

Appraisal and emotion regulation in anger situations: Differences between Spanish and Romanian women

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the differences between a sample of Spanish women and another sample of Romanian women in terms of appraisal, use of emotional regulation strategies and the time it takes to regulate anger situations. Results showed significant differences between the two samples in the frequency of occurrence when facing episodes of anger. In addition, Spanish women exhibited more active physiology, social isolation, self-control and discharge when regulating these situations, while Romanian women showed greater use of behavioural distraction, inhibition and suppression.

Keywords: Emotion regulation; appraisal; anger; Spanish and Romanian women

1. Introduction

1.1. Emotion regulation, appraisal and cultural differences

During the last decades, emotion regulation studies have received increased interest (see Gross, 2015; Gross & Thompson, 2007, for an overview). Although the concept of emotion regulation comes along with some challenges for researchers (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004), some authors have overcome the task of finding suitable models to help explain the emotion regulatory process (e.g. Gross & Barrett, 2011; Morris, Robinson, & Eisenberg, 2005; Frijda, 1986). The models of appraisal for instance, suggest that emotions are shaped by the subjective evaluation that the individual makes in response to the stimulus or the situation (Frijda, 1986). Thus, the intensity of the emotion and the choice of strategy will partly depend on how significant the event that generates it is (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Siemer, Mauss, & Gross, 2007; Oriol, X., Filella, G., & Calucho, 2013).

Working within this same framework of appraisal models, some studies conducted among different countries showed that some aspects of emotion seem to be universal. In this sense, Scherer (1997) carried out a study in 37 countries and he noticed that the subjective evaluation patterns of certain emotions, such as joy, anger, fear or sadness, were similar for all the countries. More recent studies have found that facial expression also has a universal foundation in emotions like anger, contempt, disgust, joy, sadness and surprise (Matsumoto, 2001).

Interestingly enough, however, there is an agreement in the fact that the effects of cultural processes also involve differences in the way they are expressed (Ekman &

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Friesen, 1971). According to Matsumoto & Kuppertsbusch (2001), cultural differences in emotional expression occur because members of different cultures learn to have different emotional reactions to stimuli or events. Many other authors agree that this vision concerning emotional processes would be mediated by the context and the culture, and therefore culture may have a great influence in the generation of emotional processes (Barrett, 2006; Mesquita, 2003; Mesquita and Albert, 2006; Mesquita & Leu, 2007). It is only logic then, that the regulatory strategies and resources used in the emotional process are also mediated by these socio-cultural factors.

Despite of this evidence, relatively few studies have focused on culture specific differences in the regulation of certain emotions, such as anger. Therefore, this study will try to help shedding some light on the matter.

1.1. The concept of emotion regulation

When we refer to emotion regulation we mean the modulation (increase, maintain or decrease) of any kind of emotional response including expressive experience and behavior (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Goldsmith & Davidson, 2004; Gross, 2015; Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). From the many models of emotional regulation (Bonanno, 2001; Forgas & Ciarrochi, 2002; Higgins, Grant & Shah, 1999; Gross & Thompson, 2007; Larsen, 2000, amongst others) one of the most significant is important the Gross and Thompson's model (2007). These authors describe strategies involving cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression, that is, inhibition of the expression of the emotions.

Cognitive reappraisal takes place before there is an emotional reaction and it involves changes at a cognitive level and the suppression of negative emotions, which in turn involves the inhibition of emotional expression (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Thompson, 2007). According to the authors, suppression is associated with lower closeness to others and reduced social support, while cognitive reappraisal is associated with an increased emotional interchange, stronger relationships, and an increased social support (Butler, Lee, & Gross., 2007; John & Gross, 2004).

Studies with large cross-cultural samples show differences in both reappraisal and suppression among countries. In a study by Matsumoto and colleagues (2008) with a sample of 3,258 respondents of 22 different countries, for example, results revealed clear significant differences in reappraisal and suppression among the different countries of the study. This results supported previous literature findings (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2003; Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004; Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005).

1.2. Appraisal and regulation of anger

Anger is defined as an emotion which is characterized by subjective feelings that can vary on intensity, ranging from discomfort or irritation to a fury or intense rage (Potegal et al., 2010). According to a number of studies, it is one of the most intense negative emotions (Feldman Barret, Gross, Conner Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2011) and it has the greatest impact on social relationships (Lazarus, 1996).

Anger is one of the so-called primary emotions (e.g. Ekman, 1984; Frijda, 1986; Izard, 1977; Weiner, 1986). Averill (1983) was one of the pioneers in studying the antecedents, the experiences and the reactions of anger. He pointed out that anger should be understood as a complete emotional response and therefore, it does not always inevitably lead to aggression, although according to many studies, there can be several negative effects or consequences, such as cardiovascular disorders (Palmero, Díez, & Breva, 2001; Siegman & Smith, 1994) or even cancer (Johnson, 1990).

Regarding the etiology of anger, there is no consensus about which type of situations necessarily lead to anger (e.g. Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1996). Despite the existent difficulties, however, some authors have attempted to generalize its causes. Ellis and Tafrate (1999), for example, concluded that there are two main

reasons why anger is experienced: the first one concerns those situations when things do not happen in the way one would like to happen. The second refers to those moments when somebody does not treat us as well as we think we deserve to be treated. Differently, Scherer (1997) established that anger is caused by events that are valued as immoral and as obstacles for the achievement of personal goals.

Interestingly enough, Kuppens and colleagues (2003; 2007) examined the type of appraisal that is related to the emotion of anger. Results showed that anger has a distinctive pattern of appraisal than other emotions like fear, shame or sadness, and these differences are also shown in how the obstacles in achieving personal goals are perceived, being much more dependent on the context. This suggests that socio-cultural processes may acquire greater relevance in the regulation and experience of anger than in any of the other emotions (Allahyari, & Jenaabadi, 2015; Matsumoto et al., 2008; Morling et al., 2003). In this same direction, the role of social appraisal may be particularly relevant in anger, since its consequences are often interpersonal, as well (Averill, 1983). Moreover, the context and cultural factors appear to exert an influence on the generating of emotional processes and their intensity (Barrett, 2006; Barret et al., 2007) and therefore, it is conceivable that regulation time also differs among countries.

1.3. Objectives and Hypothesis

Given the scarcity of studies regarding the differences between countries in the evaluation of the emotion of anger, this study aims in the first place to establish if there are differences regarding the patterns of appraisal of anger among a sample of Spanish women and a Romanian one.

Secondly, we intend to observe if the chosen emotion regulation strategies and the difficulties in regulating anger are significantly different among both countries.

Finally, we aim to test if there are differences in terms of time in emotion regulation between the two countries.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Participants in the study were 1,121 adult Spanish and Romanian women. Two samples were studied, a Spanish sample and a Romanian one. The Spanish sample comprised 443 adult women distributed as follows: women without children (N= 214; M=21.5) and women with children (N=229; M= 40.8). The sample of women without children was selected from university students. Women with children were mothers of the Parents' Association of different public schools. Participation of both groups of women was completely voluntary. For the selection of Romanian women the same criteria were used as the Spanish sample. The Romanian sample comprised 678 adult women composed as follows: women without children (N= 249; M=21.6) and women with children (N=429; M= 38.3). Men were not included in any of the two samples since results showed not equitability among the two countries. Additionally, men and women may show certain structural differences in regulating emotions (McRae, Ochsner, Mauss, Gabrieli & Gross, 2008). Thus, for the sake of clarity, it was decided not to consider it in this research.

2.2. Procedure

This study followed the same procedure for both, the Spanish and the Romanian samples. A semi-structured interview was administered to all the subjects in order to assess the appraisal of anger, the time taken to regulate it, and the strategies that were used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and voluntarily by a specifically trained evaluator for the application of the assessment protocol of the study, who guaranteed the confidentiality of the information and offered to solve any questions that could arise. This interview lasted 10–15 minutes. Subsequently, the

Scale of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation questionnaire was administered. For the administration to the Romanian population, two Romanian philologists made a translation of the questionnaire validated in Spain.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Appraisal of anger situations, strategies for emotional regulation and time required to regulate anger

For this study we designed a semi-structured interview that was validated by twelve experts who based their evaluation on the indicators that were subject to assessment. The items included in the interview were: age, gender, profession, education level, marital status, children's age, causes of anger, and the time taken to regulate the anger. Additionally, for the assessment of the strategies the following three questions were also asked:

- Can you explain the most recent situation in which you have been angry?
- For how long were you angry (how many minutes, hours, days...)?
- What did you do in order to overcome the anger?

2.3.2. Difficulties in emotion regulation

In order to assess the construct of emotion regulation we used the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale questionnaire (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) translated to Spanish and validated by Hervás and Jódar (2008). This scale assesses different aspects of emotion dysregulation. The factorial analysis of the Spanish sample created five factors which finally correspond to the five subscales into which the instrument is divided (in Spanish): emotional neglect, emotional confusion, emotional rejection, lack of emotional control and emotional interference. The instrument used a 5-point Likert scale (from almost never: 0–10% of the time; to *almost always*: 90–100% of the time).

2.4. Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the information from the interview was conducted through an inductive categorization process using the descriptive analysis matrices. This process consisted of assembling the information obtained from semi-structured interviews for each of the dimensions obtained with the aforementioned three questions (causes of anger, anger regulation strategies, and the time required for regulating the anger situations). These were classified in different categories which were agreed by the entire research group (see Table 1). The categories of emotion regulation strategies were established according to the regulation model of Larsen and Prizmic (2004).

Table 1. Categories corresponding to the dimensions: causes of anger, anger regulation strategies, time of regulation for the anger situations.

Causes of Anger

Things do not work out the as I want (generally)
 Others do not treat me the way I think I deserve (generally)
 The child does not obey and acts in other ways than expected
 The partner acts in a different way than expected.
 The friends act in a different way than expected
 Father or mother act in a different way than expected
 At work things are not going as I want; they do not treat me the way I think I deserve

Regulation strategies of anger

Searching for social support
 Active fisiological regulation
 Positive reevaluation
 Comfort tehemselves

Behavioral Distraction
 Cognitive distraction
 Social isolation
 Self-control
 Practice religiosity
 Discharge
 Inhibition and suppression

Time of regulation

From 0 to 60 minutes
 From 1 hour to 24 hours
 From 1 day to a week

The analysis of these matrices was carried out using the statistical package PASW.18 in order to establish the frequencies and the percentages corresponding to the causes of anger, the regulation strategies used, and the time taken by the subjects to regulate the anger situations. We elaborated the contingency tables (Chi-square) and compared the results of the variables mentioned above (see Table 1). The statistically significant results were analysed after the residual adjustment. To examine the results of the questionnaire (DERS) T-test was used in order to identify the differences between the two groups.

3. Results

3.1. Differences in anger appraisal between Spanish and Romanian population

To observe the existence of differences in the causes that lead to anger among both populations chi-square tests were performed. In the comparison between the causes of anger episodes, statistically significant differences between the two countries arose. In particular, the causes of anger related to Things do not work out the as I want (generally) showed higher scores in the Romanian population compared to Spanish ($Z = 7.5$, $P < 0.005$). We also observed statistically significant differences in those causes related to Others do not treat me the way I think I deserve (generally) where the Romanian population sample also scored higher than the Spanish population ($Z = 5.1$, $P < 0.005$)

Women who were mothers experienced anger in those cases that involved children and there were significant differences between populations of both countries, as well. Spanish mothers obtained higher scores when The child does not obey and acts in other ways than expected than Romanian mothers did ($Z = 3.1$, $P < 0.005$). We also observed differences in favor of Spanish women in cases related with The partner acts in a different way than expected ($Z = 3.6$, $P < 0.005$), The friends act in a different way than expected ($Z = 3.2$, $P < 0.005$) and Father or mother act in a different way than expected ($Z = 4.7$, $P < 0.005$)

Table 2. Differences in appraisal of anger (Spanish and Romanian population).

Causes of anger	Subjects	
	Spanish population	Romanian population
Things do not work out as I want	29 15.4%	14 6.5%
Others do not treat me the way I think I deserve	7 3.7%	3 1.4%

The child does not obey and acts in other ways than expected	0 0%	145 67.4%
The partner acts in a different way than expected	34 18.1%	19 8.8%
The friends act in a different way than expected	29 15.4%	2 0.9%
Father or mother act different way than expected	49 26.1%	6 2.8%
At work things are not going as I want	40 21.3%	26 12.1%

T-Test index was used to compare the scores of the DERS questionnaire (Emotional regulation Difficulties Scale) between the populations of both countries. The results showed differences between the two populations in two dimensions. Specifically, the Romanian population showed higher scores in emotional neglect ($t = -2.399$, $df = 435$, $p < 0.05$) and emotional confusion ($t = -1.987$, $df = 434$, $p < 0.05$) (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Comparison of means (T) between Spanish and Romanian population regarding Emotional Regulation Difficulties

DERS	Spanish P.		Romanian P.	
	M	DT	M	DT
Neglect	15.42	2.57	16.05	2.89
Confusion	9.47	1.83	10.71	2.19
Rejection	14.71	5.34	14.24	5.59
Lack of control	17.94	6.95	18.33	5.98

To examine whether there were differences in the use of emotion regulation strategies during episodes of anger chi-square tests were performed. The results showed statistically significant differences among the two populations in the use of strategies in when facing episodes of anger. Specifically, the Spanish population used more active physiological regulation ($Z = 3.9$, $P < 0.005$), social isolation ($Z = 2.6$, $P < 0.05$), self-control ($Z = 7.0$, $P < 0.05$) and discharge ($Z = 2.8$, $P < 0.05$). Differently, the Romanian population used more behavioral distraction ($Z = 5.7$, $P < 0.05$) and inhibition and suppression ($Z = 5.0$, $P < 0.05$) (see Table 4.)

Table 4. Comparison of means (T) between Spanish and Romanian population regarding the used emotional regulation strategies

Regulation strategies	Spanish P.	Romanian P.
Searching for social support	18 4.2%	37 5.9%
	32	15

Active physiological regulation	7.4%	2.4%
Positive reevaluation	40 9.3%	78 12.4%
Comfort tehemselves	41 9.5%	54 8.6%
Behavioral Distraction	24 5.6%	109 17.4%
Cognitive distraction	34 7.9%	43 6.8%
Social isolation	32 7.4%	24 3.8%
Self-control	94 21.9%	44 7.0%
Practice religiosity	0 0%	2 0.3%
Discharge	45 10.5%	36 5.7%
Inhibition and suppresion	70 16.3%	186 29.6%

3.2. Differences in time of regulation

To see whether there were differences in the time required to regulate anger episodes we also conducted chi-square tests. Results showed that nearly the 70% of the Spanish sample regulated anger episodes in less than one hour versus a 58.6% of the Romanian sample ($Z = 2.6$, $P < 0.005$). Differently, Romanian individuals showed statistically significant higher scores in the category of regulating anger taking from one hour to 24 hours ($Z = 2.5$, $P < 0.005$).

Table 5. Comparison of means (T) between the Spanish and Romanian population regarding the time of anger regulation

Time requierd for regulation the episode	Spanish P.	Romanian P.
From 0 to 60 minutes	294 67.4%	376 58.6%
From 1 hour to 24 hours	93 21.3%	159 24.8%
From 1 day to a week	49 11.2%	107 16.7%

4. Discussions

The present study intended to investigate whether there were differences in patterns of anger appraisal among two samples of the Spanish and Romanian populations.

Data showed significant differences in the frequency of occurrence of each cause for the episodes of anger among both samples, which shows that our results are in line with those studies that consider that the socio-cultural context exerts a great influence on the actual process of generating emotions (eg. Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005; Boiger and Mesquita, 2012).

According to the results, Romanian population experimented more causes connected with Things do not work out the as I want (generally) and Things do not work out the as I want (generally). This causes in turn, were more frequent than for the Spanish population and generated more anger episodes. At the same time, Spanish women experienced more causes related to the children than the Romanian women. The same happened with those causes related to friends, the spouse or the parents. These results lead us to hypothesize that in the Spanish population, the figures that are sources of social support, such as family and friends exert a major influence on this process of anger appraisal as observed in other similar studies conducted with Spanish population (Oriol et al., 2013; Páez, Martínez Sánchez, Sevillano Triguero, Mendiburo Seguel, & Campos, 2012). Differently, our results showed that in the Romanian population the causes of anger episodes were more related to personal frustration, which was mainly originated when facing the non-achievement of the personal objectives. Anger episodes in the Romanian sample were also registered in social interaction situations but to a lesser extent than in the case of the Spanish sample. Most probably, these differences occur due to cultural models disparity between the two countries. That is, most Western cultures are characterized by a cultural model of independent self conceptualization, where the priority is the individual autonomy (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, in countries that are geographically located in the south as it is the case of Spain, where, in addition, there is also an important Latin influence, the relationship between people and the family take on an essential role from very early ages (Martínez-Lozano, Sánchez-Medina, & Goudena, 2011).

As previous literature regarding cultural differences shows, there is an important link between cultural values and specific socialization conditions of each country and the experience, expression and regulation of emotions (eg, Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Mesquita & Karasawa, 2002). Individualistic cultures foster personal goals over ingroup goals, whereas the cultures where the priority is interpersonal relationships tend to set objectives in relation with others (Yamaguchi, 1994).

A second objective of this study was to examine if there were differences in regulation difficulties during episodes of anger and the choice of one strategy or another. As expected, differences in regulation difficulties were noticed, particularly in emotional neglect and in emotional confusion, where Romanian women obtained higher scores. Furthermore, there were also differences in the use of strategies to regulate anger. Spanish women exhibited more active physiology, social isolation, self-control and discharge. Romanian women in turn, showed greater use of behavioral distraction, inhibition and suppression. Again, these results were also in line with previous studies showing differences in the use of emotion regulation strategies for anger episodes among countries (Matsumoto et al., 2005; Morling et al., 2003). Cultures differentially encourage and reinforce emotional responding, resulting in differences in which emotional responses are sanctioned under certain circumstances (Butler et al., 2007; Kitayama et al., 2000; Matsumoto, 1990; Mesquita, 2003). According to this idea it is conceivable that the culture influences the emotion regulatory patterns of individuals according to what is most adaptive in a particular socio-cultural environment.

We noticed that Spanish women made greater use of the discharge and instead, Romanian women make greater use of suppression. According to previous studies, cultural differences influence the way that individuals suppress or reappraise their emotional reaction (Schoefer 2010; Soto, Levenson, & Ebling, 2005). This would explain why Romanian women rely more on the inhibition and suppression of anger, while Spanish express more emotional reaction produced by this emotion using self-discharge or response without causing an inhibition. Interestingly enough, however,

Spanish women use more social isolation than Romanian women. This can be due to the fact that situations that generate anger in the first are related on multiple occasions with family or social support sources close to them, which facilitates a temporary detachment from these people (Nunes, Bodden, Lemos, Lorence, & Jiménez).

The last objective set in the present study was to study if there were differences in the time that anger episodes regulation took in both populations. Regarding expectations, we observed differences. Specifically, Romanian women took longer to regulate anger episodes than Spanish women did. Once more, these results are consistent with the use of control strategies of this type of episodes. Romanian women used more inhibition and suppression and such strategies have repeatedly shown greater intensity in the experience of anger and lower levels of frustration tolerance in these situations than in other strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal (Memedovic, Grisham, Denson, & Moulds, 2010; Ray, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2008). Therefore, the use of inhibition and suppression imply that the experience of anger is more durable over time for those who use these strategies instead of others that may result faster or more efficient.

In summary, the data obtained in the present work showed that there existed differences between the two analyzed samples, both in the anger appraisal, the regulation episodes of anger, and the time required to regulate these episodes. This leads us to corroborate the influence that cultural context has on the emotional experience and the use of one or another emotion regulation strategies, as previous studies have repeatedly pointed out. These results stress the need for further cross-cultural studies that allow us to elucidate the effect that the socio-cultural context has upon all the elements involved in the emotional processes, from the moment that the emotion is generated to the processes involving in regulating the emotional experience.

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