



I feel, therefore I am: A study on the meaning of emotions and their functions

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Abstract

Emotion is not a concept that can be accurately defined, even if in ordinary language it refers to affective states. The theory of transactional analysis, created by Berne and developed by his followers, is impregnated with the concept of emotion. In order to bring more light to these questions, the present article discusses the biopsychology of emotions, considering their objectives and functions, considering the influence of neuroscience. We also refer to authors who did a theoretical review of transactional analysis from the perspective of biology and the mind, such as Allen and Hine. We have also included authors with a body approach such as Reich and Levine for their significant contributions both to understanding how the scripting system is embedded in the body, and to consider the possibility of developing a systematic body approach within Adult decontamination methodology. We conclude that there are no destructive emotions. Destructive is the way one learns to deal with feelings, with sensations and emotions. And working on emotions is working on lifescipt.

Keywords

Transactional Analysis, Emotions, Eric Berne, Neuroscience,

Introduction

Even today, emotion is not a concept that can be precisely defined, even if in ordinary language it refers to pleasant affective states - love, affection, joy, pleasure - or unpleasant - anger, jealousy, fear, irritation, sadness - that direct the individual in the approaching or missing a goal.

In the light of psychophysiology, and considering the current focus of neuroscience, emotions are responses to internal or external stimuli, which generate excitation involving somatic alterations, perceived as more or less pronounced, pleasant or unpleasant sensations, accompanied by affective states that direct a form of specific behaviour (Rossi, 1997; Bear, Connors and Paradiso, 2002; Damasio, 2004; Goleman, 2006). They are part of a complex biological system responsible for the maintenance of life and for the preservation of the species, which can promote health or disease and may even lead to death (Maclean, 1984). They systematically trigger mental and physiological responses resulting in visceral, endocrinal and metabolic manifestations, which, associated with affective states as diverse as joy, love, hate, fear, rivalry, pleasure, sadness, depression, euphoria, determine our state of mind, that is, our motivation. By being motivated, we act this way or that way, we focus our attention here or there and we lead our lives in a certain direction, we choose specific goals, we structure behaviours. The emotional response involves physiological, psychological, and social components. The way we deal with them determines the quality of our social understandings. Allen (1998) points out that the brain areas involved with emotion and interpersonal experiences are almost the same, suggesting that they are associated not only with injunctions, but also with permission and protection. MacLean (1984) considers the unpleasant informational emotions of threats to self-preservation and species preservation, and how it is unpleasant to deal with such threats. Pleasant, pleasurable emotions are informative in removing these threats or satisfied desires. LeDoux (1998) reinforces this concept by clarifying that all sensory information arrives first at the amygdala - a system that evaluates implicitly, not consciously, whether there is danger or not, and makes us react instantly if there is an objective or subjective threat to existence. Simultaneously, tenths of seconds later, a longer neuronal pathway informs

the neocortex-aware cognitive areas of the nature of the stimulus. Only after the body has responded physiologically to a series of bioelectrochemical productions can we perceive what is happening to us, and reflect on and make adjustments for the best response to the situation.

In our human nature we bring encoded emotions that are essential for the maintenance of life and preservation of the species. Each of them has a language, an important communication to make. The emotion we bring to birth is love - it binds us to the mother, it legitimates us and will serve as a mould for our social bonds and with nature. It speaks of physical contact, approach, pleasure, passion. From the learning of love comes joy, the emotion that leads to expansion and social sharing: parties, dances, songs, celebrations. Because we are gregarious animals, we like to live in groups. We seek other partners to exercise the emotional communication pattern of each one, which defines an individual style of communicating (Montheiro, 2009).

At the beginning of our lives love is essential for survival, it is the certainty of permanence of the care, of the attention, of the reference of oneself that is mirrored in the caring gaze of those who care. The possibility of loss of love or lack of love brings out the unpleasant emotions of feeling: fear, anger, sadness. Sadness for loss. Fear of not surviving. Anger for not having. Fear and anger are emotions that speak of protection. Fear also speaks of welcoming. The emotion of anger, linked to the instinct of aggression, is essential to the defence, maintenance and conquest of territories. 'Agressere', from the Latin, means to go towards. In a body approach, aggressiveness is located in the front of the body, chest open to the daily clashes, with the focus on goals and objectives desired or already achieved (Montheiro, 2009). Odent (2002) recalls that its energy, associated with vitality and sexuality, is fundamental to survival as we are born. Without it the baby does not seek the breast, first conquest and essential for its survival. If the injunction Don't feel angry appears, the natural, biological energy from the aggressiveness is contained and collected in the body, in the back, and this leads to so many pains without precise diagnosis in this region. It remains disguised in hostility, this yes, impeding to walk in front and destructive for those who feel and for those who are around (Reich, in De Marchi, 1970).

In the complexity of social life, for life to be fully realised, feelings and emotions need to be used wisely, since our *territories* are much more subjective than objective. This is an apprenticeship for emotional education. "Without acceptance and respect for oneself one cannot accept and respect the other, and without respecting the other as legitimate in the

coexistence, there is no social phenomenon" (Maturana, 2002).

Basic feelings of safety or insecurity are organised from the emotions present in our socio-familial context and we are encouraged to feel these in our early years, when the emotional brain is most active (Greenspan & Benderly, 1999). This shapes our future social interrelations; is related to social skills and appropriate behaviours important to living our in adult life, and in structuring our life script. According to Berne (2007), these emotions define the notion of value in relation to oneself, to the other, to the world, structuring the basic existential position. If the being-in-formation is respected, loved, and has his/her needs considered at the beginning of existence, they will return to the world respect, love, consideration. Otherwise, destructive emotions will replace the natural feeling, and a sense of inferiority for oneself and for the other, disrespect for life in general, hatred and contempt, will direct (inter) actions in society and in the world (Reich, 1986. 1988). Damasio (2004) warns that in these cases "the result is well known: anger, resentment, violence, all the reactions we easily recognise as the possible embryo of tribal hatred, racism and war." (p. 176). At this moment, we invite the reader to reflect - is this not exactly what is happening in the world today?

The cultural aspect of expression of emotion - psychological aspect and acting - are learned and can be educated, guided, restrained or liberated. The physiological component of emotions will be present in the body, whether it is perceived or not. Montheiro (2009) points out that biologically natural emotions need permission and protection to be solved - discharged or elaborated - under the supervision of the Parent Ego State and the adequacy of the Adult Ego State. Substitute emotions always contain a prohibition, they are closely associated with injunctions (Berne, 1985, 2007).

Steiner (2001) points out that people not trained to decode their sensations are actually under strong emotional influence, and that their body expresses the emotion for them. "Curiously, others in general have a better perception of the emotions of this type of person than a person themselves. Although the individual in this state is not able to perceive their own emotions, those who live with it can capture those feelings through signs such as facial expression, blushing and tone of voice. If asked how they are feeling, they will probably report only indifference or insensitivity. Their emotions are in a kind of deep freeze, inaccessible to consciousness." (p.44).

Ethical concepts and notions of value about oneself, about the other and about the world, are acquired during this process of education and socialisation, involving permissions, and injunctions at different

levels. Hine (2004) clarifies that mind and brain create representations of events that occur in the outer world or that emerge from internal events of the body/mind. Damásio (2004) and Goleman (2006) consider this acquisition fundamental for the elaboration of social contracts and for dealing with conflicts. Depending on the social group of the person and the time in which they live, the weight of certain attitudes will be entirely different. It is enough to consider the taboo of feminine virginity and the behaviours related to sexuality in different times and cultures. The modest attitude of a young woman forty years ago would be rejected by any cosmopolitan teenager of today, being out of the current behavioural repertoire.

The structure of thought itself, as the formalisation of thinking rather than the concept of thought, is also learned and mainly apprehended by modelling, through coexistence, by implicit, non-conscious learning (Allen, 1996, 1998; Mellor and Schiff, 2006). Thus, an Oriental person, an inner-city dweller, and a cosmopolitan develop thinking processes, as reality-capture structures, which are entirely different from one another, and not just with dissimilar contents and concepts (Rossi, 1997). Neuroscientists have long emphasised the interference of culture in the adaptive and multipotential brain/mind plasticity. "There are other factors that can significantly modify the sequence of emotional/affective behaviors, whether in animal or human development, or during adulthood. These factors can be summarised as environmental stimulation, where the environment is considered not only the physical aspect or the structural complexity of the territory where the organism lives, but particularly the social, affective and emotional production and the interactions of people living in an area, composing a complicated web of reciprocal influences." (Valzelli, 1983, p.48).

But the feeling is the same as for any human being. What varies – again, through cultural learning - is the externalisation of feelings. Segundo Monteiro (2009) wrote: "One can think of the expansive Latin, the restrained Eastern, the cold Nordic, the exuberant Italian, the reactive Spanish, as peculiar features of dealing with their feelings and emotions. Each of them can learn to contain their feelings to different degrees and in different styles or externalise them in an exaggerated, theatrical way. But here or in China, the sense of loss involves pain; frustration involves heartache; the feeling of affection involves the desire for closeness. That is, what is biological, real, natural, not conditioned on the human being, is his feeling. Each of us feels the same. To paraphrase Descartes, I feel, then I am)." (p. 20-21).

Nature does not have a hierarchy of basic functions that are linked to the maintenance of health and the

preservation of life. To function in an integrated way, a human must know and learn to administer all aspects of being, all areas of personality, without prioritising any of them. All are important and vital for our health, long life and, above all, the pleasure of living. Without the body, we do not feel, we think, we act. Without emotion, we become robotised, guided by idealised concepts of others, without an inner leader to guide our path. Without the higher intellectual functions, we return to being animals, without will or determination, reacting to the stimuli of the world. Without spirituality (Goleman, 1995, 1999, 2006) we lose the sense of belonging, which is common to all humans, leaving us lonely and apathetic.

Sensations and perceptions of stimuli form the basis of all human communication. Sensation is the expression of our physiology, produced by the action of an external or internal stimulus on a sensory receptor, transmitted to sensory areas of the brain by the neuronal pathways. It needs to be perceived, decoded and re-signified. The training of sense-perception requires a satisfactory intermediation between the intrapsychic and the interrelational (Levine, 1999). Social needs involving interactions with friends, at work, in the family, shape the way of reacting to everyday stimuli from the beginning of life, organising positive and negative feedback circuits attuned to the various aspects of the nervous system - sensation, emotion, feeling, thought, action.

According to neuroscientist Candace Pert (1999), the emotions, using chemical communicators, are responsible for the interface between the psychic and the physical. They are closely associated with psychoneurophysiological responses that undergo interference from the acculturation process. The affective states resulting from emotion have one point in common: they are motivational generators of approach or withdrawal and are closely related to the state of vigilance. Emotions such as anger and fear generate an increase in the state of physical and mental activation. They trigger the alarm circuit that activates the sensory receivers so that they capture data about what activated us to evaluate if we are going to flee or fight. They are emotions of defence and maintenance of territory, being part of the strategies of survival necessary to the preservation of the health of maintenance of our social bonds (Bear et al., 2002).

On the other hand, sadness generates a reduction of states of vigilance, taking the focus of attention to memories of the past, without interest in what is happening around us now. Love focuses attention on a specific focus. For this reason, the passion that blinds prevents us from looking at reality objectively and can lead to antisocial attitudes.

As we have seen, emotions direct the intensity and focus of attention – we become more or less attentive, and to what. With a very low vigilance, the stimulus, the sensory message can not get through. With very high vigilance, it passes a very large number of sensory information (messages), generating an overload of internal stimuli, preventing the individual from acting selectively in face of the stimuli coming from outside (Levine, 1999). When an emotion is very strong, it can lead to a level of vigilance that is very strong or very weak, which at will interfere in the ability to perceive and decode the sensory information captured at that moment, occurring as what Gottman (in Goleman, 1995) called an emotional flood.

So, not realising or denying an emotion does not sustain the neuro-hormonal circuit that it has triggered. On the contrary, any very intense emotion leaves the body and mind at the mercy of decompensated biofeedback mechanisms. That is, it will interfere with the perception of what is actually happening at that moment, provoking a distorted view of the objective data of reality (Montheiro, 2009).

Instinctively, and biologically naturally in the first years of life, the development of being is dialectically permeated by emotional insights through external stimulation or impulses, until it can be known, understood and elaborated on through an intellectual mediation. Such mediation incorporates the direct influence of the beliefs and values assimilated during the insertion in the social field and will determine the quality of the interactions of the future adult; i.e. how the person has learned to deal with feelings and emotions. Thus, nature and environment interfere in a reciprocal and complex way in the formation of the personality, through the emotional interactions from earliest childhood, and subject to variations at each stage of development (Greenspan And Benderly, 1999, Damasio, 1995, 2000, 2004; Berne, 2007).

In the educational process, common sense does not differentiate between feeling, perceiving, expressing, and acting emotion. However, emotion has no age; is linked to the emotional, ancient, genetically pre-determined brain. Emotional education is teaching to perceive, recognise and deal with the endless range of possibilities of feeling. Because of lack of information, there is no emotional learning that teaches how to deal with emotions in order to facilitate and further the function of each. Each culture, each family group will accept certain emotions as good, allowing them and encouraging them, and will prohibit others, considering them wrong and bad (Berne, 1985, 2007; Steiner, 2001; English, 2006). It will pass these messages directly or, as is more common, indirectly through the injunctions, modelling the emotional behaviour (Berne, 2007) and the prohibition can occur in psychological and social aspects. The more severe prohibitions

prevent the perception of the physiological functioning connected to the feeling. And, as demonstrated earlier, emotions are instinctive biological forces, necessary for the preservation and maintenance of life and species. Not realising them does not cease the physiological mechanism of biochemical production (Pert, in Moyers, 1995). Since the emotion cannot be recognised and/or expressed, it cannot motivate the social behaviour linked to satisfaction. As a substitute, the person may develop symptoms such as migraine, palpitation, nausea, for example, (Erskine and Zalcman, 2006), which is the origin of psychosomatic problems, quite frequent in children with school difficulties such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. Or, instead of the initial emotion, the person feels another. For example, by not being able to get in touch with anger - which would motivate the person to transform the problem situation - the person becomes excessively 'good' or overly agitated. This situation illustrates one of the possibilities for the broad diagnosis of hyper-agitation and attention deficit disorder in children in the school stage. Biologically natural emotion is inhibited and transformed, for example, into hostility, is expressed subtly and in disguise. Deepening the enlightenment, the emotion of anger is linked to healthy aggression, necessary for defence and the conquest of territory, that is, of social goals and objectives. Without learning how to deal with feelings and emotions, without cognitive mediation, it can become overwhelming and destructive. Fear, which is biologically part of the protective mechanisms in extreme cases, can paralyse behaviour. Love and its affect, fundamental for the establishment of neural circuits that generate basic trust and emotional security, when lacking for the little person in formation, is replaced by anger (at lack) and fear (of dying without affective nourishment), which as we have seen, are biological responses of defence and survival (Steiner, 2001; Berne, 2007). They become destructive when they become fixed, blocked and blocking, filtering out any other kind of feeling or emotion. In this way, the organism freezes in an emotional circuit of threat where it needs to attack or to escape to stay alive (Levine, 1999). When this happens to a whole cultural group, ghettos are formed and violence becomes law, learned and understood from earliest childhood.

Any emotion reflects what is inherent in the person themselves, it speaks of identity. What interferes is how each person learns to deal with what they feel. Berne (1977, 1978, 1985, 2007, 2008), in developing the theory of transactional analysis, has postulated the existence of several selves within the context of the internal kaleidoscope of sensations, feelings, emotions, concepts of right/wrong in each being. He called them ego states, each of them presenting a specific way of thinking, feeling and behaving and having its origin in specific brain circuits and networks

(Allen, 1996). When not guided by the educational process in accordance with the evolutionary phases and their needs, which communicate through the emotional repertoire, significant and disturbing contradictions can occur. Each of these ego states, when acting in a dissociated manner, generates anxiety and conflicts that consume important energy, diverting the person from the previously chosen goals, inserting the person into a limiting script. In some cases, they may even create a paralysed attitude to crucial decisions (Levine, 1999), leading to stress and/or depression; the two sides of the same coin that speak of the inability to deal objectively with life.

Final Considerations

Contrary to common sense, biologically speaking, there are no destructive emotions. Destructive is the way one learns to deal with feelings, with sensations and emotions. One learns from childhood to judge what one feels and to frame in a simplistic system of right/wrong the multiplicity of feelings. In fact, negative emotions are in disharmony with objective reality and subjective possibilities. They are ways of acting/reacting resulting from dysfunctional emotional learning, conditioned in a preconscious circuit, recorded in the emotional brain, in neuronal reverberatory networks. These feelings need to be identified as outdated and in disagreement with the circumstantial reality so that it is possible to develop a new response circuit more appropriate to the moment, with more assertive patterns that will enable the way of achieving plans and goals.

Ultimately, it is the pursuit of health maintenance, since not realising or denying an emotion does not sustain the neuro-hormonal circuit that it has triggered. Instead, it leaves the body and mind at the mercy of decompensated biofeedback mechanisms that are the cause of dysfunctions and psychosomatic diseases.

So working on emotions is working on the script. Sensations and emotions precede the use of words, and body semantics are revealed as an expression and communication complementary to oral language, involving internal and external transactions. Knowledge and awareness of the body is an active and dynamic process, interrelated with emotions and feelings. We understand that the comprehension of these mechanisms makes it possible to develop a methodology to directly interfere in the symptom - physical or psychological - since both are inseparable and always act simultaneously, adjusted by mechanisms - micros or macro – of feedback.

To learn body language is to learn the language of emotions and feelings; is to learn to correctly decode symptoms and signs, focusing on the interaction between the psyche and the physiological changes resulting from the interaction of the organism with the environment; internal or external, since human

experience is rooted in the energies of the body. By increasing the flow of information in body-mind communication, the blocks that were unconsciously created from mainly non-verbal messages – injunctions - can consciously be dissolved by the action of the integrated Adult, considering the Parent beliefs and values and the needs and wishes of the Child and its sub-states. It is a way of updating our history, away from the script and its somatic and/or psychological manifestations.

Many events that have shaped or transformed our structure at the present time may no longer be useful, functioning as limitations. By eliminating these patterns, actualising beliefs, dissolving tensions, amplifying the plasma pulse, we can gain flexibility, internal expansion, and a new physical and emotional awareness. The dialogue between conscious information and unconscious wisdom happens smoothly and naturally. It is then possible to recognize the flow itself to follow it by perceiving and integrating the inside and the outside, in a continuous interactive movement of expansion/recollection. This allows the person to feel, perceive the feeling, adapt the expression and action of feelings/emotions through the conscious process of volition, considering the reality of the here-and-now with the Integrated Adult.. In this way, one can rescue the natural development of the human being, for the desired construction of their world, which, according to Berne, involves autonomy, and the exercise of the potentials of consciousness, spontaneity and intimacy.

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