own or someone else’s” (*apud* Iglesias, 1996, 122-123). According to Inmaculada Iglesias are:

“two important points in this definition that should be pointed out. First, the definition of ‘*vergüenza*’ includes both embarrassment and shame. Second, the phenomenon of ‘*vergüenza ajena*’ is included in the meaning of *vergüenza* which gives us a sense of the relevance of this phenomenon in Spanish culture [...] The translation into English of the word ‘*vergüenza*’ can be done in three senses; First, ‘*vergüenza*’ as confusion as in ‘Don’t embarrass him in front of his friends’. Second, ‘*vergüenza*’ involves a sense of *decorum*, decency, dignity as in ‘You should be ashamed of yourself’. Third, ‘*vergüenza*’ as disgrace as in ‘Lawyers like him are a disgrace to the profession’ (The Oxford Spanish Dictionary, 1994)” (*idem*, 123).

Regarding the first meaning of the concept *vergüenza ajena*, we can address what in the specialty literature is called social tact (Riezler, 1943). Otherwise put, an individual that gives an insight of this in interpersonal relationships can prevent the occurrence of emphatic embarrassment. Why feel embarrassed for the behaviour of another individual? In many situations, because of the sympathy that we feel towards someone, or of the friendships we have built on long-term or, just because we found ourselves around those who make mistakes.

Also, we can notice a direct link between shame, embarrassment and the feeling of honour. In Spain, just as in many Latin countries (Portugal, Italy, France or Latin America) honour and pride can be regarded as “national passions”. What about in Romania? At least, concerning pride, if we guide ourselves by what a common song says, interpreted passionately by the country music singer Nicolae Furdui Iancu, “we are

Romanians, we are Romanians, we are here to be forever landlords”, shows the fact that the Romanian people have strong roots of which they remember wherever they may find themselves. In Romanian, *vergüenza* can be translated, according to Valeria Neagu (2001, 365), by “shame, embarrassment, shyness, timidity”. As it may be observed, this compound of terms offers semantic similitudes to the one offered in English and Spanish.

Guilt is, maybe, the only emotion that shows a legal side. It appears just as Gabrielle Taylor (1996, 57), noted as a “legal concept”. An individual can be considered to be guilty, according to the same author, “if he breaks a law, which may be of human or divine origin. As a consequence of this action he has put himself into a position where he is liable to punishment, or where, given repentance, he may be forgiven” (*ibidem*).

Hope is a type of emotion less discussed within the emotion literature. When it comes to classifying emotions, surprisingly, we can identify it ahead of disgust, contempt or interest, according to many studies conducted in this sense (Averill, 1975).

James R. Averill *et al.* (1990) were concerned about the cultural differences that hope poses among the Americans and Koreans. Unlike love and anger, emotions often raised and discussed from an intercultural perspective, hope was identified to be “less tangible as a dream, fantasy or illusion”, its purpose remains imprecise and difficult to prove. Love and anger are closely related to “targets or specific events [...] in contrast, a person may hope for any future event its occurrence remaining uncertain” (Averill, 1996, 27). Unlike the Americans, the Koreans see hope (*himang*) as a component of personality, while others see it as a “transitional state” that occurs at certain times, when an emotion is faced. (*idem*, 31). The same author emphasized that there are multiple perspectives for the interpretation of hope accompanied by several “metaphorical expressions” based on “how a person thinks and behaves” (“hope is what dreams are made of”, “hope is a traitor of the mind”, “he was blinded by hope”), the manner hope is being looked at “difficult to control” (“she was a prisoner of hope”, “he was consumed by hope”) or that it “motivates behavior” (“hope gives you strength”, “hope is the best medicine”, “hope is the second soul of the unhappy” (*idem*, 28-30). If we take a look at the Romanian society, we can not fail to notice a maximum which, very often, we as a people bring into question, especially when we want to live better, or when times get hard: “hope dies last, for if there is no hope then nothing is”.

A less common view in the study of emotions is the one related to the geopolitics of emotions. Dominique Moïsi (2009), a professor at Harvard University, mentions in his work, the so-called “clash of emotions” in an intercultural context. The three emotions analyzed are humiliation, hope and fear from the willingness to explain the link between them and the concept of confidence that, according to the author, is “the defining factor in how nations and people address the challenges they face as well as how they relate to one another” (Moïsi, 2009, 5). In the view of the author already mentioned, fear occurs when “conviction” or safety are absent. In complete contrast to it, hope is characterized by the “expression of confidence; it is based on the conviction that today is better than yesterday and that tomorrow will be better than today”. On the other hand, humiliation can be defined in terms of “injured confidence of those (with the meaning of trust – nn.) who have lost hope in the future; your lack of hope is the fault of others, who have treated you badly in the past. When the contrast between your idealized and glorious past and your frustrating present is too great, humiliation prevails”, emphasizes the same author (Moïsi, 2009, 5). It seems that nowadays, these things are more valid than ever. The same specialist noted that “these three emotions express the level of trust you have in yourself. Confidence is as vital for nations and civilizations as for individuals, because confidence allows you to project yourself into the future, to fulfil your capabilities, and even to transcend them. Confidence (distinguished from hubris) is one

of the most important components of the world's health" (*idem*, 5-6). But, what happens to trusting society and the state? A question which is not necessarily rhetorical given the changes and the current social issues. Perhaps we are victims of the paradox of resistance to change and yet we do not realize it.

The study of emotions gives us a pretty clear picture of the „changes” that occur in society, both individually and socially. Considering all this, we can highlight the following implications that emotions have: 1) they give an image about our health, 2) they are a component and an expression of the human structure but also the animals (see Charles Darwin, 1872/2009), 3) the fundamentals (primary emotions) are part of our DNA and the secondary ones complement our image in the social and private background, 4) they manifest differently in degree and intensity due to the situation we are facing with, directly and indirectly or due to the physiological states we find ourselves into at a given time, and 5) they give an insight on the norms and cultural values, our beliefs and customs. There is nothing left for us to do, than to ask ourselves what we are really feeling. Perhaps learning to respect life, to become more human with those around us and last but not least, with ourselves.

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