

**SOCIO-EMOTIONAL
ECONOMY AND AN
INCLUSIVE CULTURE: HOW
CAN SYMPATHY BE
EXPRESSED IN THE MODERN
WORLD?**

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PLAN

- **The problem: the contradiction between the socioemotional economy of sympathy and inclusive culture, policy, and practice in contemporary society .**
- **The commercialization of emotion, on one hand, and the imperative of compassion on the other.**
- **How a socioemotional economy of sympathy and an inclusive culture fit together in the context of global events (theoretical perspective)? What is about alienation in that context?**
- **How do we explore the role of compassion in the context of inclusive culture, policy, and practice? The fields of (health)caring, volunteering, and education.**

EMOTIONAL CULTURE OF LATE-MODERN SOCIETIES AND ITS IMPERATIVES

- The emotional culture of society - the of values and norms concerning the experience and expression of emotions
- The commercialization and rationalization of the emotional sphere ("emotional capitalism," see e.g., Illouz, 2007), which is largely a consequence of consumer culture, neoliberal ideology, uncertainty and risks as special features of late capitalism.
- Some special features of modern emotional culture: psychologization and individualization of emotional experience; rational control of emotions, avoidance of negative feelings and others.
- A particular emotional "coldness," feeling fatigue in modern urbanized society (see, e.g., Simmel, 2018; Wilkinson, 2019): **how to express sympathy in modern society?**
- A political economy of sympathy and the imperative of compassion.
- The ability to sympathize turns into a measure of how much of a human being I am at all. It is a particular sensitivity to compassion, a norm according to which one monitors how compassionate people are in a given situation and sanctions are applied, a moral evaluation of behavior is given.

SYMPATHY AS PART OF THE MORAL ECONOMY OF CAPITALISM

- In this context, there is often an increased focus on feelings of empathy, sympathy, and compassion as "micro-social" forces of social solidarity.
- The impersonal and distant transmission of sympathy **via Internet helpers** and the expression of empathy, sympathy and compassion online **is increasing**.
- Different groups and arenas are multiplying and competing in the digital space, setting the agenda about who is more deserving of sympathy and how it should be experienced and expressed.
- Some experts argue that in today's world there are sociocultural conditions that erode human kindness and predisposition to care, reinforcing a moral insensitivity to the suffering of others, such as “compassion fatigue” (Wilkinson, 2019; Boltansky, 1999).
- Human suffering has become part of the information and entertainment environment.

THE RATIONALIZATION/COMMERCIALIZATION OF SYMPATHY AND AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- The problem is that contemporary varieties of sympathy culture cultivate emotions that promote individualism, commercialization of feelings, and fatigue with expressions of sympathy.
- The expressions of sympathy and compassion are subject to the commercial or economic logic of exchange often referred to as the "political economy of sympathy" (Clark, 1997; Boltansky, 1999 etc.).
- It is this social-exchange dynamic of expressions of sympathy that is generally at odds with the values and attitudes of an inclusive culture?
- Sympathy and compassion, on the one hand, are present in the values and norms of the culture of inclusion, and, on the other hand, they are irregularly manifested in the practice of relations between people and in relations with representatives of vulnerable groups (migrants, refugees, the disabled, victims of various disasters, the terminally ill, addicted people, etc.).

THE QUESTIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROBLEM

- **How do emotional capitalism and inclusive culture combine in today's world?**
- **How are inclusion social policies provided in modern society, where individualism and personal autonomy are more often promoted in individuals (Barbalet, 2019)?**
- **May a contemporary moral economy of sympathy be dysfunctional for inclusive culture, politics, and practice?**
- **Does contemporary inclusive culture and social policy need to cultivate and express empathy, sympathy, and compassion in special ways?**
- **Do inclusive cultures and policies favor the expression of sympathy and compassion and consequently caring and helping behavior?**
- **To what extent do contemporary forms of experiencing and expressing sympathy and compassion contribute to inclusive culture and practice?**

SYMPATHY IN MODERN WORLD

- **C. Clark defines a sympathy as a set of emotions directed at other(s) and associated with her/his/their pain and suffering. It is a sense of regret, sadness and concern in relation to people in trouble, difficult situation (Clark, 1997: 44).**
- **Sympathy includes empathy as a necessary component, the conscious experience of regret (sympathy sentiment) and its expression (display) (Schmitt, Clark, 2007).**
- **Between empathy and sympathy sentiment and their expression, people can make judgments that are related to cultural values and norms, attribute reasons for their experiences to someone or something, and calculate the benefits and costs of their possible actions.**
- **Sympathy is not spontaneous, but is subject to a social logic of exchange, according to which not everyone always deserves sympathy, its expression, and the corresponding helping/caring behavior.**
- **Sympathy can be used to achieve self-interest, status, or power over others (Clark, 1997).**

COMPASSION: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

- Empathy - feeling sorry - expressing or not expressing – acting or not acting
- From empathy to compassion: this process is accompanied by moral judgments that are related to the cultural ideals of a given society as well as to a given context or situation.

Judgments potentially leading or not leading to compassion (M. Nussbaum, 1996):

- recognition of the seriousness of suffering;
- belief in the innocence of the sufferer (that he or she is not guilty of his or her suffering);
- similarity of the sufferer and the helper.

Moral dilemmas affecting the experience and expression of compassion:

- caring for the other and caring for oneself;
- representations of the sufferer/vulnerable people and real-life situations;
- the identity/similarity of the receiver of compassion and the identity of the giver.

COMPASSION: FEATURES AND SPECIFICS

- Compassion is an emotional-cognitive complex, a conscious experience and expression of sympathy, an understanding of the conditions that cause suffering.
- Compassion is the most intense form of sympathy, which contains empathy, feelings of regret, and expressions of sympathy.
- As a value compassion does not require that the sufferer's innocence and linked to concern for the other and social justice.

Institutional inclusiveness or practices can and usually do foster sympathy and compassion. But:

- The discourse of compassion is ambivalent: from radical caring to calculating the merit of help and sympathy
- Compassion is unstable: it can intensify, weaken, and disappear depending on the situation.
- Compassion is not always in demand, is not always perceived positively, and sometimes leads to alienation and feelings of envy and shame.

ANSWERS?

- The attitudes and values of an inclusive culture can both increase the amount (or level) of compassion, sympathy, empathy and decrease this level.
- **Sympathy and compassion can be not only sources of solidarity and assistance, but also a power resource, contributing to the maintenance of inequalities, drawing boundaries between society and groups of socially vulnerable people.**
- The digital environment to some extent facilitates an information getting and consequently creates opportunities of an acceptance of inclusive attitudes and values (Brownlie, Shaw, 2019).
- **But often sympathy turns into a successful business or political action when used for someone else's benefit (Schmitt, Clark, 2007).**

HOW DO WE EXPLORE THE ROLE OF COMPASSION IN THE CONTEXT OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE, POLICY, AND PRACTICE?

- Sociological reflection on types of suffering and their social consequences.
- Discourses on people and groups «deserving» and «undeserving» of compassion: verbal markers, meanings, moral judgments and dilemmas;
- Arenas and agents of compassion politics: digital platforms and competition, the rhetoric of compassion;
- The ethnography of «compassion-in-action» : changing perceptions and norms of caring and helping behavior;
- Compassion and forms of its management: social contexts, texts, discussions, debates.
- Inclusive culture as "communicative and participatory" democracy and discourses about Otherness: a transition from the categorization of problems to the identification of vulnerable groups.
- Compassion and opposing emotional experiences: pity, fear, envy, shame in contexts of inclusive practice.

WHO DESERVES COMPASSION: STRATEGIES FOR "SOLVING" MORAL AMBIVALENCE

- It is necessary to examine not only perceptions (values, ideals) and norms of experiencing and expressing compassion, but also how they change under the influence of the social context or situation – **"in action"**
- It is possible to classify the strategies of "showing" compassion and the strategies of "receiving" compassion - in social situations within the overall context of an inclusive culture or policy, where expressions can range from verbal expressions to helping behavior.

For example, refugee volunteers' strategies for overcoming the ambivalence of compassion (Maestri, Monforte, 2020):

- **Shifting responsibility to large groups and organizations: government and NGOs;**
- **Refraining and avoiding the assessment of the merit of assistance;**
- **Justifying the sufferer (his rudeness, deviant behavior, ingratitude, etc.) through his «trauma of the past».**