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## A Cross-Cultural Study on the Conceptualization and Expression of Emotions Across Diverse Societies Through Case Reports

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## ABSTRACT

This work examines the role of culture in the construction and understanding of emotions, focusing on tradition, language and social customs. Drawing on qualitative data obtained through phone interviews with two individuals from different academic and cultural backgrounds, the study demonstrates how emotional phenomena, specifically in regard to funerals, culturally shaped expectations. While one participant framed collective mourning as a cathartic emotional expression, the second participant described a culture that socialized people into silence, emphasizing emotional control in public mourning which was regarded as dignified strength and respect. These contrasting views illustrate the monotropy paradox, the variability of emotional expression and the diversity of cultures that shaped each of them. This paper goes on to analyze the roles of upbringing, religion or social conditioning in the inculcation of particular emotions. The results made evident the socially constructed reality of emotions and the need for scholars to approach multicultural differences in emotions especially now when intercultural understanding and empathy is needed more than ever.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Emotions; Emotional Expression; Interview; Diverse Experiences

## Introduction

Emotions are a deep part of the human experience and at the same time, they are something everyone goes through. Customs, nationality and culture shaped emotions to be a part of every single person's life. From a biological standpoint, emotions are felt by humans without any need to process the decision to feel them. While each culture has its own practices and ways of interpreting the methods and ways emotions are conveyed, those understanding practices cannot be understood in the same sense across the world.

Looking into the distinct custom, this study sought to investigate certain practices within a culture across the globe. Understanding why people do different things helps in shedding light on the definition of emotions and the standards at which the parameters of those emotions are accepted.

In order to accomplish this goal, two remote interviews were conducted for this study whereby each case focuses on a specific culture and its emotional frameworks. Defining dual paradigms with concrete illustration systems enhances the scope at which theoretical explanations can be viewed along with practical

application which is particularly useful given the nature of the task.

## Methodology and Data

To comprehend how people from various cultures perceive and express emotions, this research conducted semi-structured interviews, employing a qualitative method. This approach was effective for the research objectives because it accounts for personal and subjective stories as well as emotional expression within the context of culture.

This type of interview made it possible for some level of flexibility. Participants were free to discuss their experiences and understanding of particular emotions as they pleased while still being prompted by a set of questions. This approach was beneficial in retrieving rich data beyond the questions.

## Participants

- Participant 1:** 25 years old and a PhD research fellow based in Coimbatore, India, she studied English literature. She provided an insightful answer that showcased an understanding and reflection of emotions that was both personal and intellectual.
- Participant 2:** 23 years old and studied medicine in Russia. His insights were a blend from cultural upbringing and medical education. His perspective was practical yet emotionally nuanced.

Interviews were conducted via Mobile phone, ensuring accessibility and convenience for both participants. Each conversation lasted approximately 20 to 35 minutes.

Areas explored during the interviews included:

- Definitions and personal interpretations of emotions.
- Cultural norms surrounding emotional expression.
- The role of family, education and society in emotional development.
- Common emotional phrases or gestures used within their respective cultures.

## Findings

The interviews highlighted many important themes which show how personal experience, education and culture impact the perception and expression of emotions. Even though both participants had similar emotions, their interpretations and expressions were shaped differently due to their culture and field of study.

In the context of expressing emotions during funerals, both the participants have divergent views which can be attributed to their culture. Participant 1 remarked that in her culture, funerals are accompanied by open crying and wailing. Loud vocal mourning is both permitted and regarded as an essential part of emotional release. Mourning is a collective experience that is supportive in nature (**Figures 1 and 2**).

As a counterexample, participant 2 pointed out that funerals within his culture tend to be more somber in nature where people are expected to hide their grief and refrain from public displays of mourning as a sign of respect. Expression of grief is often restrained and feelings of sorrow are expressed in more covert or figurative ways. These differing reactions highlight the impact of culture on the responses shaped by individuals in the context of loss.

## Understanding of emotions

The research scholar described emotions in a very specific manner as being “deeply contextual and often shaped by cultural learning and social interactions.” They made sure to point out that emotions go beyond psychological stimulus response systems and ascribe to a society’s culture which differs from one era to another.



**Figures 1 and 2:** Web-Images of Funerals Depicted by the Interviewees based on their cultural settings

The MBBS student, offered a different perspective and described emotions as “biochemical and neurological responses” which enable humans to react and adapt to various circumstances. While he somewhat accepted the cultural factor, he leaned more towards the biological aspect because of his prior medical education.

## Expression of emotions

The research scholar described the emotion-related phenomena of sadness and vulnerability in the open display of feelings in their culture as being markedly absent, especially in public settings. They placed importance on both discretion and emotional control, remarking that these traits indicate a deeper social understanding and growing maturity.

The Medical student noticed that emotional display, especially within his age group, is relatively freer. Peers accept the expression of joy, anger and even frustration although it is still tempered by familial expectations and workplaces.

## Cultural influences

The research scholar pointed out the still prevalent cultural taboos around the expression of fear or romantic love toward family which is often under-expressed. He, however, noted that the younger population seems to be moving toward more expression. The Medical student spoke about how the customs, rituals, community values and ethos of a people heavily impact the show of emotions.

## Discussion

The results of this study reiterate the anthropologically and sociologically constructed nature of emotions and supports the argument made by cultural anthropologists and psychologists that emotional experiences and their expressions are not biologically fixed but are significantly shaped by the sociocultural environment<sup>1,2</sup>. Through the narratives of both the participants, it becomes evident that emotions such as grief, though universally experienced, are interpreted and outwardly expressed in culturally specific ways.

First participant’s description of funeral rites in her community

indicates the presence of a cultural system which, as Markus and Kitayama<sup>2</sup> noted, falls within the frame of a “collectivist culture,” one where the self is interdependent. Relations are characterized by association as far as emotions are expressed in a harmonious manner within the social group and identity. Public mourning, in this case, crying aloud, embracing, vocal lamentation, as she describes it, portrays the externalization of feelings for the purpose of collective healing. The journey of mourning in this case is a social ritual rather than an individual emotional pilgrimage. It is performed within the bounds of the community and in fact is performed with community endorsement, acceptance and expectation. These are the forms of expression which Catherine Lutz<sup>1</sup> described, saying emotions are “cultural phenomena par excellence,” embedded and structured in local moral orders and therefore their social values.

In the second participant’s case, he accounts a story that is more collective and oriented rather than individualistic culture which is more personal in nature. This focuses on the cultural aspects of emotions as the functions become optional and restricted to the internal realm or to everlasting control especially in social contexts. Considered as part of his Western learning education and culture, he sees displaying grief by way of celebration as excessive or inappropriate and gives rise to calmer and more thoughtful modes to respond to loss. This aligns with Ekman’s<sup>3</sup> display rules theory, which argue boundaries of cultures determine that which is deemed appropriate or permissible to be displayed, ranging through a specified catalogue of emotions, but also the charges which they are articulated. While the biological capability of feeling emotions might be universal, cultures define the rules of how emotions are articulated, those rules capture the reality in both the participants views.

Also, education seems to intervene as a variable in the rationalization and verbalization of emotions among the participants. It is plausible that the medical student’s internalization preference stems from his culture, along with his education in philosophy and psychology that values self-regulation and reflective coping, emotional intelligence and self-therapy. It shows the strong influence of academics on culture, which alongside traditional approaches, can result in diverse, blended or hybrid emotional frameworks.

The difference of these two participants sheds light to an ongoing debate in cross-cultural psychology regarding the balance between common denominators of human emotion and the culturally specific ways of expressing them. There have been advocates, such as Ekman, who are on the side of universal biologically rooted ones. Other scholars like Lutz and Abu-Lughod<sup>4</sup> counter the universality notion with arguments of socially, linguistically or ethically constructed reasoning behind emotions. Given these theories, the findings from this study stand out to be that the expression of emotions cannot be understood apart from its culture, education and social frame. Both the participants present viable models of grieving which are culturally anchored and serve different psychological and social purposes.

Understanding this diversity is crucial inter-culturally as social support systems need to adapt to the customful emotional grammars of the diverse communities.

This discussion also reinforces that emotions go beyond being simply internal states - they are cultural performances shaped by social norms, expectations and learned actions. Hence, to understand emotions requires relating and connecting to the cultural frameworks.

## Conclusion

Although these emotions are universal, the methods of interpreting them are entrenched in deep culture, language and social structure. Two people from different cultural and academic backgrounds is what this study aimed at. The two case studies demonstrated that emotion is not simply a personal sentiment but, rather, a social communicative tool refined through socialization, education, long-standing customs and the environment in which one lives.

The case of participant 1 provided an angle that elaborated on how emotions are formed and controlled by societal values. Together with second participant’s more personal narrative shaped by his medicine training, they managed to uncover the balance between emotional authenticity and cultural expectation, feeling and expression, knowing and showing.

This study serves as a major reminder to us about the need to attend to emotional differences in cultural contexts. In our rapidly globalizing society, understanding how people feel, as well as how they express their feelings, goes beyond mere empathy; it is a crucial element of human connection. Understanding the cultural frameworks within which emotions are understood helps us work toward a more respectful and compassionate society with greater emotional intelligence.

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