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CHAPTER 23

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

BERNARD RIMÉ

> Every painful experience tears up. But what makes it unbearable is that the one who suffers it feels set apart from the world. Shared, it ceases at least to be an exile.
>
> —DE BEAUVOIR (1972, p. 169)

In contemporary research, emotions are predominantly defined as arising when an individual attends to a situation and sees it as relevant to his or her goals (see Gross & Thompson, this volume). Most often, however, the classic homeostatic perspective proposed by physiologist Walter Cannon (1915/1929) still prevails in the way emotions are conceived. Accordingly, they are primarily seen as short-lived processes whose function is to eliminate the eliciting situation, thus bringing the individual back to a state of equilibrium. Emotion generation is described as involving a sequence of processes–situation, attention, cognitive change or appraisal, response–and an emotion would end with the final step of the sequence. Even if recursive processes occurring within the sequence can complicate the picture (see Gross & Thompson, this volume), nothing seems to happen beyond the situation–response sequence. Hereafter, it will be insisted that emotions very generally do not end with this sequence. Studies conducted in the last decades revealed that emotional episodes are virtually always followed by longer-term cognitive and social effects. In particular, individual emotional experiences elicit important social behaviors by which the actor informs his or her social partners of what happened and shares with them related thoughts and feelings.

Emotion regulation is a process through which an emotion can be dampened, intensified, or simply maintained (Gross & Thompson, this volume). According to Gross (1998), the potential targets of emotion regulation consist of each element in the emotional sequence: situation selection and modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, response modulation. Yet, when emotions are seen as involving important manifestations taking place beyond the emotional sequence, a somewhat broader

definition of emotion regulation is needed. Emotional memories remain active for some time after every emotional sequence and they thus have an impact on the individual well beyond this sequence. These aftermaths motivate important regulation attempts, most of which involve communication and social interaction. This is consistent with the view according to which the emotion regulation definition encompasses "changes in the emotion itself *or in other psychological processes, such as memory or social interaction*" (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004, p. 320, emphasis added). In the perspective of this chapter, the normal fate of an emotional memory is to reach a dormant stage at which it stops having an impact on the current experience. In this context, *emotional recovery* defines the degree to which an individual is freed from the current impact of a given emotional memory. At complete recovery of an emotional episode, there is no more urge to think or to talk about it.

Whereas psychologists who investigate adults generally considered emotion regulation as a process occurring essentially within the person, child psychologists have established the fundamental interpersonal nature of emotion regulation among children. The gap between these two points of view could easily be filled by viewing the evolution from childhood to adult age as involving the growing ability to self-regulate emotion. Though this is definitely right in part, we should nevertheless be cautious with our cultural propensity to consider mature psychological processes essentially from an individualistic perspective. Considering how deep caregivers are involved in the regulation of a child's emotional life, can we expect adults' emotions to be entirely regulated by their self alone?

In this chapter, we first consider the evidence documenting interpersonal dimensions of emotion regulation. We then focus on the functions fulfilled by social behaviors with regard to the regulation of the emotion. Strong beliefs exist according to which the mere verbalization of an emotional experience induces emotional recovery. What do empirical data tell us about this? This chapter attempts to specify what people get and what they do not get from engaging in social expressive behaviors after an emotion.

THE SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTIONS: OVERVIEW

Janoff-Bulman (1992) noted that people who went through a traumatic experience later evidence a seemingly insatiable need to tell others about it as if they felt coerced into talking. Although scarce, empirical data coming from studies about traumatic circumstances and severe life events confirmed the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. A need to talk was mentioned by 88% of rescuers operating in a North Sea oil platform disaster (Ersland, Weisaeth, & Sund, 1989), by 88% of people who had recently lost a relative (Schoenberg, Carr, Peretz, Kutscher, & Cherico, 1975), and by 86% of patients with a recent diagnosis of cancer (Mitchell & Glickman, 1977). Yet, data revealed that the need to talk after an emotion is in no manner limited to trauma or major negative life events. It develops after everyday positive and negative emotional events as well. This is what we found by investigating "the social sharing of emotion."

The social sharing of emotion entails a description, in a socially shared language, of an emotional episode to some addressee by the person who experienced it (Rimé, 1989; Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991a). It usually develops in the period immediately following the episode, in discourse in which the protagonist tells one or several other persons about the emotion-eliciting circumstances and related thoughts

and feelings. After an emotion, people undertake sharing in 80–95% of the cases (Rimé et al., 1991a; Rimé, Noël, & Philippot, 1991b; for reviews, see Rimé, 2005; Rimé, Philippot, Mesquita, & Boca, 1992; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998). This propensity is not dependent on education. It was evidenced at comparable levels whether people held a university degree or had an elementary school education. It was also observed with comparable importance in places as diverse as Asian, North American, and European countries (Mesquita, 1993; Rimé, Yogo, & Pennebaker, 1996; Singh-Manoux, 1998; Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001; Yogo & Onoe, 1998). The type of primary emotion felt in the episode is no more critical with regard to sharing. Episodes that involved fear, or anger, or sadness were shared as often as episodes of happiness or of love. However, emotional episodes involving shame and guilt were shared at a somewhat lesser degree (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998). Laboratory studies confirmed that exposure to an emotion-eliciting condition provokes sharing (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000). Generally initiated very early after the emotion, sharing is typically a repetitive phenomenon in which more intense emotions are shared more repetitively and for a longer period (Rimé, 2005; Rimé et al., 1998). Emotional episodes are typically shared often or very often, and with a variety of target persons. Follow-up data showed that for a given emotional episode, emotion sharing decreases over the days or weeks subsequently (Rimé et al., 1998). Thus, progressive extinction is the normal fate of sharing. The length of the extinction period depends on the intensity of the emotion. However, sharing sometimes persists which indicates a failure to recover from the episode (Rimé et al., 1998).

THE PARADOX OF SOCIAL SHARING

Clearly, whether positive or negative, people share their emotional experiences equally with others. However, when doing so, they reexperience mental images of the event as well as related feelings and bodily sensations (Rimé et al., 1991b). For positive episodes, sharing them should reactivate positive emotional feelings and memories. It thus makes sense that people are motivated to socially share positive episodes further and further. Langston (1994) indeed demonstrated that the sharing of positive emotional episodes involves a process of "capitalization" in which positive events are seen not as problems to be surmounted or coped with but as opportunities on which to seize or "capitalize." Capitalization refers to the process of beneficially interpreting positive events (cf. Bryant, 1989, who used the term "savoring"). Capitalizing on a positive event can be achieved in at least three different ways: (1) by making it more memorable to the self (by marking the event's occurrence in some expressive fashion such as jumping, bragging, celebrating, etc.), (2) by seeking social contacts and letting others know about the event, and (3) by maximizing the event's significance (e.g., by increasing one's perceived control of the event). In two different studies (Langston, 1994), expressive displays such as communicating the positive events to others were indeed associated with an enhancement of positive affect far beyond the benefits due to the valence of the positive events themselves. Addressing openly the social sharing of positive emotions, Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) confirmed these findings. In addition, they found that close relationships in which one's partner typically responds enthusiastically to capitalization were associated with higher relationship well-being (e.g., intimacy and daily marital satisfaction). Thus, sharing positive emotions not only increases positive affect at the intrapersonal level but it also enhances social bonds.

By contrast, in the case of negative episodes, the sharing process reactivates negative emotional feelings, and memories and should thus be experienced as markedly aversive. A logical prediction is thus that more negative experiences should elicit less sharing. Yet, correlations between intensity of negative emotion and extent of sharing are systematically in the opposite direction (for a thorough review, see Rimé et al., 1998). Moreover, the sharing of negative emotional experiences is generally not found aversive. In one of our studies, participants first described in a detailed manner a past emotional experience of joy, sadness, fear, or anger, according to a random assignment. They then rated how far describing this experience was pleasant or painful (Rimé et al., 1991b). Not surprisingly, those who described an experience of joy rated it as more pleasant than those who described a negative episode. More surprising was that reporting an episode of fear, sadness, or anger was rated by only a minority as painful. When participants in this study were asked whether they would be willing to undertake sharing another emotional memory of the same kind as the first one, virtually all of them agreed whatever the valence of the emotion involved. There is thus a paradox here. Even when it reactivates aversive experiences, sharing is a behavior in which people engage quite willingly.

If people are so eager to engage in a social process in which they may experience aversive affects, they ought to be driven by some powerful incentive. What could be the reward? Common sense offers a ready-made answer. It is generally assumed that verbalizing an emotional memory can transform it and reduce a significant part of its emotional load. Zech (2000) found that 89% of respondents in a large sample of laypersons (n = 1024) endorsed the view that talking about an emotional experience is relieving. If data could confirm this view in demonstrating that verbalizing an emotion actually brings "emotional recovery," then the paradox would clear up. People would tolerate the reexperience involved in social sharing because of the final benefit it provides them. We thus examined this question in a respectable number of studies (Rimé et al., 1998; Zech & Rimé, 2005).

IS EMOTION SHARING A SOURCE OF EMOTIONAL RECOVERY?

In various studies, we investigated whether the extent of naturally developed sharing of an emotional experience would predict the degree of emotional recovery for this experience (for a review, see Rimé et al., 1998). These studies always involved the assessment of three critical variables: (1) the initial intensity of the emotion elicited by the episode, (2) the extent of social sharing that was developed after, and (3) the intensity of the emotion elicited when the memory of the episode was reactivated later. The difference between (1) and (3) served to index emotional recovery. In line with common assumptions, we predicted a positive correlation between the extent of social sharing and the degree of emotional recovery. To our surprise, the collected data never supported this prediction. Very generally, our correlative data were in line with the null hypothesis and perfectly inconsistent with the view that sharing an emotional experience would reduce the emotional load of this experience. For instance, we investigated characteristics of episodes which people had never shared (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998). In two different studies, when shared and secret emotional episodes were compared for the intensity of the emotion they still elicited at recall, no significant difference was observed. No data supported the prediction that secret events would remain more intense than shared

ones. To sum up, the correlative studies consistently suggested that *merely verbalizing* an emotional experience is irrelevant to emotional recovery.

Our correlative studies were paralleled by experimental investigations in which participants were assigned to various sharing conditions. We assessed how far these conditions affected emotional recovery (Zech, 2000; Zech & Rimé, 2005). In some experiments, students interviewed relatives about a recent negative emotional event. In others, participants extensively shared with an experimenter the most upsetting event of their life. Sharing conditions were created by instructing participants to emphasize either the factual aspects of the target emotional episode or its feeling aspects. Control conditions involved talking about a nonemotional topic. The emotional impact of the target episode was assessed before the sharing interview, immediately after, and again some days later. In one study, additional assessments were conducted 2 months later. Contrary to expectations, no effect of sharing condition was found on indices of emotional impact in any study. Thus, in regard to emotional recovery, the results of these experimental studies were as disappointing as those of the correlative ones.

The abundance of null findings finally led us to acknowledge that, despite stereotypes, socially sharing an emotion does not bring emotional recovery. Research on the social sharing of emotion was not alone in accumulating null findings. Comparable observations were made for psychological debriefings. Currently implemented immediately after traumatic events, debriefing procedures gather exposed individuals in small groups in which they have to describe to one another in a detailed manner what happened, express their thoughts concerning the event, and communicate "what was the worst thing in the situation." The technique thus clearly involves sharing emotions. Its purpose is to prevent posttraumatic stress disorders and thus to contribute to emotional recovery (e.g., Mitchell & Everly, 1995). However, recent meta-analytic reviews of controlled trials consistently concluded that debriefings have no efficacy in reducing symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorders or other trauma-related symptoms (Arendt & Elklit, 2001; Rose & Bisson, 1998; Van Emmerik, Kamphuis, Hulsbosch, & Emmelkamp, 2002). Adverse effects were even sometimes found. All in all, these observations strongly suggested that mere sharing cannot change emotional memories. Such a conclusion makes sense with regard to adaptation, as emotional memories carry important information for future situations. If their emotion-arousing capacities could be altered by mere talking, it would be deleterious to the fruits of our experience (Rimé, 1999).

The foregoing, conclusion were sometimes understood as contradicting the well-known findings from the "writing cure" (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997; for reviews, see Frattorili, in press; Lepore & Smyth, 2002). Examining effects of disclosing past traumas in written form, Pennebaker and his colleagues observed it to be associated with later health benefits as assessed by physician visits, reported symptoms, immunological functions, or other indices of health. These findings were commonly understood as supporting the view that simply "putting emotion into words" brings emotional recovery. However, in these studies, participants did not express themselves about a specific episode but, rather, about as many past emotional events as they wanted (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Thus, writing studies did not test whether putting a *specific* emotional episode into words leads to *recovery*, nor did they assess (through, e.g., intrusive thoughts about the event, searching for meaning in the event, intensity of emotional arousal when recalling the event, etc.) the residual impact that a specific episode still has (for a detailed discussion, see Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Rimé, 1999). Also, observing health effects after expressive writing inductions does not allow us to infer that emotional recovery was the mediator variable. Processes through which expressive writing led to such effects are still under investigation (Frattorili, in press; Pennebaker, 2002).

BENEFITS FROM SHARING AN EMOTION

If experimental studies of the social sharing of emotion yielded null findings for emotional recovery, they simultaneously opened on interesting observations (Zech & Rimé, 2005). In questionnaires completed at follow-up, participants who had shared their emotions consistently rated their participation in the study as much more beneficial than participants in control conditions involving either sharing facts only or sharing nonemotional experiences. As compared to the latter, the former rated their session as more beneficial globally (e.g., it was useful), as more emotion relieving (e.g., it made them feel good), as more cognitively helpful (e.g., it helped them in putting order in themselves), and as more beneficial at an interpersonal level (e.g., they experienced comforting behaviors from the part of the recipient). Interestingly, the parallel between sharing and psychological debriefing holds here too. Indeed, victims of a trauma who took part in psychological debriefing frequently report that their participation was useful and beneficial.

A further paradox is thus met. On the one hand, sharing an emotion fails to alleviate the load of the shared emotional memory. On the other hand, participants who shared their emotions experienced a good number of benefits. At least, the latter findings were consistent with people's marked proclivity to share their emotions no matter how negative they were. However, it might be that participants who reported benefits inferred them from the widespread beliefs holding that sharing is beneficial. In some of our experiments, participants' beliefs in this regard were collected before the sharing situation (Zech & Rimé, 2005). We could thus check how far these beliefs predicted the benefits reported after sharing and we observed that a part of the variance of these benefits was indeed due to previous beliefs that participants held. But a substantial part of this variance was left unexplained by this factor.

It should thus be concluded that whereas talking about an emotional memory fails to have a significant effect on the emotional impact of this memory, people actually experience benefits from doing it. How can we make sense of this paradoxical conclusion? What exactly is gained from emotion sharing? To be in a better position to consider such questions, we explore successively three different subsets of questions. First, what exactly is involved in the impact of an emotional experience and what are the regulation needs that such an experience elicits? Second, what are people looking for when they engage in sharing? What are the motives they allege? After all, every layperson has a long past experience in sharing and should thus be aware of benefits one can get from sharing. Third, how do listeners react and respond to sharing? Answers to the latter question should inform us of what is actually offered to sharing persons in sharing situations.

IMPACT OF AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND REGULATION NEEDS

For laypersons, but also for many clinical and scientific psychologists, observations disconfirming that sharing brings emotional recovery are shocking. In current life indeed, when a negative emotional experience happened, it is ubiquitously recommended to "get it off one's chest." Distress situations in general elicit both simplistic approaches and simplistic interventions due to the fact that nonvictims dramatically underestimate a victim's situation (e.g., Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Goffman, 1963; Wortman & Lehman, 1985). As the predominant concern of bystanders is gener-

ally a quick resolution of the crisis, simple solutions such as eliminating the cause or extricating the victim from the problematic situation prevail (Burleson, 1985; O'Keefe & Delia, 1987). Comforting interventions often consist of low-level imperatives focused on action, and recommendations such as "get it off your chest . . . !" are typical. In reality, negative emotional experiences have complex consequences because they affect the person on many different levels. Next, we list eight such levels (Rimé, 2005). For each of them, we also specify regulation needs to be met for overcoming it.

Eight Levels of Impact

With the loss or deprivation of a physical, material, social, or moral object, a negative emotion always encompasses some frustration of goals, so that a first level of the impact of the episode is *motivational* (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Mandler, 1984). For this impact to be overcome, the person has to abandon the frustrated goals and/or reorganize his or her hierarchy of motives. Under the form of fear, anger, sadness, shame, or the like (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 1984), the *emotional* impact properly said constitutes a second level. It elicits strong social needs for appeasement, comforting, love, care, availability, proximity, and/or physical contact (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Harlow, 1959), as well as concrete material help and assistance through action (e.g., Thoits, 1984). At a third level, a *cognitive* impact results from the fact that by disconfirming expectations, an emotional event challenges the person's representations of reality (e.g., Epstein, 1990, 1991; Horowitz, 1976, 1979). Overcoming this impact requires modification of schemas and integration of new information. A fourth level is found in the *symbolic* impact. Emotional events indeed have implications for important symbolic constructions such as views of oneself, views of others, and views of the world (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992), sense of control, sense of invulnerability, sense of coherence (e.g., Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988), and the like. To overcome this impact, the person needs to develop the cognitive work and social communication proper to restore his or her symbolic system. Part of this restoration may also require positive experiences in effective action. At a fifth level, a negative experience has an impact on *action*. A goal frustration generates some degree of helplessness so that a temporary reduction of the person's capacity to act may result (e.g., Seligman, 1975). This capacity does not build up through cognitive work or interpersonal communication but in behavior and action. Restoration should thus develop in action too, and in severe cases, the contribution of external social support may be needed. At a sixth level, a *social* impact of the negative emotional experience takes the form of alienation. Because of the uncommon character of their experience, victims often develop feelings of estrangement and are treated by others as aliens or strangers (e.g., Wortman & Lehman, 1985). Therefore, powerful needs for social recognition and validation, for listening and understanding, for unconditional acceptance and for social integration are aroused. A seventh level regards the *self*. Key functions of the self encompass planning, prevision, control, organization of action, and reaching goals. Thus, a goal frustration threatens the self, causing a drop in self-esteem (e.g., Epstein, 1973). Support from others, reassurance, and expression of esteem will help to overcome these effects, together with new successful experiences in concrete action. Finally, an emotional experience has an impact on *memory*. The emotional memory which was set up in the episode is activated easily by numerous associative cues (e.g., Lang, 1979; Leventhal, 1984). If the appraisal of the reactivated memory is the same as the initial appraisal of the event, it will trigger the same emotions again and again. For overcoming this impact, cognitive reframing and reappraisal are required.

Central and Collateral Effects

The foregoing analysis shows that the impact of a negative emotional experience is complex and multifaceted. However, two broad classes of effects could be distinguished in this list.

A first class, obvious to everyone, is largely documented by scientific work and might be labeled central effects of an emotional experience. Such effects result from rapid and automatic meaning analyses of supervening events (e.g. Frijda, 1986, 2006; Scherer, 1984). For example, if meanings such as "goal blocked," "danger," "no control," and "no escape" are elicited, a variety of emergency reactions develop in the person's body, and this person simultaneously experiences fear. Central effects involve both a signaling and an executive function (Frijda, 1986, 2006; Oatley & Jenkins, 1996): The emotion-eliciting situation will become the center of attention and automatic action tendencies will temporarily control the behavior. The components of this experience are then stored in a complex memory network (Lang, 1979; Leventhal, 1984). Such materials can easily be activated and recalled via associative links in later situations.

Though they pervade the eight-level picture just sketched, effects of the second class are far from being obvious, and it even took scientists a long time to become aware of their existence (e.g., Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Epstein, 1973, 1990, 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988). We can label them "collateral consequences" of emotional experiences. They result from unattainment of goals, discomfirmation of expectations and schemas, shattering of symbolic constructions, and so forth. In emotional experiences, indeed, the meaning analysis goes beyond the specific emotion-eliciting situation. Situation-specific meanings such as "goal blocked," "danger," "no control," and "no escape" easily spread to broader meanings such as "the world is unsafe," "I am vulnerable and helpless," I am not in control," "I did poorly," and "life is unfair." Such meanings affect how the person views the world and how this person views him- or herself. In other words, they pervade the person's symbolic universe. In current life, the person behaves in a context of apparent order and meaning thanks to which he or she can face the world. Emotional events undermine this delicate architecture. They disconfirm expectations, models, and world views. Traumatic situations have been shown to be particularly deleterious in this regard (Epstein, 1973, 1990; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Parkes, 1972). But any emotion has some impact on this symbolic architecture because emotion precisely develops at its fissures—or where things are unexpected and/or go out of control. By making fissures apparent, emotion makes us feel the weakness of the construction. This causes collateral emotional feelings under the form of anxiety, insecurity, helplessness, estrangement, alienation, loss of self-esteem, and so forth. *In other words, negative emotional experiences have a subtle and most often ignored consequence of temporary destabilization.*

Three Classes of Regulation Needs

The picture just sketched not only showed that the impact of a negative emotional experience is complex and multifaceted but also manifests that such experiences elicit a large variety of regulation needs. To obtain a simpler picture, these regulation needs can be categorized under three broad classes (see Table 23.1). A first one groups *socioaffective needs* such as basic comforting, concrete social support, social integration, and esteem support. They all result from the destabilizing effect of the emotional episode. Their fulfillment rests on the active contributions from the social environment.

TABLE 23.1. Three Classes of Regulation Needs after a Negative Emotional Experience

Socioaffective needs
- Appeasement, comforting, love, care, contact (level 2)
- Social support and backup in action (level 5)
- Understanding, recognition, social validation, social integration (level 6)
- Support, esteem, reassurance (level 7)

Cognitive needs
- Abandonment of goals, reorganization of motives (level 1)
- Modifying schemas and representations (level 3)
- Re-creation of meaning, restoration of the symbolic system (level 4)
- Reframing, new appraisal of the emotional event (level 8)

Action needs
- Concrete help and assistance (level 2)
- Re-creation of meaning, restoration of the symbolic system (level 4)
- Restoration of mastery and control through action (level 5)
- Successful experience through action (level 7)

A second class gathers *cognitive needs*, such as reorganization of motives, modification of schemas, re-creation of meaning and reframing, which open on a variety of cognitive tasks. Completing them allows the person to overcome perseveration of the episode impact (mental rumination, intrusive thoughts, intrusive imagery, preoccupation, etc.). Social contributions through comparison, suggestion, or incitation may play a critical role in this respect.

Finally, a third category comprising *action needs* reminds us of something which is often overlooked in the investigation of emotional expression and emotional recovery. Emotional experiences may damage facets of the person which were built up in experience and action, as is the case for example, for feelings of control, feelings of mastery, and self-esteem. As a consequence, emotional restoration requires the contribution of new experiences developed through concrete actions. By action needs, it is thus meant that actions undertaken by the person who experienced the emotion and/or members of this person's social network are most often requested for this person to achieve full emotional recovery. For instance, for a horse rider who fell from a horse, whatever their useful contribution to emotional recovery, no cognitive processing and no socioaffective interaction could substitute the action of riding a horse again. Only through such an action could the rider fully reconstruct his or her feelings of control, mastery, self-confidence, and so forth, which were damaged by the fall. Acting has self-constructing consequences that no word and no sympathy can replace.

The more the various regulation needs just listed are met, the more the impact of the eliciting emotional experience will be surmounted. Now, what is the contribution of emotion sharing in this regard? As emotion sharing consists of symbolic interactions, it can involve the planning of action but not action as such. Action such as riding the horse again will by definition develop outside the frame of interpersonal sharing situations. Thus, one of the three classes of regulation needs considered escapes sharing as such. How far can sharing meet the two remaining classes? Exploring motives that people allege for engaging in sharing and examining how listeners react and respond to sharing should be informative in this regard.

MOTIVES FOR SHARING EMOTIONS

What are the motives that people allege for engaging in sharing? Four sets of data are available in this regard. The first was obtained from a group of psychology students enrolled in an advanced class on emotion (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1996). After recalling a recent emotional experience they had shared, they were asked to list all the possible reasons why they had engaged in sharing. Next, working as a group, they had to eliminate their duplicates and group items with similar content into clusters. They thus reached a list of 69 motives which could be grouped under eight categories labeled as in Table 23.2. In a second study (Delfosse, Nils, Lasserre, & Rimé, 2004), a pool of 200 items were collected from non-psychology students who also referred to a recent emotional experience they had shared. Judges uninformed of previous findings then grouped these 200 items under the smallest possible number of classes. They obtained nine categories (Table 23.2) which were nicely consistent with the previous ones, as eight of them had a clear counterpart in the eight categories previously obtained. In a third study, Nils, Delfosse, and Rimé (2005) had some 100 male and female participants recruited in university libraries recalling a recent emotional episode they had shared. Each of them was then asked to mention five different reasons why they did so, which elicited 517 responses. Their responses were submitted to a systematic categorization technique ("heap-up" method, see Bardin, 1991) by judges blind to previous findings who thus obtained 11 classes of motives. Two of them involved tautological answers (e.g., "I shared because the event was strong"; "I shared because I have felt a need to talk") and are thus not considered here. The remaining nine classes of motives (Table 23.2) showed a very good fit with those from previous studies. They indeed matched six of the eight classes collected in the study by Finkenauer and Rimé (1996) and seven of the nine classes obtained by Delfosse et al. (2004). Finally, motives for sharing were also considered in a study examining the sharing of negative consumer experiences. To this aim, Wetzer, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2005) developed a questionnaire relying on a literature review of theories about social sharing, word-of-mouth communication, and social interaction. Their review led them to adopt seven different motives as questionnaire dimensions. One of them, "revenge" (e.g., "I wanted the service provider to lose customers"), specific to the context of consumption situations, is not relevant here. Each of the other six classes (Table 23.2) had an exact correspondent in the categories of Delfosse et al. (2004). The consistency across studies is thus striking despite differences in approach.

The last column of Table 23.2 displays the 12 classes of motives for sharing emotions obtained when the four reviewed studies are considered together. What is their relevance to sharing situations and to emotion regulation? Some of the motives do not concern social partners in important respects. Rehearsing the episode or venting it does not necessitate an active contribution of the target person. Other motives such as entertaining or informing and warning the target do not aim at emotion regulation. By contrast, all remaining motives in the list manifest considerable demands addressed to social targets in view of emotion regulation. Social sharing partners are indeed expected to provide contributions as diverse as help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization, clarification and meaning, and advice and solutions. And this long list of specific social solicitations is still augmented with less specific and more personally involving demands to the sharing partner, such as attention, bonding, and empathy.

Thus, motives alleged for socially sharing emotions reveal an overabundance of social demands with regard to emotion regulation. Obviously, these motives massively

TABLE 23.2. Classes of Motives for Socially Sharing an Emotion Evidenced in Four Studies

Finkenauer & Rimé (1996)	Delfosse, Nils, Lasserre, & Rimé (2004)	Nils, Delfosse, & Rimé (2005)	Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters (2005)	Summary of motives for sharing
Rehearsing: reexperiencing	Reminding: reexperiencing, remembering, rehearsing			Rehearsing
Venting: expressing, searching for relief, getting steam off	Catharsis: venting, finding relief, alleviating	Affective motives: venting, catharsis, search for relief	Venting: to get it off one's chest	Venting
Obtaining comfort: support, listening, sympathy, help	Social support: being listened to, receiving help/support	Social motives: seeking help and support	Support search: seeking comfort, moral support, or understanding	Help and support
		Socioaffective motives: being consoled, comforted		Comfort/ consolation
		Social approval motives: being legitimized, approved, understood		Legitimization, validation
Finding understanding: explanation, meaning	Understanding: analyzing what happened, finding meaning/order	Cognitive motives: cognitive clarification, finding words, etc.	Advice search: obtaining information about the thoughts and feelings of others	Clarification and meaning
Obtaining advice: feedback, guidance	Knowing other person's view: receiving advice, finding solutions	Sociocognitive motives: receiving advice, suggestions, solutions		Advices and solutions
Being in touch: relating, escaping loneliness	Social bonding: escaping loneliness/ feeling of abandonment	Sociorelational motives: strengthening social links	Bonding: decreasing interpersonal distance and strengthening social bonds	Bonding, strengthening social links
	Empathy: touching/moving others, feeling oneself closer to others	Affecting the target: moving the listener		Arousing empathy
Receiving attention: impressing others	Gaining attention: distinguishing oneself, eliciting interest			Gaining attention
			Entertaining: "lubricating social interactions"	Entertaining
Informing others: warning	Informing others: bringing them one's experience	Informing one's close circle of one's experience or of one's condition	Warning: helping others by warning them about negative consequences of a particular action	Informing and/or warning

meet socioaffective regulation needs. They also meet some cognitive regulation needs such as finding clarification and meaning. Yet, major cognitive needs such as abandonment of goals, reorganization of motives, reconstruction of schemas, reframing, and reappraisal of the event are simply absent from social demands for regulation. This may in part result from the fact that participants simply might not be aware of such motives and thus might be unable to report them in investigations relying on self-reports. Yet, very likely, there is more. Theoretical views of goal-blocking situations and their consequences consistently stressed that initial responses to goal-blocking involves invigoration, repetitive behaviors, and concentration on the initial goal (e.g., Dembo, 1931; Klinger, 1975; Martin & Tesser, 1989). In other words, early after an emotion—which is precisely when most sharing takes place—people generally refuse to abandon their frustrated goals, they do not consider modifying their hierarchy of motives, they stick to their existing schemas, they do not want to change their representations, they stand by their initial appraisal of the emotional situation, they do not feel ready to reframe it or to change their perspective. There are thus motivational reasons why cognitive needs, which all require distancing from perspectives that prevailed at the time of the emotion, were not mentioned by respondents among motives for sharing emotions. Yet, as we demonstrate later, completion of these cognitive needs is particularly critical to emotional recovery.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE SHARING OF EMOTION

What can we learn from the study of how recipients respond to emotion sharing? When they are brought together, three findings from this study reveal an interesting interpersonal dynamic which develops in sharing situations (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). First, when they rated the intensity of their primary emotions while listening, sharing listeners manifested a remarkable salience of the emotion of interest. Collected on 7-point scales, the average rating of interest exceeded the value of 6.00, suggesting that most recipients rated this particular scale at maximal level. This corroborates the fascination exerted by emotional materials on human beings (Rimé, Delfosse, & Corsini, 2005). As was stressed by Pennebaker and Harber (1993), there are of course limits to this fascination (see also Herbette & Rimé, 2004). Yet, listeners are generally much opened to emotional episodes. We are as eager to listen to emotional narratives as we are to watch a traffic accident, to look at a building in flames, or to attend emotional stories displayed on TV, newspapers, movies, novels, plays, dramas, operas, songs, images, and so on. A second finding confirmed that hearing an emotional story is emotion eliciting. A clear positive linear relation occurred between the emotional intensity of the episode heard and the intensity of the listeners' emotion. Third, responses displayed by sharing listeners varied dramatically as a function of intensity of the shared episode. For low-intensity episodes, listeners' responses mostly consisted of verbal manifestations. Such responses decreased linearly with the increasing intensity of the shared episode. Conversely, the higher the intensity of the episode heard, the more recipients displayed nonverbal behaviors such as touching, body contact, taking into the arms, or kissing. In sum, at increasing levels of emotional intensity, sharing interactions became decreasingly verbal and increasingly nonverbal.

The interpersonal dynamic which develops in the sharing of emotions can thus be sketched as follows. A person *A* who experienced an emotion feels the need to share this experience and shares it effectively with a person *B*. The latter manifests a

strong interest for the narrative. This stimulates sharing and person *A* consequently expresses emotions more and more. The enhanced expression arouses emotions in person *B*. A reciprocal stimulation of emotion develops in this manner in the dyad which leads to enhanced empathy and to emotional communion. The empathetic feelings experienced by person *B* stimulate a willingness to help and support person *A*. If the emotional intensity of the episode shared is high, person *B* is likely to reduce his or her verbal communication and to switch to a nonverbal mode, with body contact or touching. Altogether, such a situation is proper to induce an increased liking of *B* for *A*. And *A*, who received from *B* attention, interest, empathy, support, and help, will similarly experience enhanced liking for this sharing target. In sum, the dynamic just sketched manifests that emotion sharing has the potential to bring the sender and the receiver closer to one another (Collins & Miller, 1994). As sharing addresses most often people who already count among intimates (Rimé et al., 1998), it is thus instrumental in maintaining, refreshing, and strengthening important social bonds. The practical significance of the process is considerable. In brief, it means that every time someone is faced with an emotion-eliciting situation, his or her closest social ties will be drawn tighter in the next minutes or hours. Enhanced social integration is thus a very likely consequence of the physiological and psychological turmoil resulting from an emotional situation.

Exposure to the narrative of an emotional experience can induce considerable emotional changes in the listener (Archer & Berg, 1978; Christophe, 1997; Christophe & Rimé, 1997; Lazarus, Opton, Monikos, & Rankin, 1965; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992; Strack & Coyne, 1983). In confirmation of the general prediction that emotion elicits sharing, listeners of sharing were found to later share with others the heard narrative, in a "secondary sharing" (Christophe & Rimé, 1997; Curci & Bellelli, 2004). The extent of secondary sharing and the number of persons with whom it occurred varied as a function of the emotional intensity felt by the listener in the primary sharing. Also, listeners exposed to a highly emotional sharing manifested secondary sharing more extensively than those exposed to either a moderate or a low-intensity sharing. Thus, once an emotion is shared, there is a high probability that the target would share it too. Would the process extend further? A target of secondary sharing may also experience emotion when listening and thus may further share the episode heard in a "tertiary sharing." Emotions heard in a secondary sharing were indeed found to be shared again with one new listener for one-third of the participants and with several new listeners for another third of them (Christophe, 1997). In sum, sharing an emotion leads to the spreading of emotional information, thus revealing that emotional episodes propagate very easily across social networks. It can be calculated that when some intense emotional event affects someone in a community, 50 to 60 members of this community would be informed of it within the next hours by virtue of the propagation process. From intimates to intimates, most people in the community will know what happened to one of them. This propagation of emotional information has many implications. It means that emotion elicits intragroup communication. It means that members of a community keep track of the emotional experiences affecting their peers. It also means that in a group, the shared social knowledge about emotional events and emotional reactions is continuously updated as a function of new individual experiences. As emotions generally occur when events are unexpected or unpredicted and as such events generally require rapid and appropriate responding, the spreading of information about emotional situations and responses in a social group appears as a particularly efficient prevention tool with regard to future emotion-eliciting situations.

THE ACTUAL CONTRIBUTION OF SHARING TO EMOTION REGULATION

We can now reconsider the paradoxes encountered in investigating sharing of emotion and examine how far observations reviewed in the latter three sections could help us in resolving them. These paradoxes can be summed up as follows. Sharing an emotion necessarily involves the reactivation of the emotional experience. In the case of negatively valenced episodes, sharing should thus be aversive. Yet, people are found to be extremely eager to engage in sharing whatever the valence of the experience. They generally assume that doing so would bring them emotional recovery with respect to the shared experience. However, assessing the evolution of the emotional impact of a shared experience failed to reveal significant recovery effects. Yet, participants who shared experiences reported abundant benefits of having done so. Do materials considered earlier shed light on these contrasting observations?

Examining the impact of an emotional experience manifested the variety of regulation needs involved. They consisted of, respectively, socioaffective needs, cognitive needs, and action needs. Motives that people allege for sharing are massively in line with regulation needs of the first category: they look for help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization, attention, bonding, empathy, advice, and solutions. Listeners' responses in sharing nicely meet these expectations, as they involve attention, interest, empathy, support, nonverbal comforting, and help. Thus, sharing covers particularly well the socioaffective regulation needs elicited by emotional experiences. By contrast, cognitive needs are relatively overlooked by sharing. Major aspects of the cognitive regulation of the emotional experience—abandonment of goals, reorganization of motives, reframing, and new appraisal of the emotional event—are simply absent from motives to sharing. Does this mean that they are by definition excluded from sharing, as is the case for action needs? Certainly not. Abandonment of goals, modification of schemas, re-creation of meaning, reframing, or reappraisal of the event are all needs that could benefit from the contribution of interpersonal symbolic interactions. Yet, responses adopted by sharing listeners are making this possibility very unlikely. When shared emotions are intense, listeners' use of verbal mediators reduces and they switch to the nonverbal mode, thus leaving less opportunity for cognitive work and still more place to manifestations of the socioaffective kind. In addition, as stressed before, most of the social sharing of an emotion takes place early after this emotion, a stage at which people generally are obsessed with their frustrated goals. They do not consider modifying their hierarchy of motives, they stick to their existing schemas, they do not want to change their representations, they stand by their initial appraisal of the emotional situation, they do not feel ready to reframe it nor to change their perspective. To sum up, in regard to cognitive processing in naturally occurring sharing, there is no offer and there is no demand. Thus, if naturally developed sharing seems particularly well suited for the fulfillment of socioaffective needs resulting from the impact of an emotional episode, this is certainly not the case for cognitive needs.

Paradoxes may now be resolved. People develop sharing abundantly and quite willingly after an emotional experience because it brings them socioaffective contributions from their sharing partners, thus granting them completion of their socioaffective regulation needs. Rather than preventing the development of sharing, reactivation effects are actually playing a major instrumental role in the interpersonal dynamic that sharing instigates. Indeed, the more the sharing person would feel and express emotions, the

more the sharing partner would respond along socioaffective lines, thus providing help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization, attention, bonding, empathy, advices, and solutions. Because of the interpersonal dynamic it naturally favors, the sharing process is thus remarkably efficient to buffer destabilizing consequences of negative emotional episodes, which result from the disconfirmed expectations, models, and world views, and which manifest themselves in anxiety, insecurity, helplessness, estrangement, alienation, loss of self-esteem, and so forth. In other words, naturally developed sharing is perfectly suited for relieving what we described earlier as the *collateral consequences* of a negative emotional episode, and thus, for restoring the person's stability, at least temporarily. The immediate and strong completion of his or her socioaffective needs is in fact the source of the important benefits the sharing person reports after every social sharing situation. These perceived benefits will fuel laypersons' beliefs that sharing is helpful and relieving. Because people are indiscriminant about the multifaceted impact of their emotional experiences, they equate emotional relief and emotional recovery.

Indeed, the fact that the sharing of emotion was instrumental in buffering the collateral consequence of a negative emotional episode is irrelevant to the regulation of *central effects* of such an experience and, thus, leaves emotional recovery unachieved. Central effects of emotional experiences result from automatic meaning analyses and from the storage of components of the related experience in long-term memory. In the absence of cognitive work on this material, it will elicit the same set of emotional manifestations every time it is activated and recalled. Thus, relieving effects obtained from the socioaffective process involved in naturally developed sharing are expected to be temporary and to vanish rapidly once the sharing situation is over. Whereas the social sharing of emotion is a normal component of emotional responding in the early phase following an emotional episode, a perseveration of the need to share the same experience in the longer term is indicative of poor recovery and suggests deficits in the completion of related cognitive work.

Completion of cognitive work involving abandonment of goals and reorganization of motives, modification of schemas, re-creation of meaning, reframing, or reappraisal of the event is thus critical for achieving emotional recovery. Yet, we noted that people are not prone to develop such work in the immediate aftermath of an emotional experience. We also noted that naturally developed sharing is unlikely to bring it up. Practical recommendations in this regard are thus double. First, cognitive work should better not be undertaken early after an emotional experience. Early after a negative emotional experience, completion of socioaffective needs is primarily what the person needs. In this regard, any available human being with sense and sensibility may provide some useful contribution, though most often the person's circle of intimates is expected to play the preponderant role. Second, if the person's need to share fails to extinguish over time and if preoccupations with the episode do disturb current adaptation, cognitive work should take place. Sharing developed with professional psychologists or psychotherapists will then provide the person the appropriate guidance and support for completing the needed cognitive work.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As Schachter (1959) foresaw it in his classic studies around "emotion and affiliation" and "misery seeks company," a formidable and mostly ignored social process develops in the wake of emotions. Emotional experiences, whether positive or negative, elicit a

social sharing process that is generally repetitive and directed toward a variety of targets. Such a process signals interpersonal regulatory attempts that people need to develop in the aftermath of an emotional experience. The question thus arises of what is at stake in these interpersonal regulatory efforts undertaken after an emotion.

In the case of a positive emotional episode, regulatory efforts are obviously not oriented toward the reduction or buffering of the experienced emotions. To the contrary, what is at stake in this case is to maintain, sustain, and prolong as much as possible the experienced positive affects. By doing so, people can enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence, and in this manner, they are able to improve their general well-being. Studies showed that communicating the positive events to others was indeed associated with an enhancement of positive affect far beyond the benefits due to the valence of the positive events themselves. In addition, the process of sharing positive emotions was shown to enhance social bonds. Thus, the interpersonal regulatory efforts developed after an emotion not only involve capitalization at the benefit of the person who experienced the emotion, but they also entail benefit sharing with members of this person's social network.

In the case of a negative emotional episode, regulatory efforts should reduce the negative affects aroused by the emotional memory. Their implicit purpose would thus be to bring this memory to the dormant stage, or to a stage at which it would no longer return to the person's mind. As a result, this person's attentional capacities would become fully available for current tasks. In this chapter, we considered that the regulation work resulting from a negative emotional experience is not an univocal task. Collateral or destabilizing effects of such an experience elicit socioaffective needs which naturally developed sharing is well suited to buffer. However, the central effects of the negative emotional experience may prolong its impact through activation of its long-term memory representation. Regulating central effects requires important cognitive work which is much less easily achieved and is nevertheless critical to emotional recovery. Moreover, it should be stressed that, as was the case for positive emotions, the social sharing of negative emotions has important consequences for the social network of the concerned person. We noted that sharing is instrumental in maintaining, refreshing, and strengthening important social bonds. We also noted that through a process of social propagation of emotion sharing, members of a community keep track of the emotional experiences affecting their peers. In addition, we remarked that due to the sharing process, in a group, the shared social knowledge about emotional events and emotional reactions is continuously updated as a function of new individual experiences.

In our Western culture, we predominantly conceive emotion as a process taking place deep inside the physiological and subjective universe of the person. It is thus stimulating to explore interpersonal and social aspects of emotion regulation. It does not spontaneously come to our mind that when someone experiences an emotion, people around this person play a critical role in the regulation of this experience. Yet, is it so surprising? Considering the conditions under which emotional life is shaped in child development, the answer is no.

To start with, newborns are only able to send emotional signals. For a long time, every adaptational responses to these signals come from the baby's social environment. A long-term contract known as *attachment* develops between the baby and members of this social milieu. Attachment represents a resource that the infant activates when under stress (Bowlby, 1969). Thus, in stressful situations, attachment figures provide children with the essence of every later socioaffective response: presence, appeasement, contact, comforting, support, and so forth. Under their socioaffective protection, the

child develops abilities to construe the environment he or she explores, thus setting up cognitive tools for preventing further emotional stressors. Parents also talk to their child far before the latter is able to understand language. In emotional situations in particular, the child is talked to abundantly. In such talks, the emotion-eliciting situation and the child's feelings and responses to it are labeled, causes and effects are identified, remedies are mentioned, and regulatory advices are formulated. In this manner, the child's emotional consciousness emerges and develops in a framework entirely defined from the caregiver's perspective. Young children are already so well aware that adults aptly carry emotional meanings that already in their first year of life, they manifest social referencing (Baldwin & Moses, 1996; Feinman & Lewis, 1983; Klinnert, Emde, Butterfield, & Campos, 1986; Sorce, Emde, Campos, & Klinnert, 1985; Striano & Rochat, 2000). They explore an adult face when exposed to a puzzling situation and they refer to the facial signals for defining the situation as innocuous, dangerous, or pleasant, thus demonstrating how heavily they rely on adults for emotional meaning. In addition, because of adults' conversations or because of tales they are told, children are exposed daily to innumerable emotion narratives in which they learn what can happen and how they could or should react (Brunner, 1990). As soon as he or she can talk, a child is actively trained by adults in telling stories and reporting what happened in their absence (Fivush, 1994; Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 1999). Last but not least, all along their development, children are equipped by attachment figures and their substitutes with common sense and symbolic constructions through which they will be protected from the emotional impact of raw reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

Thus, for every individual, both emotional meaning and meanings that buffer emotions originate from the social milieu. It may then not come as a surprise that when, later in life, individuals confront an emotional experience, their most systematic response is to address the social milieu.

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