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Stigmatization of Emotionality

INTRODUCTION

Stigmatization of emotionality indicates externally imposed negative image or negative attitude towards the expression of emotions. It often aims to intense emotionality or uncontrolled emotion-laden responses to an event or a situation (e.g. screaming out loudly, when angry; running away without a proper reason when scared; crying uncontrollably when sad). Frequently such intense or exaggerated emotionality is attributed to women. The reasons behind are often related to women's supposed intense sensitivity to others (also in comparison to men). Women are in this respect allegedly more compassionate, emphatic, etc. In this contribution, I will focus on some possible origins of such stigmatization. These origins include unreflective beliefs about emotionality, which individuals often have. One can label these beliefs as images, since they are formed in a non-reflective, perceptual way, taking as their basis stimuli from the society. First, I will explicate the notion of stigmatization, which will be followed by the analysis of the stigmatization of emotionality. Section 4 deals with emotionality as related to women. In conclusion I develop the notion of the "images of emotion" and relate it to considerations about overcoming stigmatization of emotionality.

WHAT IS STIGMATIZATION?

Oxford Dictionary defines stigmatization as such kind of treatment of somebody that makes her or him feel that they are very bad or unimportant (2015).

Other definitions point out that stigmatization is related to treating a particular type of behaviour as wrong or some state as embarrassing, and tries to make people who behave in this way feel ashamed; that if someone or something is stigmatized, they are unfairly regarded by others as being bad or having something to be ashamed of. Stigmatization is thus a social, cultural and moral process or phenomena (Kleinman, Hall-Clifford 2009). In this vein, stigma can be defined as "a severe social disapproval due to believed or actual individual characteristics, beliefs or behaviours that are against norms, be they economic, political, cultural or social" (Lauber 2008, 10).

In this article, I understand stigmatization as a phenomenon that indicates externally imposed negative image and provokes negative attitudes towards a person, a group or a social phenomenon, which express different images, beliefs, values. On the other hand, it often invokes reactive attitudes such as shame, embarrassment and indignation. Externally imposed negative image often arises out of unreflective beliefs or convictions, which a given society or community created on the basis of their agreed values, norms, ideas. Everything that stands out and does not comply with their agreed values, norms, ideas, can be labelled as deviant. A negative attitude involved in stigmatization serves to distinguish (or in the extreme case even exclude) a targeted person, group or social phenomenon (with different beliefs) from other members, and at the same time serves as a mechanism for the persistence of this negative image. The basic grounds for this mechanism to persist are usually fear of other(ness), ignorance, resistance, rejection, isolation, weakness, imposed impressions from the media, or stereotypes exclusion, imposed self-image or imposed shame (Williams 2007; Link, et al. 2001; Smart Richman, Leary 2009).

STIGMATIZATION OF EMOTIONALITY

If we take description above as a starting point, stigmatization can also target emotions or emotionality. So, we can say that stigmatization of emotionality indicates externally imposed negative image or negative attitude towards the (excessive, inappropriate) expression of emotions. Stigmatization of emotionality thus often aims to an intense emotionality or uncontrolled emotion-laden responses to an event or a situation (e.g. screaming out loudly when angry; running away without a proper reason when scared;

crying uncontrollably when sad). But these emotion states-responses involve and are closely tied to our pre-existing beliefs, which in turn means that also stigmatization of emotionality can include or take into account there pre-existing beliefs and "evaluate" them in relation to appropriateness of formation and expression of emotion. For example:

> Encountering a knife-toting stranger causes fear in most people, but encountering a teddy bear does not. This is because most of us have certain beliefs about knives – which are, in the hands of strangers whose purposes we cannot divine, dangerous – that we don't have about teddy bears. It is not necessary that the cognitive components of paradigm emotion states be full-blown, fully conscious deliberations. They may simply be identifications or conceptualizations of the object that trigger our emotional reactions. (Sizer 2000, 745)

Thus, the expression of fear in a certain situation or before certain phenomena gets stigmatized as inappropriate or something to be ashamed of, this can be related to beliefs about the ground of this emotion.

Further, we can best explain the process and grounds for stigmatization of emotionality from the perspective of social and cultural theory of emotions. This theory basically claims that emotions are social constructions, i.e. emotions are products of societies and cultures, and are acquired or learned by following social norms, values, expectations and experiences (Parkinson 1996; Harré 1995; Averill 1993; Harré & Finlay-Jones 1986). We can consider these norms, values, and expectations also as rules of expressing appropriate emotions. One example is some rules for anger, which were identified by James Averill:

> A person has the right (duty) to become angry at intentional wrongdoing or at unintentional misdeeds if those misdeeds are correctable (for example, due to negligence, carelessness, or oversight); Anger should be directed only at persons and, by extension, other entities (one's self, human institutions) that can be held responsible for their actions; Anger should not be displaced on an innocent third party, nor should it be directed at the target for reasons other than the instigation; The aim of anger should be to correct the situation, restore equity, and/or prevent recurrence, not to inflict injury or pain on the target or to achieve selfish ends through intimidation; The angry response should be proportional to the instigation; that is, it should not exceed what is necessary to correct the situation, restore equity, or prevent the instigation from happening again; Anger should follow closely the provocation and not endure longer than is needed to correct the situation (typically a few hours or days, at most). (Averill 1993, 182–84)

And at the moment such rules arise they can also be broken. If an individual or a group is not obeying these rules, one consequence can be exclusion from the society or/and stigmatization. More specifically we can speak about a transitory social role theory of emotions. According to this view, rules for forming and expressing emotions are rule governed ways of performing a social role. Individuals adopt a role with a set of corresponding emotions that is consistent with what a given situation calls for and if there are any deviation from the social roles and emotional expression, this role is judged and labelled as deviant. For example, a grief response is appropriate at a funeral, but different grief responses are appropriate at the burial and at the service before the burial. In order to have an emotion response that is consistent with social norms and expectations, the individual must understand what the role they are adopting means in the context in which it is used (Averill 1986, 1993). Some researches go even further and say that the purpose of the emotions is to reinforce society norms and values. Allowing that emotions may also serve other purposes, some of the functions "the regulation of socially undesirable behaviour and the promotion of attitudes which reflect and endorse the interrelated religious, political, moral, aesthetic and social practices of a society" (Armon Jones 1985).

Not understanding or knowing about proper responses to emotion role, can be crucial for a person especially when being stigmatized. Consequences of stigmatization can be social, psychological or even physical. For example: low self-esteem, increased fear, anxiousness, reduced or disrupted relationships when one is isolating him-/herself or he/she is isolated by others, entering into harmful or bad relationships, rejection, depression, suicide, other behavioural responses, etc. (Williams 2007). Stigmatization could also influence moral status of the stigmatized individual or group.

> The moral standing of an individual or group is determined by their local social world, and maintaining moral status is dependent on meeting social obligations and norms. Individuals with (or associated with) stigmatised conditions are de facto unable to meet these requirements. Thus, stigma decays the ability to hold on to what matters most to ordinary people in a local world, such as wealth, relationships and life chances. Yet, we must remember that the stigmatised and those who stigmatise are interconnected through local social networks. Although stigma may share features across contexts, it uniquely affects lives in local contexts. (Kleinman, Hall-Clifford 2009, 418)

In a way emotions are manifested in emotionality or better said are expressed through emotionality. And when emotionality is stigmatized means one should not have certain emotion, because is not appropriate for a given situation.

WOMEN AND STIGMATIZATION OF EMOTIONALITY

Often such stigmatizations of emotionality take as their objects women. The reasons behind are often related to women's supposed intense sensitivity to others (also in comparison to men). Women are in this respect, i.e. compared to men, allegedly more compassionate, emphatic, etc., and thus more emotional in general. These beliefs (stereotypes) about women emotionality more specifically include (Feldman Barrett, Bliss Moreau 2009, 649):

> assumption that women are emotionally complex and expressive, whereas men are stoic and reserved; women supposedly have differently evolved brains that are wired for more emotionality […]; in novels and other media women are often portrayed as having more extreme emotional lives when compared with men […]; some people even believe that women are too emotional for certain roles or professions, e.g. to be elected for President of the United States […]

Happiness, sadness and fear are typical emotions for women; women experience, express emotions more often and intensively than men. Also other academic reviews confirm the existence of such stereotypes (e.g., Brody, Hall 1993; Fischer, Manstead 2000; Shields 1987).

But despite all the above beliefs that women are the more emotional ones, consistent scientific evidence (for sex differences) in emotional responding remains elusive. On one side there are expected reactions, which could be based on sex, and on the other side there are learned expectations or beliefs, which are based on external world (which specific society created). Both correlations are difficult to prove. E.g. some sex-based researches are focusing on children and their emotional behaviour. They try to measure their facial movements and reactions on certain situations. Results showed that girls have more emotional temperament when compared with boys, but evidence for consistent sex differences in emotional responding using instrument-based measures of emotional behaviour are still not clear […] (Feldman Barrett, BlissMoreau 2009, 649).

And, on the other hand there are some other studies that have shown that sex-based stereotypes about emotions are grounded in expectations of the persons attributing justifiability to a given emotional response. Krull (1993, 656) e.g. suggests that:

> it is possible that people approach male and female targets with different epistemic goals. When perceivers see a woman acting in an emotional fashion, their goal is to explain something about her person (leading to an initial dispositional attribution), but when they see a man acting in a similar way, their goal may be to better understand the situation (leading to a situational attribution).

Thus despite the emotional reaction is the same the situation gets interpreted differently. We can conclude first, that "women are influenced by society expectations how to behave like a woman; they are influenced by gender role knowledge […]" (Feldman Barrett, Bliss Moreau 2009, 649); and second (local) society created beliefs about women that its members follow. The final result is the same; emotional responses get stigmatized if they deviate from the norm.

So, if we go further given the points expressed above, we can point out some ideas about why such convictions and stigmatization of women's emotionality and expression of certain emotions appropriate for women, are not just(ified). Anger, for example, is typically deemed more appropriate for men, whereas sadness seems more fitting for women (Stearns, Stearns 1986). First, we can see that following expectations how to behave like a woman or treating women as (local) society believes is right for women, is probably closely tied to some pre-existing beliefs about female gender itself. This could mean that stigmatization of women's emotionality can include or take into account there pre-existing beliefs about women (gender) and "evaluate" them in relation to appropriateness of formation and expression of certain emotions. For example, if we take pre-existing beliefs that women are more sensitive, compassionate, caring and empathetic than men, and because of that emotions like compassion or empathy are more womanlike, then it is more appropriate for women than for men to express those emotions when for example a sad situation occurs. But there are no such emotions which are more attributed to women or men. Both, women and men, have presumably all emotions. So, how these emotions and emotionality are presented, expressed by any gender in social life should not primarily be based on rules regarding roles (local) society created nor should not be

based on some unreflective beliefs about women. Rather (appropriate) usage of emotions should be established on our education about emotions and understanding their usage for our wellbeing, not gender specifically. Second, usually women's emotionality is negatively presented when comparing with men's gender or men's emotionality. For example: women are weak, crying a lot, are not in control of their emotions, they are panicking, screaming, etc., thus in some situations are not taken seriously, and that could also be crucial for their wellbeing in some cases (Jordan Brook 2011). But in contrast, we can point out that there are also some men who are not in control of their emotions and emotionality; for example they are drinking, screaming, abusing their wives and so on… What is important to point out here is that if we assume that women and men both possess the same emotions, then they both have ability to be (too)emotional.

To sum up, we can say that in this kind of context of assumptions about gender role and negative gender comparisons, stigmatization of emotionality can be understood as at least partly consisting of unreflective beliefs about the justifiability of emotional responses and expressions.

IMAGES OF EMOTIONS

The formation of unreflective beliefs that has lead to the stigmatization of emotionality is similar to the unreflective formation of direct perceptual beliefs on which we form perceptual judgments. The latter are of course immediate and due to reliability of our senses also generally justified. Beliefs behind stigmatization of emotionality are on the other hand often unreflectively formed on the basis of authority, imitation and (socially conditioned) perception. A given society or community can hold deeply entrenched expectations about the appropriateness of emotional attitude expressions. Its members then react in accordance with them when being faced with expressions that are not in line with expectations. Such reactions are immediate, and given background beliefs are also strongly compelling, just as a given image is that is in front of us. That is why it is often also so difficult to overcome stigmatization of emotions and emotional responses, just as it is hard to resist immediate perceptual impressions. In this way stigmatization process often functions unreflectively and perpetuates itself as long as there are these majority norms in play.

CONCLUSION: OVERCOMING THE STIGMATIZATION OF EMOTIONALITY

To overcome the stigmatization of emotionality, we should start first from the perspective of the individual, rather than from a group or a society perspective, since we must primarily take responsibility for stigmatizing individually.

One mechanism that could help us as individuals to overcome stigmatizing others for their emotionality is sympathy or sympathetic imagination. This represents our willingness to step out of our ego and enter into the world of the other, and allows us to avoid the phenomenon of the "invisible other" (Nussbaum 2012, 139–140). A special challenge for such a sympathetic imagination is that the other is often different or distant, which means we must first make the other real for us. The main obstacles for this process are again fear, bias and narcissism. Inclusive imagination and empathy represent only one aspect of compassion and care, but they are crucial, because they are moving us in the opposite direction as fear, that is in the direction of the other. Narcissism misleads us, when it persuades us that we can go through our life with other people, without any efforts in the domain of imagination, empathy and care, and this is one of the main forms of moral error (Nussbaum 2012, 169). Stigmatization of emotion is a kind of moral error. Compassionate empathy and imagination are able to overcome such tunnel vision or blind spots, and do that in a way that mere arguments cannot, because the former include experiential participation (solidarity) on/with the other, but it also goes beyond it, since it evaluates, criticizes and explores the values that are embedded in the situation, and to dismantles hierarchies, stigmatization and undeserved suffering (Nussbaum 2012, 186–187).

But at the same time we should not underestimate the importance of social aspects of stigmatization. Society and group identity are very strong in establishing our own identity as individuals, and our wellbeing is also heavily dependent on it. Social strategies for overcoming stigmatization must therefore also be employed. These include education focused on direct experience and contact, creating open spaces that are non-judgmental and putting under question certain entrenched norms about expressing emotions. Such combined approach can then help us to overcome the stigmatization of emotionality.

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