Emotional Maturity and the Impact on Forgiveness in Families and Relationships

Tori James
Department of Communication

Western Carolina UNIVERSITY

EMOTIONS & FORGIVENESS

Emotions are a natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.

Forgiveness is the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven.

Emotional maturity is when someone can manage their emotions no matter the circumstances.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Emotions are directly correlated with the ability for someone who has been wronged to forgive the other party. Often families have a hard time expressing emotions. This can look like sharing too much information or sharing too little. These inabilities to properly handle emotions can result in passive aggressive behaviors, tension, and miscommunication in the home.

Families who struggle to express emotions often project those inabilities to children. Children learn from their parents' actions and mimic the lack of emotional maturity in conflict or relationships with others.

Conflict might cause a relationship to need forgiveness, but those emotions prevent forgiveness from happening. Negative emotions can translate into bitterness, sadness, depression, lack of trust, or the loss of a relationship.

The inability to forgive in one relationship can project into others due to the hurt caused by the action needing to be forgiven. Those who have an inability to forgive may find new relationships daunting and avoid them.

Matsumoto, Yoo, and Nakagawa (2008) claim that suppression of emotions have been associated with less social closeness, while reappraisal has been associated with sharing emotions, closer relationships, and more social support.

Figure 1. Two friends are in a conflict. Friend 1 in the red has been hurt by Friend 2 in the purple. Friend 2 is seeking forgiveness, but Friend 1 is lacking emotional maturity. Friend 1 uses passive aggressive behavior toward Friend 2, which results in a damaged friendship between the two.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Different cultures are subject to different ways of showing emotions and handling forgiveness. Culture is defined as the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group. Factors that influence the emotions, responses, and coping mechanisms of others are gender, personality, culture, ethnicity, and familial background.

Individualistic cultures tend to foster independence of oneself. Independent individuals tend to keep their emotions to themselves and handle them privately. Collectivistic cultures tend to foster interdependence with each other. Interdependent individuals tend to share their emotions publicly to friends and family.
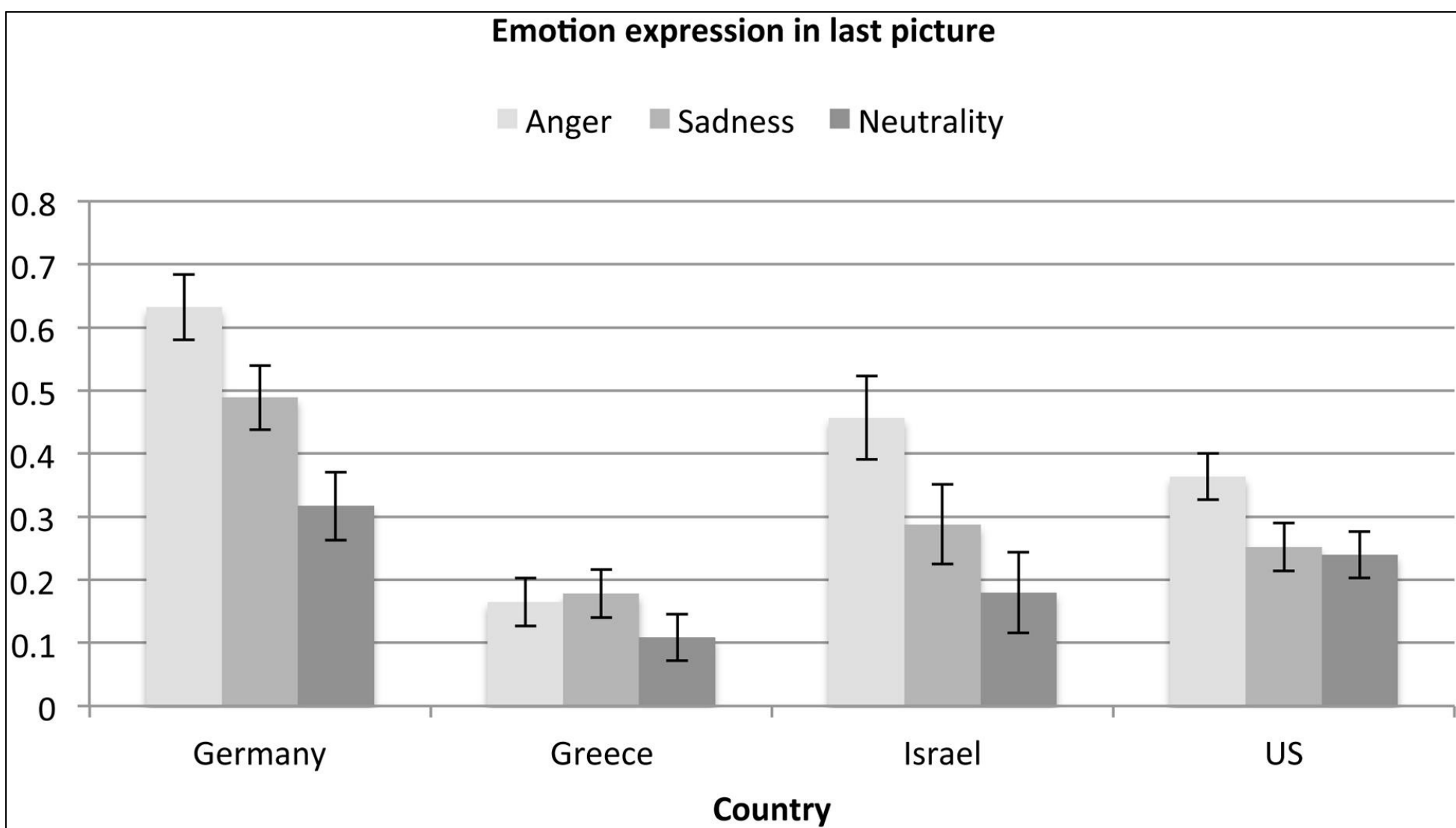

Figure 2. A study conducted by Hareli, Kafetsios, and Hess about the cultural differences with emotion perception and expression. This figure shows the level of emotions expressed across different cultures.

Lim (2016) claimed the difference in how happiness was expressed across different cultures was dependent upon two factors. The first factor is if the culture is individualistic or collectivistic. The second factor is if the culture responds to high arousal or low arousal.

Individualistic cultures value individual needs over a group. These cultures are viewed as more independent and autonomous. Their expressed behaviors are individualized. Collectivistic cultures prioritize group needs over an individual. These cultures are viewed as more dependent. Expressed behaviors of this culture are centralized to the needs and wants of the group rather than the individual. American culture is individualistic, while Asian culture is collectivistic.

Asian culture expresses more low arousal emotions for happiness through being peaceful, reserved, and relaxed. American culture expresses higher arousal behavior for happiness such as excitement and enthusiasm.

Cross-culture emotion expression can influence the productivity or lack of productivity of a conversation. This is determined by nonverbal messages and the individual versus group dynamic.

HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Healthy conflict is possible when two emotionally mature individuals convey their emotions in a productive and insightful manner. Collaborative conflict styles are the most productive and successful when expressing concern. Collaborative styles are those who sit down with others and have a civilized conversation about their emotions.

Avoidant and aggressive conflict styles are toxic to the relationship and can further the conflict at hand. Conflict is inevitable, therefore, use it to clear resentment, clarify goals, and set healthy boundaries with one another. Conflict stems from perceived incompatible goals that must be addressed by each party. Set or reevaluating goals to prevent further conflict over the same issues.

Studies	High arousal emotions	Low arousal emotions
Russell (1980)[24]	Afraid, alarmed, angry, annoyed, aroused, astonished, delighted, distressed, excited, frustrated, glad, happy, tense	At ease, bored, calm, contented, depressed, droopy, gloomy, miserable, pleased, relaxed, sad, satisfied, serene, sleepy, tired
Feldman (1993)[51]	Afraid, enthusiastic, nervous, peppy	Calm, relaxed, sleepy, sluggish
Tsai (2007)[36]	Elated, enthusiastic, excited, fearful, hostile, nervous	Calm, dull, peaceful, relaxed, sleepy, sluggish
Suh & Koo (2011)[32]	Irritated, joyful	Helpless, peaceful

Figure 3. The following table represents the different expressions of emotions based on low or high arousal cultures.

Gender is a huge factor in the way emotions are expressed and how conflict is handled. Feminine personalities tend to be more compassionate and empathetic during conversations. Masculine personalities tend to attempt fixing the situation and suppressing emotions to move on.

According to The Harvard Gazette (2016), men are more likely than women to make amends with those they have conflict with. Women tend to feel more threatened and hurt after conflict with one another. Men are more aggressive and forward, but have an easier time letting go and moving on.

Moving forward, whether masculine or feminine personality types, everyone must remain open minded, actively listen, and express empathy to resolve conflict in a progressive and intellectual manner.

FORGIVENESS IS *Freedom*

PRACTICE EMOTIONAL MATURITY

Emotional maturity is not a mastered skill. Having control over one's emotions requires continuous practice for those people striving to live a happier, more inviting life. Closing emotions off from others or sharing too much can result in the loss of a relationship and trust. Trust is no easy task, but it begins with a mental battle of allowing others in.

There are several resources local and remote that offer guidance to forgiveness, emotional wellbeing, and various other topics that can result from the inability to be emotionally mature. Here are some basic steps to consider when battling to forgive or let someone into your emotions:

- **Take Responsibility**

Do not blame others when a situation arises

Seek to find a way to improve the situation

- **Show Empathy**

Connect and relate to others by putting yourself in their shoes

Seek to support and connect with those around you

- **Own Your Mistakes**

Do not make excuses and own when you do something that hurts someone else

Acknowledge you are not perfect

- **Be Unafraid of Vulnerability**

Do not fear sharing intimate or difficult things with others

Be honest with others about your emotions

- **Recognize and Accept Needs**

Realize your limits and when you need a break

- **Set Healthy Boundaries**

Stand up for yourself and others

Knowing your wants and needs and how to address those

References

1. Butler, E. A., Lee, T. L., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Emotion regulation and culture: are the social consequences of emotion suppression culture-specific?. *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, 7(1), 30–48. https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.7.1.30
2. Hareli, S., Kafetsios, K., Hess, U. (2015). A cross-cultural study on emotion expression and the learning of social norms. *Frontiers in Psychology.* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01501
3. Legg, T. (2020). Emotional Maturity: What it Looks Like. *healthline.* https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/emotional-maturity
4. Lim, N. (2016). Cultural differences in emotion: Differences in emotional arousal level between the East and the West. *Integrative Medicine Research*, 5(2), 105–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imr.2016.03.004
5. Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & Nakagawa, S. (2008). Culture, emotion regulation, and adjustment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(6), 925–937. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.925
6. Writer, P. R. H. S. (2016, August 8). Resolving conflict: Men vs. women. *Harvard Gazette.* https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2016/08/resolving-conflict-men-vs-women/