



*Future of our Feelings:  
Sociological Considerations about Emotional Culture in Pandemic Era*

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**Come citare / How to cite**

SIMONOVA, O. (2020). Future of our Feelings: Sociological Considerations about Emotional Culture in Pandemic Era. *Culture e Studi del Sociale*, 5(1), Special issue, 211-225.

Disponibile / Retrieved from <http://www.cussoc.it/index.php/journal/issue/archive>

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**Articolo pubblicato online / Article first published online:** June 2020



- Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN  
DOAJ

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**Note of Editor-in-Chief**

This is the first Special issue of the journal *Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc*. The idea behind the special issue comes from this consideration: around the world, individuals are facing a critical moment, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences require some reflections on many topics, often forgotten by scholars. This is the reason why many Italian and foreign scholars have been invited to give their contribution. Furthermore, now more than ever, it is crucial to share knowledge coming from multiple disciplines and that's why it was decided to write an entire issue in English.

For scientific and intellectual correctness, the contents of single articles refer to the situation as in mid-May 2020. It is necessary to clarify that because this Special issue was published when many countries were starting to reduce their emergency measures to cope with the pandemic.

# *Future of our Feelings: Sociological Considerations about Emotional Culture in Pandemic Era<sup>1</sup>*

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## **Abstract**

The article is devoted to some aspects of the emotional culture of the late modern society, which will evidently undergo changes due to the new virus pandemic. The author draws on the opportunities that belong to the sociology of emotions, because emotions by their nature and function are related to overcoming of uncertainty of the future. The purpose of this essay is to review the main *imperatives and contradictions of the emotional culture*, identify some feelings that are a socially “sensitive” answer to the current circumstances. The future changes will probably become clearer, if we observe how the contradictions of the modern emotional culture will be resolved; for example, what development the simultaneous “emotionalization” and rationalization of social life will undergo. In the situation of crisis connected to the pandemic all the feelings will be involved, emotional norms and strategies of emotion management will be modified. The author believes that the moral individualism of modern societies will draw attention to the matters concerning social solidarity and moral guidelines, which could be viewed through the concepts of care, human sufferings and feelings that lie at their heart: anxiety and fear for other people, empathy, sympathy and compassion.

**Keywords:** Sociology of emotions, Emotional culture, Emotional capitalism, Emotional imperatives, Sympathy, Compassion, Care.

The situation of the pandemic in a globalized world causes major social changes, formation of new normative orders, drawing of new symbolic borders between groups, categories, societies, as well as reconfiguration and a sort of review of the existing and traditional social institutions. At the moment, it is quite difficult for a sociologist to talk about the future, about the likely consequences, which socio-cultural configurations will be established, and which won't. The future and its images in the late modern societies were already a problem to some extent from the point of view of social consciousness and sociology (Jacobsen, 2019; Urry, 2016; Barbalet, 2019; Gudkov, 2017). Under the socio-cultural circumstances, the present is more frequently viewed through the past, which is much more available (although there are risks and uncertainties here too). The beginning of a “new sensitivity” epoch or a new emotional culture with increased attention to the emotional sphere, “emotional capitalism”, is considerably related to it (Karppi *et al.*, 2016; Illouz, 2007; Simonova, 2019). While it is quite difficult to foresee, predict and perceive the future completely rationally and scientifically, it is beyond calculation, one can anyhow worry about it, treat it on the basis of emotional reflexivity (Holmes, 2015), relying on sentiments, senses, emotional anticipation, which at

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the RFBR grant 20-011-00870 «Social Inclusion in the System of Bases of Integration of Russian Society: Comparative Analysis of Values and Practices in Institutional and Informal Contexts».

least gives some opportunity to trace, outline the future of the complicated modern world (Barbalet, 2019; Gonzalez, 2017).

The current world situation intensifies even more the already existing emotional culture particularities: what will happen to the norms to which emotion management in public and private spheres adheres? What will happen to emotional capitalism that, to a great extent, was based on the commodification of feelings in service industry in the pandemic situation? Which emotions will be cultivated, which will be limited?

The opposition of “irrational passions” and “dispassionate rationality”, according to many experts, is currently not relevant anymore (Patulny *et al.*, 2019). Emotions and feelings are also included in the evaluation of the current developments and serve as guidelines for actions, including moral ones. Even before the crisis many people and scholars believed that the existing world order was destructing, and the situation was getting worse and expressed pessimism (see, e.g. Bauman, 2017; Hookway, 2013). The indeterminacy of the world perceived by everyone (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 2000) grows in the age of the pandemic (as a liminal phase); feelings of fear for the future of humanity, anxiety, frustration, pessimism increase, affectively charged rumors, forecasts and dystopias constantly emerge. It occurs against the backdrop of rethinking of human sufferings, both individual and collective, the topic of which became relevant again in social sciences and, in particular, in sociology (Wilkinson, 2005; Williams, 2008; Boltansky, 1999). Hence the feelings of alienation, grief, sympathy, empathy, compassion become a kind of moral guideline in social life, where various forms of solidarity integration and inclusion are put into question.

What gives us an opportunity to speculate about emotions and thus approach understanding of social reality and, in particular, the present and the future? The sociology of emotions in general is devoted to social dimensions of emotions, among which the following can be included: (1) their evaluating dimension, signaling function and marking function (emotions as marks of important events in social and personal life); (2) their focus on and sensitivity to social expectations; (3) their “contagious” ability and ability to manifest at a collective level; their ability to be shared and increase collectively; (4) communicative and expressive functions (including digital forms of communication), which are also connected to formation of new designation of emotions (Bericat, 2016; Patulny *et al.*, 2019). In view of this, sociologists observe growing realization of complex emotionality in the modern world, as well as growing tension between collective and individualized emotions, increasing mediating, communicative and expressive role of emotions (see: Patulny *et al.*, 2019). It appeared that both in scientific sphere and in public and private spheres of social life emotions seem to explicitly “require” constant reflexive monitoring, management at an individual (construction of identity), as well as at a global (coping with global processes and events) level (Barbalet, 2019). It becomes important for politics, solution of the problems of social inequality, migrations, construction and support of the already existing and new forms of social solidarity.

In this respect, the sociology of emotions is a rational attempt to comprehend the main human emotions and feelings that in a certain way “inform” and “signal” to people about the present and the future. One of the purposes of the sociology of emotions in the study of emotional culture is to relate the undergone experience of people in different contexts at a micro-level to wider social and cultural structures of the late modern society at a macro-level (see, e.g. Barbalet, 2019; Lyng, 2018). It is in feelings and society’s attitude towards feelings where one can grasp the con-

tradictory nature of the modern society and its culture, the problematic character of the future.

### **1. Late-modernity emotional culture, its imperatives and contradictions in the context of the current situation**

The modern society, often called late modern or late capitalist, is characterized by a special emotional culture (Simonova, 2019) or special characteristics that mainly define human emotionality. For the general characteristics of the late modern society culture many specialists apply the term “affective” or “emotional capitalism”, meaning that emotional experience is commodified, can itself produce economic effects, a contemporary person values it and aims at it, is willing to pay for it (Karppi *et al.*, 2016; Illouz, 2007). We called emotional culture a characteristic for a certain type of society configuration of notions of feelings and social norms with regard to their undergoing and expression in different social contexts or situations that manifest in behavior patterns, experience, practices, speech expressions, special emotional regimes or orders (see Simonova, 2019). One of the ways to describe the modern emotional culture is to identify its emotional norms, in which notions of feelings and norms of their expressions are also reflected. From our point of view, the most interesting are the norms that we decided to metaphorically call “*emotional imperatives*” in order to create special optics for description and research of the modern society. We have chosen this metaphor in order to highlight the main characteristic features of the modern emotional culture and create a theoretical basis for analysis of the subsequent social changes.

Special norms-requirements, indisputable and moral prescriptions about what and how should be felt in a certain socio-cultural context (or situation) refer to the emotional imperatives. The emotional imperatives enable cultivation or avoidance of certain feelings. Emotional imperatives are compulsory, they serve as orders that people address to themselves and others, however, they are not always viewed as a burden and are presented as a result of free choice. They are *compulsory* not only because they are requirements for behavior, but also because people consider them extremely important. People believe them to be something *natural, necessary*, and worry when they are absent, for example, in case of positive feelings (happiness, love, affection etc.), or when they are present, mainly in case of negative feelings (guilt, shame and so on). Such imperatives are perceived by people as intimate, deeply internal, as soul movements, as innermost desires and aims. These imperatives appear due to the common social processes that are characteristic of the late modern societies: first of all, in the age of globalization, consumerist culture, commercialization of virtually all aspects of life, neoliberal system of control, deep individualization of social life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Barbalet, 2019).

We will identify some emotional imperatives that, from our point of view, most vividly describe the emotional culture of the late modern societies, as well as the main contradictions that are and will be resolved by certain ways. One of the most important is the *imperative of rational emotion management*, according to which people aim at rational management of feelings (for example to achieve success and self-realization). This imperative is connected to commodification of emotion management and, consequently, to notions of necessity of working through “negative” feelings, development of emotional intelligence, emotional competence and inner emotional self-control. Spread of notion of necessity to rationally manage emotions is connected to characteristic features of late modernity, where fast-paced changes,

segmentation and uncertainty of the world, its “liquidity”, globality of events and corresponding understanding of risks, increase of fears and anxiety, concern about the future cause aspiration to cope with this situation by means of rational control over feelings (Gonzalez, 2017; Bauman, 2017; Beck, 2000).

The imperative of emotion management can be interpreted as a sign of “a vital link between larger social contradictions and private efforts to manage feeling” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 202). Emotional labor and emotional consumption culture established in the late modern societies have an impact on labor ethics and practices, because it combines commodification of emotions, their rational management with the purpose of gaining of profit, income and pleasure. In the current situation inquiry of emotion work with feelings will also be in demand; for example, how to cope with anxieties, fear and at times grief, how to express them? To what extent will emotional practices be rationalized? Every day links to resources, where everyone can individually learn to manage and cope with one’s own emotions, appear in social media<sup>2</sup>.

The imperative of “*authentic feelings*” is related to the above described imperative. It is connected to the notion that it is *necessary* to treat one’s own feelings with respect, because during the process of commercialized and rational management of emotions there emerged the notion of value of one’s own feelings that should be preserved, protected and, in some cases, followed. One of the main contradictions of the emotional culture manifests here: high control over emotions and simultaneous necessity to experience them, effectively manage them and simultaneously “be true to oneself”, express one’s authentic feelings (Reckwitz and Pakis, 2020), simultaneous commercialization of control over feelings, when one needs to suppress one’s feelings, and necessity to display one’s own feelings, one’s own authentic self.

According to Jack Barbalet, the late modern society is characterized by a combination of emotional complexity and instrumental attitude to one’s own emotions (Barbalet, 2019, p. 6). Individuals are focused on their own emotions, the so-called *ego-emotions*, i.e. emotions directed to oneself, one’s own well-being, satisfaction, self-expression and self-esteem, rather than to others, their evaluations and opinions (Barbalet, 2019, p. 9). Barbalet notes that ego-emotions are a result of alienation and rational individual control over emotions in bourgeois societies, while the growth of them in human life causes specific social consequences: maintenance of large collectives of people (corporations), in which everyone is individualized and shut in one’s own world of emotional experience. Inconsistency of combination of rational emotion control is manifested in the display of “emotional neutrality”, detachment and even coldness and simultaneous deep anxiety, search of authentic feelings and desire to experience them, to “get excited” (Lyng, 2018). In other words, there is a coexistence of individuation and ego-emotions, concern for one’s own peace, well-being, pleasure and simultaneous suffering from weakening of social connections, loneliness, constant search of love and happiness (Illouz, 2007; 2012).

The most important emotional imperative is a maxim or cultural purpose “*to be happy*” (“do what makes me happy”) – *the imperative of pursuit of happiness*. This

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<sup>2</sup> Emotional Well-Being and Coping During COVID-19. Available from [https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/coronavirus/coping?fbclid=IwAR29EJPOUCP2hZAYQabqnudnJBVPyfbhwGqCnkyGyW\\_BFSuxMXRuOQe2woA#main-content](https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/coronavirus/coping?fbclid=IwAR29EJPOUCP2hZAYQabqnudnJBVPyfbhwGqCnkyGyW_BFSuxMXRuOQe2woA#main-content) (Accessed, April 20, 2020).

imperative refers to persistent inquiry of individual happiness (however it could be understood) and is oriented to consumption of some objects, material and symbolic, that “guarantee” this happiness (see Ahmed, 2010; McKenzie, 2016). To this imperative also relates *the imperative of “romantic love”* that “a person should encounter at least once in a lifetime”, which is also connected to persistent pursuit of happiness and conviction that these feelings should be present in human life and lead to happiness (see Illouz, 2012). And also, *the imperative of avoidance of (certain) “negative feelings”* (for example, shame, grief), this imperative is connected to the previous ones and oriented to escape from anything that causes negative emotional experience, focus on completion of periods of painful feelings, reduction and avoidance of experiencing them (see, for example, Berns 2011).

The following contradiction: persistent requirement to constantly experience positive emotions, happiness and actual impossibility of this, pursuit of positive emotions and their simultaneous rationalization and commercialization, a specific gap between demonstrated, mainly positive, emotions and actually experienced negative and other feelings (Reckwitz and Pakis, 2020). Hence intensive emotionalization and overload with it (and with these gaps: with the simultaneous wish to experience authentic feelings and to control them) is accompanied with obsessive search of tools for work with negative experience, widespread address to psychology, trainings, development of emotional intelligence and emotional competence (Simonova, 2019).

*The imperative of “individual guilt”*, when an individual should feel individual guilt for everything that happens “wrong” in their life. Guilt can be viewed as a “negative feeling”, however useful at that, helping an individual to cope with failure, be constantly oriented to success and happiness. This is an example of emotional experience that Barbalet, taking cue from other experts, calls ego-emotions and that forms part of social control in large contemporary collectives (Barbalet, 2019). Special emotional regime of capitalism bases on the notions that an individual is first of all responsible for their failures, one’s problems can be resolved individually, and one can resolve them, and if not, it is one’s own fault. Ego-emotions reflect the process of individualization at the extreme, when social problems are mainly perceived psychologically: as personal inadequacy, feeling of guilt, anxiety, conflicts and neuroses (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

*The imperative of sympathy/compassion and/or individual loyalty* is connected to the previous ones: in order to achieve success and happiness it is necessary to express a certain amount of sympathy, compassion and loyalty in different kinds of relations and first of all in subordinate relations (see, for example, Clark, 1997; Barbalet, 1999). It means that relations are subject to specific socio-emotional economics: exchange relations regarding display of sympathy as affection and sympathy as commiseration, which people tend to rationally manage.

*The imperative of nostalgia or longing* for the past, the future and the present that constantly “changes”, “slips away” is connected to fast pace and changes in social life, segmentation, uncertainty and risks. This imperative is not evident, however its persistence manifests in search of memories and notions that provide determinacy, stability, protection (Bauman, 2017; Jacobsen, 2019a; Jacobsen, 2019b). Zygmunt Bauman notes the general inconsistency of feelings, their fast interchange, transience and, at the same time, longing for them; such are, for example, “liquid” fear, love, anxiety (Bauman, 2003; 2006). In this context spreading and persistence of nostalgia becomes an attempt to achieve stability, confidence, trust in fluctuating modernity or fast-paced world. It is noteworthy that Bauman writes about “global epidemic of nostalgia” (Bauman, 2017, p. 18), which will

probably also be of importance in the post-viral age. Rationalization as a social process, about which sociologists talked, partially determined *nostalgia for live emotions and feelings* (Gonzalez, 2017), as well as for the past times and even moments. That is to say, virtually at any given moment one may begin to feel nostalgic for something irretrievable and something that can never be returned. Perhaps, this feeling starts to increase much more in the situation of the pandemic, because people feel that it is not possible to go back, while the future is extremely uncertain, that is why a turn for utopia, about which wrote Bauman (Bauman, 2017), would be relevant here, as well as different kinds of escape to fantasy worlds in order to cope with anxiety about the future. On the other hand, it actualizes various kinds of the film industry and art, gives an opportunity to develop technologies that allow to immerse in digital worlds and interactions that recreate past life, i.e. tendencies, which were already present in the modern societies, will increase even more.

Obviously, this list could be continued, each imperative can be explored through specific examples, typical modern mundane notions and even some branches of modern psychology. It should be noted once again that not the whole world of human feelings is implied here, but the aspects that are considered deserving, worthy of being aimed at, important, valuable (in the modern society). Therefore, *in the modern emotional culture one can observe an emphasis on (positive) feelings (for example, happiness and pleasure), their authenticity and spontaneity together with an emphasis on rational means of their achievement*. Needless to say, an attempt to express and search these feelings or emotions may result in failure, impossibility, inaccessibility of these states. Hence, from our point of view, various social consequences are possible, however, disruption of personal social connections, avoidance of different kinds of social relations, loneliness, feeling of alienation, frustration and depression, emergence of anxiety and fear, suppression of really important (including negative) for social life feelings, formation of different kinds of collective solidarities, for example, irrational communities as shelters from failure, misfortune, absence of love, etc., become evident.

Even before the pandemic these tendencies were observed to different extents in the late modern societies. However, the forecasts themselves were different: some sociologists wrote about post-emotional society, where emotions become an object of manipulation, fabrication from economic and political structures, rather than appear spontaneously, “happy emotions” for the masses (Mestrovic, 1997); other authors see in emotions emergence of a new “moral agent”, drivers of moral choice, building blocks of identity (Bauman, 1993, p. 67); the third ones observed emergence of affective attachments to new social associations (“identity tribes”) (Maffesoli, 1997), collectives that require individual obedience or attachment and are directly connected to emotions of each one (Barbalet, 2019, pp. 5 and 11). In the institutional context of neoliberalism, we have a paradoxical mixture of individualization and social solidarity. Emotions reflect relations with market and large organizations, corporations and political figures, supporting the power of the latter.

Moral individualism and its social consequences under the conditions of the viral and post-viral age become the key topic in this respect: if emotional culture as such enabled weakening of personal human connections, individualization and new forms of solidarity of atomized individuals, then how these tendencies would be interpreted under the new conditions of the global epidemiological catastrophe? It is also important to understand how rational instrumentality in relation to emotions and their commercialization will “overlap”, enable or counteract current circumstances, events, affect human behavior. In any case, in the viral age all the feelings

will be affected, socio-cultural dimensions of each socially significant feeling will change in close interconnection with general socio-cultural conditions and situations.

Considering the above, it may be stated that one of the most important and interesting researches will be a research of the feelings that are related to human sufferings, the topic that has already been raised in sociology (see, e. g.: Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson and Kleinman, 2016). Sociological reflection of types of sufferings and their social consequences may become one of the key topics in sociology, and accordingly, transformation of the most important emotional states – empathy, sympathy and compassion, that are “micro-social” forces of social solidarity and can play a certain role in the situation of decline of sensitivity to feelings and sufferings of other people, emotional coldness and focus on rational management of emotions (Bauman and Donskis, 2013; Illouz, 2007).

## **2. Sympathy, compassion and care in the modern societies and in the context of the global epidemic**

We would like to draw attention to the essential feelings that perhaps will define human connections and solidarity forms on a global scale under the conditions of the pandemic, because catastrophic events intensify not only selfish fight for resources, but also various forms of altruism and solidarity (Batson, 2011). It is coping with personal and someone else’s sufferings that will highlight emotional work with psychological pain, anxiety, grief, fears, alienation. Coping with suffering, healing from it relates to sympathy and compassion, which in general strengthen social connections, weaken alienation, motivate various kinds of care for other people, supporting common solidarity and moral order, weakening discrimination, inequality and other kinds of social exclusion. How may special aspects of the emotional culture of the late modern societies affect displays and manifestations of sympathy and compassion? What limitations and opportunities are contained in these sentiments?

Jonathan Turner and Jan Stets classify such moral emotions as sympathy and empathy as connected to sufferings of others, emerging in response to distress of others, which can as such initiate various emotional states (including those that are considered negative) (Turner and Stets, 2007, p. 550). These states serve as a significant component of social interactions, support social solidarity, because they act as motivating force for provision of help to individuals in a difficult situation (Turner and Stets, 2007, p. 555). They ease interpersonal relations, postulating altruism and suppressing aggression (Clark, 1997; Eisenberg and Miller, 1987). If we refer to the definition of sympathy, in the most well-known sociological work on sympathy culture Candace Clark defines it as a range of emotions directed to others and connected to their pain, anxiety and suffering, it is a feeling of sorrow or sadness and anxiety regarding people in trouble, in distress (Clark, 1997, p. 44). Sympathy includes empathy as a necessary component, conscious sympathy sentiment and its display (Schmitt and Clark, 2007, p. 467), i.e. it is an acceptance of others’ role, their sentiments, anticipation of their emotions and actions. Empathy is classified as bodily (physical sensation of others’ sentiments), emotional (experiencing of others’ feelings, understanding of others through emotions, for example sadness or anxiety) and cognitive (realization and understanding of another person’s state). Sympathy sentiment is connected to the type of empathy, emotional empathy mostly enables emergence of sympathy and compassion (Clark, 1987, p.

295). Sympathy display is the most important element of this feeling: “Without display, the emotion is a social outcome, but not a social force” (Clark, 1997, pp. 56-57), that is why “a sympathy display serves as one of many “little offerings” that affirm the recipient social worth, smooth human interaction and strengthen social bonds” (Schmitt and Clark, 2007, p. 472). For example, men and women usually follow different rules of sympathy display. Women to a greater extent “specialize” in sympathy, perform the corresponding sympathy work and care for others (Schmitt and Clark, 2007, p. 473).

Empathy as such does not necessarily cause emergence of sympathy that usually motivates helping behavior and care for another person (Davis, 1994). From the sociological point of view, it is interesting to note that between empathy and feeling of sympathy and correspondingly its display (which more likely motivates person’s helping behavior and care for another person) people can make judgements related to cultural notions, purposes, moral norms, as well as ascribe to somebody or something reasons of their own sentiments, make judgement related to situation, status, calculate profits and costs of their potential actions. It means that sympathy and compassion are not spontaneous, they are directed by emotional culture, which, in its turn, depends on general socio-cultural conditions. According to Clark, sentiment and display of sympathy is directed by rules and logic of “socio-emotional” economy (Clark, 1987). Sympathy is regulated by cultural rules and logic of social exchange that define the rules of reception and display of sympathy, and also sympathy can be used for achievement of one’s own purposes, status or power over others (Clark, 1997, p. 113). People estimate and in a certain way should estimate whom, when, how and to what extent to display sympathy, what are time and context, for example to a stranger on the day of commemoration of their dead relative (Schmitt and Clark, 2007, p. 473).

In other words, sympathy display complies with the cultural purpose of control over emotions (the imperative of emotion management), as well as (capitalist) logic of social exchange, and under these conditions sympathy can be seriously deficient resource. However, all of that does not mean that sympathy is only a “product”, logic of exchange can be different, for example, either proceed according to the beneficence principle, when another person deserves sympathy as a gift, or base on the principle of complementarity, as between relatives, or follow the principle of reciprocity – equivalent exchange of feelings. These principles can also be combined and contradict each other, for example reciprocal beneficence is the most probable form of sympathy exchange with a wide circle of strangers (Clark, 1997, pp. 134-140).

Clark speculates about sympathy etiquette or “micropolitics” of sympathy, the common rules of sympathy display that are conventional in the American society (Clark, 1997: 159); for example, not to perform insincere sympathy displays; not to display too much sympathy or accept it with too much willingness; return sympathy, if it was displayed by other person, etc. Also, by means of using economic metaphors, Clark identifies agents that direct sympathy exchange: those are sympathy entrepreneurs and sympathy brokers (Clark, 1997, p. 42). Entrepreneurs and brokers act on behalf of different communities and individuals (including Internet communities) and determine which misfortunes and sufferings deserve sympathy. Sometimes sympathy becomes successful business or political action, when used to someone’s benefit, for instance, social movements for the protection of indigenous rights (Schmitt, Clark, 2007, p. 473). These social agents of sympathy attempt to evaluate, influence and manipulate judgements and emotional display of those who feels or should feel sympathy. For example, they frequently define representatives

of which age, gender and status categories, as well as which problems and troubles deserve sympathy in people's minds (Clark, 1997, p. 82).

On the basis of the above, Clark identifies the main principles of sympathy display, for example, the special deprivation principle, which indicates that those people or groups that are deprived deserve sympathy, for example, disabled persons; the vulnerability principle: the weak deserve sympathy; as well as the potential principle: those who didn't have a chance to use opportunities, for example, children, deserve sympathy; the special burden principle that claims necessity of sympathy display to those who perform important social activities, for example, firefighters or doctors (Schmitt and Clark, 2007, p. 472). In this list of principles one can also find negative principles that specify those who don't deserve sympathy – privileged groups or people according to the balance of fortune principle, as well as those who consciously expose themselves to the risk (special responsibility principle), for example, smokers. Persons who are of value for the whole society or embody the key values (social worth principle), for example, Mother Teresa, deserve special sympathy. Obviously, these principles can also be combined and even contradict each other, depending on a social situation and cultural context.

In general, it can be said that sympathy display is regulated according to certain norms that reproduce economic and social exchange principles. Moreover, empathy is portrayed as spontaneous and innate feeling or emotion, while sympathy is social; therefore, empathy is more affected by social factors: on the one hand, increasing social differentiation, social and geographic mobility, urbanization, as well as emphasis on the values of success, impede display of empathy, because they narrow down the possibilities to see sufferings of others and thus to feel sympathy (Schmitt and Clark, 2007), and on the other hand, some institutions and organizations “promote” empathy and sympathy, for example religious and humanitarian organizations.

The following important issue remains unclear: do sympathy and different forms of its display enable social solidarity? Considering the pandemic situation, socio-emotional economics and sympathy politics will manifest in a peculiar manner. For example, digital capitalism will play bigger role, and consequently sympathy and compassion will be displayed through Internet mediators, and even bigger competition for platforms, where groups determine who and how should be sympathized more, is also possible. It is understandable that actions speak louder than feelings, however, the “work” of sympathy, even with the help of Internet mediators, as a result appears to be functional for the participants of interaction (Brownlie and Shaw, 2019). The issues of cultural differences in sympathy display and ways of combination of above-mentioned sympathy culture principles are also important.

Compassion is a more intense feeling than just sympathy and empathy, which even more likely motivates helping behavior: “It is a profoundly moral emotion” (Wilkinson, 2019: 73), aimed at coping with sufferings of other people and related to the notion of the common good. In some institutional orders this feeling is actively cultivated, for example, in the health care professional environment compassion is viewed as a part of emotion work that facilitates healing and recovery of patients (Neff and Vonk, 2009); also, for example, in teaching compassion and sympathy may enable learning efficiency, development of self-confidence, successful socialization (Zembylas, 2013). Compassion is a part of notions of social justice, ideologies of social movements and strategies of their activists. Liberalization was accompanied with the growth of compassion to vulnerable people and groups (Wouters, 2007), nowadays there is a widespread cultural attitude that people

should be compassionate, that it is an integral human quality (Wilkinson, 2018, pp. 81-83).

However, taking into account the emotional imperatives and above-mentioned cultural contradictions, one can say that in the late modern societies the observation of the so-called compassion fatigue at a micro- and macro-level of society (see, e.g. Figley, 2002; Sprang et al., 2007) becomes perfectly understandable, i.e. the established socio-cultural conditions destroy human kindness and disposition to care (Wilkinson, 2019: 75). As was already stated above, nowadays we live under socio-cultural conditions, in which inconsistency of experiencing and display of various feelings intensifies, and likewise compassion may increase and simultaneously decline (Wilkinson, 2018: 79). Human sufferings become a part of infotainment environment, disrupting moral sensitivity (Kleiman and Kleiman, 1996). On the one hand, there is a cooling of feelings, compassion fatigue, on the other hand, there is an emergence of opportunity of compassion to all the people across the globe, anywhere in the world, as well as to those who haven't been born yet. Nevertheless, a sign of the times is also compassion fatigue, burnout in combination with anxiety and worry, frequently the position of "detached observer" (Boltansky, 1999) increases moral insensitivity and consequently causes absence of specific actions in response to sufferings of other people.

Thus, empathy, sympathy and compassion are of great importance in the global pandemic situation, because they become a response to sufferings of other people, play role in support of social solidarity, helping behavior, motivate implementation of care for different categories of population. Experiencing and display of these feelings are influenced by socio-cultural conditions and aren't spontaneous but directed by socio-emotional economics. Sympathy and compassion are affected by contradictions of the emotional culture of late modernity and manifest unevenly, may increase and decline under the influence of new forms of communication, and moreover, are an object of manipulation from different interest groups.

In the current situation, it is quite important to implement care at every social level, whereas feelings of sympathy and compassion can be called "fuel" for the realization of effective care in every area of social life. However, even before the pandemic experts mentioned a "crisis of care" as a general characteristic of the present-day situation in the area of practices and relations of care (see Borozdina *et al.*, 2019: 9-12), which manifested itself in the crisis of traditional female roles, deficiency of care in private and public sphere, etc. This crisis was partially the consequence of total commodification of care, including its emotional component, and introduction of neoliberal management principles. Which feelings motivate care at the moment and what modification will they undergo in the present and in the near future? This is the question that is important for confrontation with global processes initiated by the new virus pandemic. Here compassion is an ethical category and morally right and necessary emotion (Pulcini, 2017).

We have already mentioned that empathy, according to the opinions of various experts (Davis, 1994), represents an important component of sympathy or compassion (as key action motivators regarding care), but is a morally neutral feeling in relation to care. In the course of analysis of different sources Elena Pulcini classifies care as personal or private, when it is based on love, affection or family relations; as professional care in private and public sphere of society, when it is implemented by professionals and various kinds of specialists for people who are not relatives or significant others; and also a new kind of care that can be called global, which is care for strangers who may be far away, anywhere in the world (Pulcini, 2017, p. 66). The latter kind of care is especially interesting, because, to a certain

extent, it reflects global mutual dependence and universal human identity, and most importantly, the recent events reflect this close global interdependence and common problems, threats and turmoil. Global measurement of care, compassion, spreads through space and time to distant other and future generations.

However, Pulcini notes the same inconsistency that is established in the modern emotional culture: compassion is increasingly more displayed through mediating role of media, where emotions are manipulated, where we become spectators of affective performance and rhetoric instead of real feelings, which lead to helping behavior and care (Pulcini, 2017, p. 69). The researcher believes, taking cue from Luc Boltanski, that it is important to apply “politics of pity”, which is able to counteract moral individualism and atomization of the modern societies, compassion fatigue and activate and support compassion to distant other and “empathic fear” for future generations, far from us in time, feelings that emerged due to global interdependence of all the people across the globe. That is to say, the modern emotional culture is extremely contradictory, and it is not known whether the sentiments that became active in the pre-viral and viral age would lead to new kinds of solidarity in the future, solution or escalation of the crisis of care. Besides, we would like to add that in this context *one more kind of care is also important – it is self-care* that paradoxically reflects the pandemic situation, under the conditions of which this care is effective along with self-isolation, as well as individualism and moral ambiguity of modern people, who have to make many decisions in various situations and choose for whom to care first: for themselves or for the others.

In other words, it is important to understand how socio-emotional economics and sympathy politics will change under the conditions of the global pandemic and, accordingly, already digital emotional culture and capitalism. Probably we will have to be effectively compassionate online, all the more so, because the imperative of rational emotion management remains in place, and Internet resources emerge, where you can learn the ways of compassion display<sup>3</sup>.

## Conclusion

From our point of view, the crisis connected to the pandemic may facilitate a certain manner of resolution of paradoxes and contradictions of the modern emotional culture. Moral individualism became the principal guideline system of the modern world. However, the second key factor was a global event – a catastrophe in the form of the pandemic, when actually a revision of social norms and connections takes place. In which manner will cultural configurations be constructed? Will the imperatives of the late modern emotional culture remain the same? The emotional imperatives cause social consequences in terms of spreading of different behavior types, characterize the state of social connections, etc. That is why during and after the pandemic people will probably follow, for example, the imperative of rational emotion management: for instance, they will search new ways of coping with anxiety, fears, stress, addressing specialists and corresponding literature. It demonstrates “effect” of emotional culture, because, for example, it is not always functional to cope with anxiety, since it indicates indeterminacy, risks and mobilizes. It is also connected to the imperative of happiness, avoidance of “negative”

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<sup>3</sup> Compassion in Action: 15 Easy Ways to Spread Kindness by *Sara Schairer*, Founder and Executive Director of Compassion It. Available from <https://chopra.com/articles/compassion-in-action-15-easy-ways-to-spread-kindness> (Accessed, April 20, 2020).

emotions. From this point of view, it is interesting to know how constant communication with significant others during self-isolation will affect the kinds of emotion work in private sphere.

Perhaps the excessive emphasis on happiness, pleasure and positive emotions will not only become obsolete, but just impossible in the context of common disaster. On the other hand, moral individualism can't disappear in an instant: moral difficulties with sympathy and compassion demonstration, implementation of various kinds of care, including self-care. At the moment, many societies probably face a moral dilemma: either to leave behind economics of high consumption, comfort, pleasures and care for other, not only those who exist now anywhere in the world, but also for future generations, or to follow one's individual desires, maintain extreme autonomy and detachment, pursue one's own interests without care for others, encourage one's own insensitivity and fatigue with feelings to other people. Some forecasts on the future after the pandemic sound optimistic: there may be emergence of new forms of solidarity, strengthening of moral rules of mutual aid, etc. Indeed, the pandemic enables review of moral rules, however, in such a case, it increases their indeterminacy. For example, the crisis of care and moral individualism, which developed even before the pandemic, now escalate. Whom to care for, how and whom to express sympathy and compassion? For example, self-care is an undoubtedly important moral prescription, because when we care for ourselves in the current situation, we thereby care for the others. On the other hand, if we do NOT at least be compassionate, sympathize and at most care for any human, we will face great problems and sufferings, because the pandemic has showed to what extent we depend on each other on a global scale. This moral ambiguity probably leads to formation of new moral notions of how to be compassionate, sympathize and what to do in a such complicated modern world.

Therefore, it is possible to formulate the following list of questions in the context of the topic of this article (regarding emotional culture) that deserve attention and are important for study by the specialists from different branches of science, who are involved in the research of emotions. Firstly, it is absolutely unclear what emotional capitalism will be like, what kinds of commercialized emotion management will there be and how emotion consumption will change technologically. How will manipulation of consumers' emotion modify? Secondly, it is important to study changes and transformations of norms that regulate emotion management, because this kind of interaction reflects the state of social connections and has functional consequences for social order in general. Regarding the previous question: will there be new forms of commercialization of emotion work, for example, with anxiety and fears? Will rationalization and coldness in relation to feelings remain an important tool for achievement of cultural purposes? Hence, how will emotion work change in close relations and other spheres, as well as in digital communities?

Further on quite difficult for sociology topic becomes relevant: the topic of human sufferings, their collective comprehension and partially cultural construction are important resources for coping with current difficulties and development of the future prospects. As for separate specific emotional sentiments, it should be noted that there will be important topics connected to emergence of new forms of solidarity and care for other people at every level of social structure and, accordingly, the respective feelings, such as empathy, sympathy and compassion. How will the contradiction between naturalness and necessity of these feelings and their rational management, burnout, cooling of these feelings, characteristic for complex mass societies be resolved? Will compassion become the most important imperative?

It is necessary to continue the studies of such complicated feeling as nostalgia (the imperative of nostalgia), because this feeling may be functional in relation to search of means of coping with the challenges of the current situation, indicate those that were effective in the past. Grief also becomes highlighted, because it is connected to sufferings and the way in which society regulates experiencing and display of feelings related to grief and mourning. Moreover, the global social crisis is connected not only to the feelings of compassion, but also to the emergence of righteous indignation at various kinds of injustice, which may result in political consequences in the situation of emergency quarantine and isolation. Other questions can undoubtedly be raised. What will the future be like? What emotional norms will establish first of all? The fate of solidarity, new forms of inequality, conflicts and mass behavior from the perspective of research of emotions as a form of the comprehension of the future will at least partially allow to overcome uncertainties and complexity of the modern world.

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