

Students' Essays

Conscious and Unconscious Emotions in Alexithymics and RepressorsTsvetelina Slavchova Hadzhieva*^a

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Abstract

In this article, the nature, evolution and characteristics of conscious and unconscious emotions which determine the internal regulation of behavior are traced. Definitions of the nature of emotions and feelings of other authors are presented, and studies which reflect the cognitive relationship of emotional processes are cited. A classification of two different personality types has been considered (alexithymic and repressor), who differently express their emotions, because of their cognitive peculiarities. The main idea of the article is based on tracing the specifics of emotional expression and intensity.

Keywords: emotions, conscious, unconscious, feelings, alexithymic, repressor

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Importance of Emotional Experiences for Everyday Life

We are the bearers of different feelings provoked by the impact of the situations in which we participate directly or indirectly. Every day we are faced to the ambivalence of the feelings we experience and which are transformed into positive or negative emotional energy which determines the direction of our mood and behavior. Some of the feelings we experience are available to our consciousness, while others remain hidden and misunderstood in the unconscious realm of our mental life.

Emotions and feelings accompany the human being from his or her primordial creation and arouse curiosity about the reasons for their manifestation, understanding and studying through the path of evolutionary development. Emotional processes have always excited the human being, who is searching for an answer to his/her personal behavior, as well as the science which is trying to give more specific, definite and scientifically based explanation of the nature of emotions (and especially unconscious emotions) covering their diversity, dynamics and importance for human behavior.

Some Theories of the Nature of Emotions

Emotions are relatively short-term processes and conditions, associated with a positive or negative experience, which accompany any manifestation of action (impulses) influenced by the different personalities (Golman, 2011). The emotional expression of feelings influences the psychosomatic state of the individual, which affects the facial expression and is unmistakably captured by others, as it is accompanied with organic amendments and physiological proceedings (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990). Or, refracted through the prism of literary creativity: "The best thing is seen only by the heart. The most non-essential is invisible to the eyes" (de Saint-Exupéry, 2015, p. 46).

Edward de Bono intertwines emotions and feelings with thinking. Thinking is related to more effective use of emotions (de Bono, 2001). S. Freud creates the idea that emotions are the central mental image governing the human behavior whereas the thinking, the memory, the perception which form the mind /'Ego/' and the concepts used by people in their cooperative conduct /'Super-Ego/' are just a mean by which the individual keeps his/her emotions in accordance with their beforehand genetically fixed content /condition/ (Freud, 1997).

The emotional world of each of us is a complex system in which different feelings are intertwined. They differ in intensity, focus and depth of expression. All emotions are characterized by valence or tone, as they may be positive or negative. The positive ones give human beings their power and strengthen their will, while negative emotions weaken the will and reduce the activity (Leontiev, 1971). Emotions energize motives and every motive contains emotional component (Nikolov, 1980). Conscious and unconscious emotions define the direction and intensity of the mental activity of the individual, determining the degree and direction of sensitivity, which is reflected in the external manifestations of behavior, due to the specifics of perception and reflection of the emotional impacts.

Unconscious Emotions

According to Sigmund Freud, the expulsion of the ideas itself is the "prototype" of the unconscious, which in turn is of two types: a latent but capable of being realized, and repressed, which cannot be conscious by itself (Freud, 1997, p. 12). The unconscious is a storehouse of instinctual desires, needs and mental actions (in Fromm, 2002, p. 123). Carl Jung divides the unconscious into two parts: a personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious is an accumulated material that was once realized, and soon was forgotten or suppressed. The collective unconscious is the deepest level of the psyche containing accumulated and inherited experience (Jung, 2000). It is believed that there are two ways to connect the personal ego with the unconscious. For example, our attention may be diverted from this page to the memory of something we did yesterday (Jensen et al., 1997).

For that reason, when it comes to the unconscious emotions, a person can have very intense experiences such as strong love or hate, but actually, he or she does not realize what and why provokes them, so they have unconscious character expressed in ignorance and misunderstanding about the existence of these emotions. The actual difference between an unconscious and a conscious idea (respectively thought) is based on the fact that the first is performed on the material that remains unknown, while to the second some verbal concepts are

added. The process of awareness is implemented "through the connection with the corresponding verbal notions" (Freud, 1997, p. 16).

One feels certain experiences, giving them relevant expressions in his/her behavior, but the reasons for one's behavior remains misunderstood for him/her, because those thoughts are pushed to the unconscious sphere, as the main reasons for this are the respect for oneself, i.e. everyone seeks to build and maintain a good opinion about himself/herself and the others around him/her, despite the awareness that s/he is a carrier of some unacceptable features. In an effort to maintain self-esteem, the personality pushes that emotion into the unconscious sphere of their mind. According to William James, the self-evaluation of the personality is determined by the correlation of the actual achievements of the individual and his/her claims, i.e. between the actual Self and the ideal Self (as cited in Sarailiev, 2008).

Education is another reason for unawareness of the emotions, which is rooted in the educational interactions and the subjective attitude of the family to a certain behavior that can be condemned or supported. Thereby, stereotypical conventional patterns of behavior are perceived, corresponding to a specific family environment. The process of growth and development of the child's personality to its maturation is marked with a number of difficulties that affect underdeveloped sense of community. These difficulties are due to insufficient culture, poor economic situation of the family and "deficiencies in the body's organs" (Adler, 2007, p. 46).

The next reason for the unawareness of the emotions is the ambivalence experiences for which the person cannot give a statement, why at some point feels a strong affection for one of his closest circle, and the next moment - insurmountable hatred. This situation reports the dissatisfaction and tension of this duality, which exposes it to uncertainty and confusion, provoked by the vagueness of ambivalent feelings.

The unconscious emotions are a very strong factor that influences changes in the behavior, for which the person is not aware and did not report them as out of the norm. In practice we are given many examples showing graphically the results of unconsciousness of the emotions. Although being unconscious, they "talk" to their existence, manifest in dreams, jokes, entertainment, etc. Very indicative is the proof of the nature of the relationship between unconscious emotions and significant changes in the reactions of a person, based on a research carried out by A. Luria (Luria, 1984, pp. 228-234).

The study consists of giving a word to the studied person to which he must respond with the first, which was created in his mind. The study expands along and while giving the answer, the examined have to press a button. The button itself is connected with a recording device which takes into account the course of the motor reaction and the manner in which the button is pressed. To the examined person are given neutral words and others, pronounced with emotional significance. To the neutral words the person responds very quickly (2-3 seconds) as the manifestation of the motor response at the beginning is evenly and ends with a high peak.

To the emotionally significant words, the person's behavior changes dramatically. Under their influence an emotional stress is caused, which alters the course of the answers to the word. The response time is significantly increased on 4-5-20 seconds, depending on the emotional meaning of the word-stimulus. There are some cases when a response of the word cannot even be found. The motor response is as follows: emotional stress causes imperceptible shake of the hand. The line reported during the pressing of the button begins to mark breakings and interruptions that record the shaking of the hand. This is clearly evident in a person who is likely perpetrator of a serious crime. Thereby, by bringing a word related to a crime, an

unconscious emotional complex is intensified. Unconscious and unregulated, it starts to affect in a hidden manner and unintentionally on the speed of the response. This slowing of the response is evidence that this is not the first response which was generated in the human's mind. Meanwhile, the unconscious emotion does not allow a suitable replacement of the expelled answer to be found quickly, and even more, to find one. These external reactions testify to the invisible emotional palette of experiences that are reflected in the unconscious part of the mental life of the individual.

Emotions constantly accompany our daily lives, participated in the internal regulation of behavior. A boundless ocean of emotions is the basis of interpersonal communication, which itself is a challenge to develop the potential for skillful communication and enrich the spiritual life of a man/woman. Emotions are spontaneous and register unmistakably a snapshot, and significantly affect the activity and the behavior of the individual.

Conscious Emotions – Their Study and Subtypes

The discovery that there are several basic emotions, which are recognized by all the people with different cultural backgrounds, is due to Paul Ekman of the University of California at San Francisco. It shows that facial expressions test of the four emotions (fear, anger, sadness, pleasure) are registered by people all around the world belonging to different cultures, including primitive tribes who are unaware of the existence of the TV and the cinema, which indicates the likely universality of these expressions. P. Ekman showed photographs of faces expressing various emotions of people from different cultures - even an isolated tribe of New Guinea - all recognized these four basic emotions (Ekman, 1992, p. 175).

Unlike the emotions, the feelings are relatively stable attitudes of a man/woman to objects, events and himself/herself. They can be defined as the strongest motive of behavior and are characterized by relatively complex and stable conditions and properties of the individual. Feelings are closely intertwined with emotion, which is impulsive instantaneous expression of feelings. Expressing the feelings differs by specific forms of experience as sensual tone, emotion, affect, passion, stress state, and mood (Desev, 2006).

Carl Jung distinguishes between "feeling" when involved sensory organs and intuition - when we present a kind of perception that cannot be traced directly to the conscious sensory experience. Therefore, the author defines sense as a conscious perception through sensory processes, and the intuition - as perceived by unconscious contents and links (Jung, 2002, p. 82).

The emotions, and the feelings later on, become part of the human nature with the evolution of the brain functions (LeDoux, 1993). The elementary cognitive development as a consequence of the primitive brain development is the reason for the lack of higher cognitive functions to coordinate thought and behavior by more complex expression (Kagan, 1994). In the early ontogenesis quite simple emotions occurred, associated with the physiological survival, resulting in satisfying basic physiological needs. Later, on that basis, the neocortex (the cortex) is developed, "which is the seat of thought," which contains centers that assemble and analyze the data submitted by the senses. "It adds to our feelings, our opinion about them - and allows us to have feelings about ideas, art, symbols and imagination" (Golman, 2011, p. 29). It is a fact that confirms the inextricable link between thought and feeling and eternal opposition between the "heart and brain", i.e. the emotional mind against rational (Golman, 2011, p. 27). And this is quite justified, taking into account that the limbic system that dictates our emotions is related to all elements of the neocortex and in this way it influences the brain centers

that have evolved precisely from the limbic area. This in turn provides the emotional centers with the opportunity to influence the rest of the brain, including the centers of thought (Golman, 2011, pp. 31-32). Hence it is not accidental eternal dilemma between mind and heart when you have to make a serious choice. In physiological terms these two systems work in concert and mutually, but in terms of external appearance, expressed verbally and nonverbally, it is like they have nothing in common and act as a completely separate and detached from one another. The degree of the expression of the emotional manifestations depends on the intensity of the sensitivity that each of us brings in certain regards.

The sensitivity is the ability for sensation, perception and construction of impressions under the influence of factors from the outside (the outside world) and from the internal environment (own body) to reflect objects and phenomena that perform signal functions and orient the individual in the environment (in Desev, 2006).

Dr. Ely Aaron explores the highly sensitive person, called briefly HSP for the first time in the early 90s of the 20th century. According to this author, people expressing high sensitivity, who make up about 1/5 of the population with an equal number of men and women, are people that can process sensory information more deeply and carefully, because of biological differences in their nervous system (Aron, 1996).

Alexithymics and Repressors

In all situations we think, feel and act in a manner typical for our personality. Some of us have more expressed sensitivity, and others less. For some, the emotions rule their entire inner world giving and obeying them entirely, while for others, the feelings are not so significant and strange as it may sound, they do not seem to feel, because they cannot describe their feelings, do not have the vocabulary containing precise and appropriate words to describe a particular feeling. The feeling unfolds emotional awareness for those who possess it, but not for those who do not. The psychologist Edouard Diener points out a really indicative case for this: one student, who one night noticed a fire in the hospice went and got the fire extinguisher and extinguished the fire. Nothing unusual and disturbing ... except the fact that he did not run there, but just walked. The reason for this, to him, was fully well-founded as he considered that the case was not particularly urgent (Pavot & Diener, 2009).

Edouard Diener explores the intensity in which people experience their own emotions and shows that the student demonstrated one of the lowest levels of intensity that the scientist had ever seen - a man who lived almost without feeling (Pavot & Diener, 2009). There is also a case of another immoderation, brought back by the same author, where a woman lost her favorite pen, could not get over for days. The recording of the sensitivity of humans is determined by the intensity of the experience of their emotions, as it is higher for some and lower for others. This question is the subject of longstanding studies and awakes keen interest in how some people can be so insensitive, like almost nothing is able to affect them and they do not express their emotional moods and feelings. On this occasion, in 1972 Dr. Peter Sifneos created the concept of "alexithymia" - from the Greek words "alpha" (particle of negation), "Lexis" - word, and "thymus" - spirit or emotion (in Sifneos, 1991, pp. 116-122). Such people do not find adequate words to express their feelings and cannot describe them in any way. They seem to be unable to express their emotions. Clinical signs of the alexithymia include difficulty in describing feelings, own or others', and an extremely limited emotional vocabulary (Taylor, 1987).

The main point for alexithymics is that they cannot understand and thus to describe their feelings as they do not experience them. For these people, it is impossible to make a verbal expression of the essence of the feeling that comes to their mind. When they feel the birth of a sense, they begin to experience anxiety and try to avoid it so as not to collide with something they do not understand, do not know how to explain it, which also can disturb and confuse them (Golman, 2011, p. 79).

Although alexithymia has been studied for several decades, the science still cannot give fully substantiated explanation of the reason for its appearance. However, Dr. Sifneos suggested that it appears due to the disruption of the connections between the limbic system and the neocortex, especially with its language centers (Sifneos, 1991).

There is another category of people who seem to be impervious to the emotional impacts – repressors, who are able to automatically exclude the emotional concerns out of the field of their attention (Weinberger, 1990).

The psychologist Daniel Uiyngargar from the University "Case Western Reserve" concludes that, although these people purely seemingly remain calm under the influence of stressful situations, their unconscious physiological responses record just the opposite - signs of anxiety, accompanied by sweating, palpitations and increased blood pressure, and even though, they claim of feeling totally at ease (Weinberger, 1990).

According to Weinberger, the continued isolation from negative emotions occurs quite often, and the author notes that one in six people has this ability. Also the repressor behavior can be learned by children as one of the methods based on a strategy of survival. For example in an unhealthy family environment, where there is a conflict between the parents, alcohol dependence, etc., and the existence of the problem is denied. Another method for acquisition of such traits is if the child has parents – repressors, from who to learn the serene and unwavering mood, and the ability to counter the concerns (Weinberger, 1990).

Ekman and Davidson explore the reactions of repressors and show that their characteristics are most probably due to a neuronal mechanism that slows down or modifies the process of transmission of disturbing information. By measuring the levels of activity in prefrontal lobe of a repressor, it is seen that the left side (the center of pleasure) is much more active than the right (the center of concern) (Ekman & Davidson, 1994).

The authors give a very accurate characterization of the nature of repressors: "... they see themselves in a positive light and are in high spirits. They deny that the stress makes them angry and even if they stay calm, their left frontal lobe, which is responsible for the positive feelings, did not stop working. This brain activity may be the key to their assertion that they feel well despite their physiological effects that can be construed as a negative stress "or" this is just a successful strategy for emotional self-regulation" (Ekman & Davidson, 1994).

For neurological reasons, the brain has developed a certain way that characterizes our emotional consciousness, deploying our potential in various fields. Sensitivity to art is more expressed in some people, in others – sensitivity to technique or to medicine, etc. This in turn determines our direction to a certain environment, interests and resources for its fulfillment. Regarding the feelings associated with love, values, principles, ethics, different social norms, everyone sees them, realizes and analyzes them in a way, refracted through their own prism. This and some neurological features are the cause of individual peculiarities in perception and giving particular importance to certain objects and situations. So, at first glance it seems that some are too sensitive, with strong emotionality, while others - heartless, soulless, as if they have no feelings,

and they actually have a completely different focus of perception. Here the question comes down to individual perception and subjective assessment in cognitive and emotional interpretation of every different situation. For that reason, it is suggested that we ought to have a good knowledge about ourselves, our own feelings and monitor ourselves, analyze and accept the way we are; and only when we fully understand ourselves, we will be able to perhaps attempt to understand others, to accept them and appreciate their character and uniqueness.

Conclusion

Due to the peculiarities of the processes occurring in the emotional sphere, people are divided into two types, some of which live consciously, adopting objective and comprehensive life, and others who see a small part of life and the world. "The human soul has the ability to conduct awareness, i.e. makes us do something consciously or unconsciously, if it is necessary to achieve the same purpose" (Adler, 2007, pp. 102-103). Adler added that one realized just what would encourage him or her. The unconsciousness was all that would interfere his/her internal reasoning about his behavior. The features of the emotional sphere are an expression of a different type of behavior, provoked by the specifics of perception and reflection of the emotional effect. This cause is due to neurological features, accompanied with inherited and acquired models of visualization. In conclusion, the consciousness and the unconsciousness are closely interlinked, defining and directing the behavior of the individual.

This article aimed to be theoretical in nature and presents an attempt to outline the essential components of the conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings. As representing their relationship, mediated by human cognitive functions. Also, the article discussed two types of personalities – repressors and alexithymics. Their behavior is determined by the peculiarities of the cognitive functions of the conscious and unconscious emotions. The theoretical overview of this article presents a deeper deployment of the characteristics of conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings. It's a focus on two different types of personal behavior with a particular emotional contrast. The contribution of this article is that it arises the question of conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings. And that excite a broad audience not only of professionals and specialists in the field of psychological science, but anyone who is interested in the hidden and mysterious mental processes.

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