# 13 From Experience to Regulation: Notes on the Social Rootedness and the Communicative Value of Discrete Emotions

**Radek Trnka**

*Summary*. – The final chapter is focused mainly on the process of strategy choice for emotional regulation or coping. I will outline issues such as the social rootedness of emotional experience, the communicative value of emotional exchange in relation to regulation strategies, and the role of imagination in emotional regulation. Further, I will also pay attention to several more general issues, like the sense of inauthenticity or the presumption of causality rooted in thinking styles.

Previous books focused on discrete emotions have chiefly discussed the experience of individual emotions (e.g., Lewis & Haviland-Jones, 2004; Dalgleish & Power, 1999). The present compilation aims to shift the discussion from emotional experience to emotional regulation, and to coping with discrete emotions. I hope that this conception will show emotional functioning in a more complex and dynamic manner.

Each chapter of the main part was focused on one of the discrete emotions. The general aim was to provide readers with a new perspective of the functioning of various emotional constructs in the sense of its experience and regulation. I use the term emotional constructs because the typology of emotions was developed mostly by psychologists during the previous decades of research work. However, the names of emotions more likely represent unrefined allocations in the entire experiential space. Many chapters point out that discrete emotions often occur in combination with one or more different emotions. This fact shows that, in real life conditions, emotional blends occur more often than emotion prototypes. It seems that emotion prototypes or constructs were created artificially in the course of previous scientific investigation mostly for the purposes of easier orientation in the human emotional space. However, I believe that

the present typology of emotions is useful for the theoretical allocation of different seg-ments of experiential space, and thus was used for the targeting of individual chapters.

The reader can see that the list of authors includes scholars from various disci-plines. There are cognitive psychologists, general psychologists, social psycholo-gists, but also anthropologists, sociologists and therapists. This variability was intentional, as the editors wished to create an interdisciplinary discourse that is connected only by the general focus on the experience and regulation of discrete emotions. On the other hand, the editors wanted to avoid the unified structures of all chapters, and therefore, the final designs of chapters were based mostly on the decisions of individual authors. I hope that this approach helped to provide a rich representation of various issues related to the functioning of various segments within the entire experiential space.

The goal of this final chapter was not to make any broad generalizations. I do not think that it is very convenient when working within the paradigm of discrete emotions. Rather, I will try to mention a few interesting issues that emerged in the individual chapters. The main focus will be aimed on the process of strategy choice for emotion regulation or coping. I will outline issues such as the social rooted-ness of emotional experience, the communicative value of emotional exchange in relation to regulation strategies, or the role of imagination in emotional regulation. Further, I will also focus attention on several more general issues, like the sense of inauthenticity or the presumption of causality rooted in thinking styles. It is not possible to discuss all interesting issues here. However, the reader may surely find them in the individual chapters.

Furthermore, I would like to apologize to more conservative readers for the several non-standard standpoints presented in the final chapter, and also within the whole book. The terms regulation, coping and control are not precisely defined nor separated. All terms are used in the book freely and it depends on the author's decisions and on the given contexts if one or the other term is used. The experi-ence of both stress and emotions represent highly interconnected processes, and it seems fruitful to try to understand them in a holistic manner. Furthermore, many interpretations in the final chapter are highly speculative. However, I suggest that speculative reasoning may help generate new hypotheses and help provoke fol-low-up theoretical reflections, as well as to inspire future empirical research.

## SOME EMOTIONS ARE BEYOND CONSCIOUS REGULATORY EFFORT

While some emotions are hard to control or to regulate, there are also examples where people do not want to control emotion at all. Actually, it seems that con-

tempt is usually not consciously regulated, and that people experiencing contempt are sure that such an emotional state is appropriate for the particular situation and person. The experience of contempt is often the result of a previous chain of social interactions with the given person, and indicates the final stage of a relationship (see chapter: "Contempt: A Hot Feeling Hidden under a Cold Jacket"). The person experiencing contempt does not want to proceed with the further development of the relationship, and they wish to exclude the other person from their social network.

In this case, we can reveal the underlying sequential dynamic of different negative emotions. Previous mutual interactions of two hypothetical individuals would be accompanied by negative emotions like anger or disappointment, which indicate a not very satisfactory relationship. Contempt then emerges as a result of emotions that were experienced during the previous mutual interactions. The sequential dynamic of emotions can play an important role also in other cases, and it represents an essential issue for the understanding of emotional functioning.

Anger and rage belong among those emotions whose experience includes the personal awareness of the negative consequences of their open expression, as well as the conscious effort to regulate them (see chapter: "Anger Coping Strategies and Anger Regulation"). Why is anger often the target of the voluntary effort to manage it and why contempt is not? The phenomenon of coldness in relation to contempt was discussed in more detail in the chapter "Contempt: A Hot Feeling Hidden under a Cold Jacket". Furthermore, anger is supposed to be a "hot emotion". Thus, the hypothesis that people are motivated to consciously regulate "hot" negative emotions, but are not very motivated to regulate "cold" negative emotions seems plausible. The experience of contempt is the result of long-term cognitive processing, and maybe, therefore, the final decision of the person experiencing contempt is quite stable. On the other hand, the emergence of anger would be more context-dependent and impulsive, with the activation of evolutionarily older brain systems. It seems possible that the degree of cognitive processing could be one of the factors influencing the activation of the voluntary effort to diminish the experience of a particular negative emotion or its expression.

However, it is important to also see the long-term perspective within the sequential dynamics of emotions and social interactions. Sometimes, the person who previously excluded another person from their social network reappraises such behavior from the point of view of fairness after a few months, or even years. The question of justice and guilty conscience plays an important role in such cases. The person who has a guilty conscience as a consequence of the previous exclusion of another person can sometimes also start with reconciliation tendencies and try to restore the previous relationship. The guilty conscience diminishes if this effort is successful. The diminishing of guilty conscience may function as increasing well-being and restoring overall emotional balance.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that there are also many positive emotions, which people do not wish to regulate at all. Joy or happiness is quite often experienced freely without any effort to voluntarily regulate them. The regulation of their expressions represents an exception, as overt expressions of joy or laughter may not be appropriate in some situations.

## SOCIAL ROOTEDNESS OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND REGULATION

The fact that emotions are highly social in countless and various domains is well-known, and is also often supported by empirical research (e.g., Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Shifting the issue of emotional experience to the coping framework, however, can reveal several interesting insights. The social rootedness of emotional regulation can be seen from various perspectives. First of all, we will explore how social factors enter into coping and regulation strategies.

Social factors influence coping and regulation processes in two main ways. Some of the coping or regulation strategies are essentially social in their nature. This group of strategies involves professional counseling, family communication, solace seeking, blaming others, collective relaxation and social entertainment, collective religious activities, instrumental social support, but also social withdrawal or social isolation (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). As we can see, the range of strategies that are interrelated with social influences is broader than that covering the most mentioned general category of "seeking social support".

Furthermore, social influences may also play an important role before coping and regulation processes even start. They may be an elicitor for the choice of a discrete coping strategy, or they may strengthen or weaken the actual level of intensity of emotional experience. Such changes in emotional intensity can further influence the choice of the particular coping strategy, or the timing and the effort given to the strategy performance.

Some cognitive processes are very well-attuned for the purposes of coping. This is also the case of downward comparison. Downward comparison is often present in the regulation of regret, sadness, or guilt (see chapters: "Coping with Life Regrets across the Adult Lifespan" and "Guilt and Guilts"). People experiencing regret sometimes think of those who are in worse situations than they are. On the other hand, guilt is often reduced by imagining that other people have behaved worse than the guilty person did. Such cognitive work reduces responsibility for the results of one's behavior.

Some regulation strategies are also closely connected with identity confrontation. For example, guilt is sometimes regulated by the strategy called "It wasn't

me" (see chapter: "Guilt and Guilts"). At this point, the previous behavior of the person is denied in the sense of self-justification. Such *ex-post* suppression of responsibility elicits in others the impression that one was not aware of their behavior. What other effects can this strategy elicit in the interaction chain and in the attitudes to the person who justifies their behavior in this way? The receiver of such a message can imagine that the person in question is not fully able to control their behavior. Another possibility is that the receiver perceives this *ex post* justification as the insufficient ability to evaluate the consequences of one's behavior. Both processes can sometimes lead to the lowering of image of the person in question in eyes of other people, but the strategy "It wasn't me" can also effectively reduce the feelings of guilt of that person. Interestingly, this effective coping strategy for internal unpleasant emotional states can, in some cases, elicit negative consequences within interpersonal functioning.

The effort to diminish personal responsibility is present also in another strategy for coping with guilt. One might delegate the evaluation of the given behavior to a significant other who approves of such behavior. However, individuals using this strategy often choose the significant other opportunistically based on the type of situation that should be evaluated. Delegating evaluation to a significant other in combination with the opportunistic choice of the significant other represents a very interesting example of self-deception or self-manipulation for the purpose of reducing negative feelings.

## THE COMMUNICATIVE VALUE OF EMOTIONAL EXCHANGE AND INTERPERSONAL EMOTION MANAGEMENT

When we are seeking the tool through which the social rootedness of emotion is considered, it is not surprising that we find the field of communication. Communication is the system that enables the exchange of emotions, their sharing or their conflict. Emotions can elicit another chain of emotions in the second person. They also can calm the actual emotions. The social sharing of emotions can promote mutual understanding, as well as group cohesiveness (see chapter: "New Sources of Fear in a Late Modern Society: The Globalization of Risk"). Therefore, communication processes may play a key role in interpersonal emotion management and in the social regulation of emotions.

However, not all cases of emotional sharing are effective for the promoting of mutual bonds. The sharing of aggressive emotions such as anger or rage can only launch opposite processes. But, there are also examples when the situation is not so clear. Providing sympathy to people experiencing sadness can foster a relati-

onship, but too much sympathy may also cause withdrawal or ambiguous feelings (see chapter: "The Management of Sadness in Everyday Life"). Also, not offering the sympathy that others expect may cause some discrepancies in the relationship. These effects point out the importance of knowing the rules of sympathy not only in the case of sadness, but also in other emotions. Sad people sometimes tell others not to ask them about the reasons of their sadness. In this case, we can witness the process of apprehending the rules of sympathy through communication.

Aside from the example of sadness, we may find many other examples of situations where the knowledge of communication rules can promote the effective social regulation of emotion. People experiencing intense jealousy may be sometimes quite dangerous for their partners or their rivals. Communication with the jealous actor can prove to be really very delicate (see chapter: "Understanding Coping with Romantic Jealousy: Major Theoretical Approaches"). Therefore, the sensitive choice of words and arguments represent the most important determinant of the further development of the relationship. The quality of knowledge of communication rules is strongly influenced by previous experience with similar interactions within the family or with previous romantic partners.

Interpersonal emotion management is not only performed verbally, but also through nonverbal channel. Nonverbal signals play an important role particularly in the communication of low-intensity emotions. Low-intensity emotions, like sullenness or discomposure, may not always be readable at first glance. However, the soaking up of nonverbal signals indicating low-intensity emotional states is often present. The level of empathy of the interaction partner seems to be quite important for receiving such slight nonverbal keys. Those partners who are more empathetic in their interaction with others are able to better recognize the actual emotional state of the other person, and consequently behave in an appropriate way, for example, by providing social support. More empathetic individuals may be thus more attractive for those who actually seek social support. As a result, more negative emotional arousal may be directed towards such highly empathetic people. The question is whether those highly empathetic people who experience the emotions of others also have higher dispositional coping skills than less empathetic people. As we can see, the level of empathy represents another important factor for the social regulation of emotion, particularly for the group of social support coping strategies.

However, even almost non-communicative social encounters may play a role within interpersonal emotion management. A quite interesting issue is the function of shared silence in promoting mutual bonds. Some therapists value the function of shared silence for its emotional sharing effects in both individual and group therapy. This "understanding" silence is believed to communicate messages like "I am here with you", "I am trying to understand you", "I fully understand you",

or "I feel the same feelings like you". As we can see, this "understanding" silence is similar to forms of passive social support. It is interesting to note that neither verbal messages nor other verbal signals are present. Also, the nonverbal channel is very limited. Only slight facial expressions, eye contact, proximal distances and tactile signals can be empirically observed during the "understanding" silence phase in small therapeutic groups. However, therapists often use this tool for promoting intimacy in the group. The described shared silence may last from 5 to even 20 or 30 minutes! This communicative gap seems to be quite long, and does not occur in common everyday interactions. Such artificial communicative situations may be sometimes boring for the participants, and some members of the group therapies demand changing their therapeutic group because of its communicative slowness. Future empirical research could explore the underlying processes and functions of shared silence in the group communication.

## SENSE OF INAUTHENTICITY

The group of socially embedded coping strategies and their employment can be also influenced by other factors. Behavior that is not congruent with one's internal experience of self may often elicit the sense of inauthenticity in others (Miller, 2008). Such presentation of a "false self" can lead to possible changes in the behavior of others and also to modified social feedback.

Social feedback is a crucial determinant of both self-evaluation and self-development. Persons are used to attune their self-opinions to the way others react to their behavior (Macek, 2008). Such social feedback helps us to understand the sense of culture and the actual cultural norms or common cultural behavioral scripts.

However, some emotions can force one to behave or react in ways that are not congruent with one's attitudes, with one's internal experience of self, or with the actual decisions about how to appropriately react in the given situation. This is the case of shame or regret (see chapters: "Regulating and Coping with Shame" and "Coping with Life Regrets across the Adult Lifespan"). Both emotions have quite specific display rules, in other words, both have common cultural scripts of when and how it is appropriate to express shame or regret. However, these cultural scripts do not necessarily respect the actual emotional state of the real person. If the actual emotional state is congruent with the shame or regret display rules, the person's behavior will elicit the impression of authenticity in others. A different situation arises when the actual emotional state does not meet the requirements of the shame or regret display rules. The person tries to pretend the required expressions and to "play the game" appropriately. The level of authenticity impressed in

others is thus dependent on the dramatic competencies of the person and on the contextual factors. Others may even provide disrupted social feedback if the individual does not express the appropriate signals.

How can such disrupted social feedback influence the intraindividual coping processes? First, the person who received embarrassed reactions from others can be confused and perform further communication errors. The unsatisfied social encounters can launch depressive thinking or may also decrease self-worth. Such a person may be more inclined to employ ineffective coping strategies such as self-blame, self-criticism, internalizing, anxiety amplification, resigned acceptance, rumination or social withdrawal. In the extreme hypothetical case, tendencies of self-isolation may emerge when social encounters repeatedly do not run successfully.

As we have seen, intraindividual coping processes are quite strongly determined by social factors. Dispositional coping traits are supposed to be influenced by the family environment and by the course of socialization. All of these factors are interrelated with the constructs of cultural norms-acceptance and cultural norms-internalization. Based on the norms of acceptance and of internalization, individuals behave in manners that are more or less congruent with social expectations. However, there are also factors that are not dependent on socialization and fostering. Given the fact that many feeling rules are performed through emotional expressions, innate dispositions play an important role, as well. The talent to act and perform emotional expressions authentically is often innate, and it can be only modified and refined by learning. The dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman (1959; 1967) could be inspiring for future work on interdependence between individual coping processes and display rules for specific emotions.

## IMAGINATION AND EMOTION REGULATION

Imagination belongs to the less-discussed factors of emotional regulation skills in scientific literature. However, it seems to be quite important in many cases. One's abilities to imagine alternative realities and to create ideal scenarios often play a crucial role in the coping with unpleasant life events.

Some authors believe that our imagination generally works towards the worst possible interpretation of events (Füredi, 2006). This statement is quite controversial, but it opens space for further theoretical exploration. Imagination may work in various ways in relation to effective or ineffective coping. We can imagine a hypothetical alternative event of a worse course, better course or the same course with different progression or context. Another issue is the imagining of a different course of events versus the imagining of different results of the event. Sometimes we can imagine the event in the same progression, but only the results of final sequence may differ.

It seems that abilities to imagine are pretty much determined by several personal traits. The traits of optimism and pessimism are closely related to the actual course of imaginative work, and consequently to the choice of the individual coping strategy. Optimists rather interpret negative life events in a positive manner (Carver & Scheier, 2001), and are also less likely to employ ineffective coping strategies like imagining catastrophic scenarios and rumination. On the other hand, pessimists tend to maintain negative emotions longer due to rumination and to the imagination of "what could have been". Such differences may also be crucial for the length of period that one needs for restoring well-being.

The process of social comparison represents another area where imagination plays an important role. As we saw in the part "Social Rootedness of Emotional Experience and Regulation", guilt is often reduced by imagining that other people have behaved worse than the guilty person did. Downward comparison works with both the real and hypothetical conditions. People can create fictional or hypothetical comparison targets when specific real-life examples are neither available nor easily brought to mind (see chapter: "Coping with Life Regrets across the Adult Lifespan"). The construction of fictional comparison targets may be effective in the short-term perspective; however, it proves to be rather ineffective in the long-term perspective.

Some products of our imagination can be also confusing, as in the case of jealousy (see chapter: "Understanding Coping with Romantic Jealousy: Major Theoretical Approaches"). Individuals with a strong tendency for guarding their partners may sometimes imagine quite unreal pictures of their partner interacting with the rival. Such individuals may blame the partner and try to search for "clear evidence" of mutual contact of the partner with the rival. A high level of imagination does not help reduce unpleasant feelings in the jealous person. Rather, it maintains, or even strengthens the actual jealousy and supports ineffective emotional regulation.

It is definite that individuals differ in the extent as well as in the quality of imaginative processes. Some people are highly imaginative with an enormous fantasy; others have relatively poor imaginative abilities. What are the interrelations with coping and emotional regulation processes? We can hypothesize that highly imaginative people show better regulation abilities when performing problem-focused strategies, for example, problem solving, direct action, altering plans, logical analysis or decision making. They may be able to find the satisfactory solution easier than less imaginative individuals because of their higher creativity in solution seeking. However, the question remains how highly imaginative people do employ emotion-focused strategies in comparison with less imaginative people. Another interesting task is to compare whether less imaginative individuals have better emotion-focused strategies than problem-focused strategies, or vice versa. Aside of the extent of personal imaginative abilities, the disposition for the use of

the intuitive versus the cognitive approach to problem solving may represent another factor that possibly influences the efficiency of regulation and coping skills.

## PRESUMPTION OF CAUSALITY AND THINKING STYLES

Many individual coping strategies include the component of seeking causes or of justifying the situation. Typical examples are rumination or guilt-denial. One tries to deny the responsibility for the results of previous behavior and seeks alternative possible causes (see chapter: "Guilt and Guilts"). In another example, one may repeatedly evaluate the circumstances of the situation and ask why it happened. Similar coping strategies and also guilt processing are based on the common presumption that everything has a cause or causes. This presumption is widely distributed in almost all Euro-American cultures. However, do we not know if this presumption is really true?

The thinking styles (or *noesis*) and the thinking bases that are common for most Euro-American cultures were shaped through centuries of intellectual development on the European continent. The tradition of the "Euro-American thinking paradigm" reaches back to Ancient philosophical influences. Efforts of understanding reality in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle represented the general ground for later thinkers like René Descartes or Isaac Newton. The term "Newtonian-Cartesian tradition (or paradigm)" was subsequently developed from the last-mentioned names. This thinking tradition has up to now taken control of millions of people's minds, as well as the mainstream of scientific investigation.

The aim of this chapter is not to discuss the truthfulness of the presumption of causality. The impact on the perception and the cognitive processing of life events is more important in relation to the choice and performance of regulation strategies. We can see naturally unconscious tendencies to deny the causal role of people or events, at least in the case of some emotions. As mentioned above, the effort of finding the arguments that can support the belief that one was not the real or primary cause of an event is often present in the cognitive processing of guilt. The component of "causality denying" may also be the essential functional segment, possible antecedent, or a result of some coping strategies, for example seeking meaning, seeking understanding, cognitive refocus, cognitive restructuring, seeking spiritual support, fatalism or internal negotiation.

Strategies that are activated in situations when one needs to know the cause or causes of an event include rumination, seeking meaning, seeking understanding or internal negotiation. It seems that this group of rather ineffective coping strategies stem from the presumption of causality that is strongly embedded in the thinking styles

of most Euro-American cultures. Another related phenomenon is the phenomenon of accident. Many people try to justify their negative emotions or high levels of stress by the expression "It was an accident". However, the "accidental" explanations only represent a bridge to other questions like "Why me", "Why my family" or "Why my best friend". After that, rumination, seeking meaning or internal negotiation proceeds, and stress or negative emotional experience is maintained or even strengthened. One of the interpretations is that the "accidental" explanation is only a compensatory cognitive strategy that aims to explain the uncertain chain of life events. Carl Gustav Jung (1960) discussed the phenomenon of synchronicity and its function within the coincidence of events. This concept seems to have good explanatory potential for life events that are difficult to explain within the causality paradigm.

When we change from the psychological perspective to the sociological perspective, we can see further indicators that show the significant decrease of people's belief of causality in contemporary society. For example, the current mass popularity of Eastern religious and philosophical systems can stem from the same reason. It seems that "scientific explanations" of the world are no longer satisfactory for people living at the beginning of the 21st century. Also, the current increase in the popularity of existential therapeutic approaches seems to profit from the people's demand for "alternative explanations of the world". The shift of attention from the modern medical diagnostic approaches to traditional Chinese diagnostic approaches seems to relate with the above-mentioned trends, as well.

This inspiring trend for future clinical and therapeutic work lies in the integration of the innovative approaches for understanding the occurrence of life events into the current state of the art. Aside of Jung's above-mentioned work on synchronicity, the general principle of finality (e.g., Vobořil, 1998), the theory of implicate order (Böhm, 1980), or the chaos theory (e.g., Gleick, 1987) represent several shifts in thinking and world understanding. The incorporation of such innovative approaches into current knowledge and its clinical use may help to improve coping and regulation skills in the sense of one's easier acceptance of negative life events, also including the more effective regulation of affiliated emotions. However, it is important to say that the presumption of causality is deeply rooted in Euro-American thinking and the change of this thinking base represents quite a difficult challenge for the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

As seen above, the shift of the discussion from emotional experience to emotional regulation and coping has elicited stimulating research areas. The social rootedness of emotional regulation and experience is rooted deeper than was generally expected. Social factors often play an important role even in those indi-

vidual coping processes that were supposed to be dependent mostly on individual cognitive processing.

The discussion of the communicative value of emotion exchange in emotional regulation pointed out to the mediating role of emotional expression. Emotional expression is performed through both verbal and nonverbal channels. A better understanding of the special functions of both channels can be a challenge for future empirical research of regulation processes in different emotions.

The precondition of causality seems to strongly influence the ways that people living in Euro-American cultures manage their feelings and their stress. Future basic research of regulation and coping strategies in non-Euro-American cultures can bring stimulating insights into cross-cultural differences. However, the psychometric instruments developed in Euro-American countries are not suitable for research use within these other cultures. Therefore, the development of new psychometric instruments is needed to reliably map out the structure of regulation and coping strategies for emotions within specific non-Euro-American cultures. Such results could bring new perspectives of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of coping, as they could represent a reference point for the comparison with the structure of regulation and coping strategies in Euro-American cultures.

I am aware that many interesting issues were not discussed or were only roughly outlined. We omitted issues like gender differences in coping mechanisms, goal adjustments as a result of emotional coping, primary control strategies versus secondary control strategies, the impact of a hierarchy of actions within the cognitive system, the perceived control potential and self-efficacy, cognitive evaluations of costs versus benefits in the process of coping strategy choice, etc. The complex understanding of emotional functioning represents an inexhaustible field for future decades of research. I hope that the present book will contribute further knowledge to the current state of the art.

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