

Chains of happiness: emotions, gender, and power

Correntes da felicidade: emoções, gênero e poder

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ABSTRACT

From the discussion on happy life norms, I direct the investigative focus from media representations to the internet's emotional courts, proposing the construction of a theoretical-methodological reference framework to analyze the discussions on the emotional posture of two women: a prostitute who declared to be “happy” with her profession, in a campaign of the Brazilian Ministry of Health; and a mother who revealed to “hate” the experience of motherhood, in answer to a Facebook challenge. The examination of the impact of these two cases will provide a vivid panorama of the implications of affective ideals that, along with other disciplinary forces, constrain and produce identities.

Keywords: Emotions, happiness, gender identity, power, internet

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RESUMO

A partir da discussão sobre as normas da vida feliz, direciono o foco investigativo das representações midiáticas para os tribunais emocionais da internet, apresentando uma proposta de construção de um quadro de referência teórico-metodológico para a análise dos debates em torno da postura emocional de duas mulheres: uma prostituta que se declarou “feliz” com sua profissão, no material de uma campanha do Ministério da Saúde; uma mãe que revelou “detestar” a experiência da maternidade, em resposta a um desafio do Facebook. O exame da repercussão dos dois casos fornecerá um vívido panorama das implicações de ideais afetivos que, com outras forças disciplinares, constroem e produzem identidades.

Palavras-chave: Emoções, felicidade, gênero, poder, internet

INTRODUCTION

IS “EMOTION” AN essential term to social communication? The categorical answer would be *no*, if we based ourselves in most dictionaries and encyclopedias that condense and legitimize knowledge in our research area. I consulted 24 works that aim to recapitulate fundamental concepts, theses, and methodologies of communication theories and media studies – in the 19 books listed below, there is no entry for *emotion* (neither for *affection* nor *sentiment*, concepts often used as synonyms):

- *Key concepts in communication and cultural studies* (Routledge, 2001);
- *Television studies: the key concepts* (Routledge, 2001);
- *Communication, cultural and media studies: the key concepts* (Routledge, 2002);
- *Encyclopedia of communication and information* (MacMillan Reference, 2002);
- *Encyclopedia of new media* (Sage, 2003);
- *Cyberculture: the key concepts* (Routledge, 2004);
- *Key concepts in journalism studies* (Sage, 2005);
- *Critical dictionary of film and television theory* (Taylor; Francis, 2005);
- *Dictionary of media studies* (A. & C. Black, 2006);
- *Encyclopedia of religion, communication, and media* (Routledge, 2006);
- *Encyclopedia of children, adolescents, and the media* (Sage, 2007);
- *Encyclopedic dictionary of semiotics, media, and communication* (University of Toronto Press, 2008);
- *Dicionário da comunicação* (Paulus, 2009);
- *Encyclopedia of journalism* (Sage, 2009);
- *Encyclopedia of politics, the media, and popular culture* (ABC-CLIO, 2009);
- *Keywords in news and journalism studies* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2010);
- *Key concepts in media and communications* (Sage, 2011);
- *Cinema studies: the key concepts* (Routledge, 2013);
- *Dictionary of media and communications* (Routledge, 2015).

As the reader can see, I examined works with general nature and with a more specific thematic focus, published between 2000 and 2015. In the books in English, the word *effect* is, in general, succeeded by *encoding/decoding* or *entertainment*. I only found the keyword *emotion* in five works: *Dictionary of semiotics* (Cassell, 2000); *The international encyclopedia of communication* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008); *Encyclopedia of communication theory* (Sage, 2009); *Dicionário Houaiss de comunicação e multimídia* (Publifolha, 2013);

and *The concise encyclopedia of communication* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015). The summaries are little clear, except the four entries prepared by *The international encyclopedia of communication*: “Emotion”; “Emotion and communication in organizations”; “Emotion and discourse”; “Emotional excitement theory”; and “Media effects on emotions.”

Given this constant lapse, I remembered an old complaint of writer João do Rio: “Dictionaries are only considered easy sources of complete knowledge by those who never browsed them” (João do Rio, 2008: 29). The truth, however, is that the academic guides translate and perpetuate – without reservations – an intriguing facet of our disciplinary field: the scarcity of studies that analyze how the different media artifacts propagate, orchestrate, and manage divergent or rival discourses about emotions; researches on the sharing and evaluation of emotional experiences and demonstrations in new communication environments and cyberspace platforms are also very rare.

The existing studies on the topic of *media* and *emotion* have, as a rule, a fairly narrow purpose: scanning emotional aspects of media reception or consumption. Authors prioritize the analysis focused on the formulation of “emotion-inducing messages” (or “emotionally resonant content”) and the examination of the “emotional needs” and “emotional states” accompanying the involvement with a particular product or genre of the cultural industry (Dill, 2013; Dovelung; Von Scheve; Konijn, 2011; Nabi, 2014; Wirth; Schramm, 2005; Winterhoff-Spurk; Van Der Voort, 2013).

In the researches based on theories about media effects, emotions are treated, operationally, in two distinct ways: 1) as a *dependent variable*, likely to be caused by aspects of the content or communicative process (for example, analysis of the influence of sensationalist reports in the incitement of fear, sorrow, or indignation reactions; surveys regarding how the form and content of advertising create or intensify certain emotions – hope, excitement, jealousy, guilt, shame – in potential customers); 2) as an *independent variable*, able to affect communicative phenomena and practices (for example, verification of how prior emotions and moods – happiness, sorrow, irritation, anxiety – interfere both in the preparation of messages and in the processing of news, announcements, and political discourses).

These investigations confirm the hegemony of the psychological concept of *emotion* – secular category that, since the 19th century, started to include and redefine a constellation of phenomena of the affective life that classic philosophers and ancient Christian writers (such as Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas) called *appetites*, *affections*, *passions*, or *feelings* (Dixon, 2003). In those first taxonomies, *passion* and *affection* were associated with

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a web of words and expressions, such as “of the soul,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘fall,’ ‘sin,’ ‘grace,’ ‘Spirit,’ ‘Satan,’ ‘will,’ ‘lower appetite,’ ‘self-respect” (Ibid.: 5). The fields of philosophy, theology, medicine, rhetoric, and literature (especially in genres such as the epic and tragedy) created theories, qualifying systems, and therapies of mind and mood commotions capable of disturbing the temperament and social stability. Around 1860, with the rise of experimental psychology, the secular notion of *emotion* was linked to another distinct series of interrelated terms: “‘law,’ ‘observation,’ ‘evolution,’ ‘organism,’ ‘brain,’ ‘nerves,’ ‘expression,’ ‘behavior,’ and ‘gut’” (Ibid.). Explicit moral and religious concerns were denied or concealed because of the ostensible commitment to objectivity in the study of the human mind.

For centuries, analysts and disciplinarians faced *passions*, in general, as a disobedient and morally dangerous movement of the soul; but the new academic discipline of Psychology – guided by theoretical and methodological assumptions that largely came from physical sciences – reinterpreted *emotions* in an ostensibly amoral way, as an autonomous bodily or mental state characterized by vivid sensations and physical unrest.

Faithful to the paradigm of experimental psychology, the empirical researches in the field of communication tend to adopt a very narrow definition of emotions: psychophysiological phenomena with episodic nature and short duration, which can occasionally be induced, observed, and measured in volunteers, within the ordered environment of laboratories. Anger, fear, disgust, sadness, and joy appear, here, as universal congenital processes, triggered by a well delimited stimulus or event.

Thus, one builds a plain communicational circuit, in which pornographic videos, news of crime and disasters, violent cartoons, and new forms of youth entertainment act as *triggers* or *emotional conditioners*, and anxiety, panic, irritability, euphoria, or aggressiveness are predictable affective *responses* and experimentally verifiable behavioral *effects*. It is easy to understand the appeal of this interpretive bias: the verification of its working hypothesis offers, among other advantages, an uncomplicated and convenient explanation for the genesis of behaviors identified as “problematic” by experts in education, safety, and public health.

FOR A CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS

The conceptualization of emotions as *natural entities*, fundamental components of our biological constitution, preprogrammed instinctive reactions, whose function was defined along the evolutionary march of the human species,

obscures the perception of the possibilities of political and cultural analysis of emotions as *historical products*, as socially built practices and performances. As Potkay (2007) points out, the understanding, *demonstration*, and judgment of emotions are formed in linguistic contexts, biographical trajectories, and specific normative environments:

Emotions or passions are not simply constant components of human psychology and physiology, the hard wiring of who we are. They are shaped, as well, by histories: the case history of each individual, and the cultural history of each emotion term. [...] [The] what a specific person loves and will love depends, first of all, on what a community agrees to call love (as distinguished, for example, from possible opposites such as “lust” or “friendship”), and is further conditioned by what that community allows or disallows, what a culture renders familiar or unimaginable, with regard to love’s objects and expression. (Ibid.: vii)

In “Love and knowledge” (1989), one of the most influential feminist approaches of emotions, the American philosopher Alison Jaggar examines how the dominant values are implicit in reactions considered pre-cultural, spontaneous, in “our so-called visceral responses.” The author considers, however, that people not always experience the conventionally acceptable emotions.

They may feel satisfaction rather than embarrassment when their leaders make fools of themselves. They may feel resentment rather than gratitude for welfare payments and hand-me-downs. They may be attracted to forbidden modes of sexual expression. They may feel revulsion for socially sanctioned ways of treating children or animals. In other words, the hegemony that our society exercises over people’s emotional constitution is not total. (Jaggar, 1989: 166)

Individuals who experience emotions reputed as unacceptable – “outlaw emotions,” in Jaggar terms – may feel confused, unable to name their experience, even doubting their own sanity: “Women may come to believe that they are ‘emotionally disturbed’ and that the embarrassment or fear aroused in them by male sexual innuendo is prudery or paranoia” (Ibid.). But the “outlaw emotions” may allow, on the other hand, one to perceive the world in a different way from that portrayed in conventional descriptions, providing the first indications that something is wrong with the way how alleged facts have been built.

Conventionally unexpected or inappropriate emotions may precede our conscious recognition that accepted descriptions and justifications often conceal as much as

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reveal the prevailing state of affairs. Only when we reflect on our initially puzzling irritability, revulsion, anger or fear may we bring to consciousness our 'gut-level' awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger. Thus, conventionally inexplicable emotions, particularly though not exclusively those experienced by women, may lead us to make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo. (Ibid: 167)

¹ In the original: "Un après-midi, je me déshabillais dans le vestiaire de l'institut, quand Zaza apparut. Nous nous sommes mises à parler, à raconter, à commenter; les mots se précipitaient sur mes lèvres, et dans ma poitrine tournoyaient mille soleils; dans un éblouissement de joie, je me suis dit: 'C'est elle qui me manquait!'. Si radicale était mon ignorance des vraies aventures du cœur que je n'avais pas songé à me dire: 'Je souffre de son absence. Il me fallait sa présence pour réaliser le besoin que j'avais d'elle. Ce fut une évidence fulgurante. Brusquement, conventions, routines, clichés volèrent en éclats et je fus submergée par une émotion que n'était prévue dans aucun code. Je me laissai soulever par cette joie qui déferlait en moi, violente et fraîche comme l'eau des cascades, nue comme un beau granit".

² In the original: "On m'avait entraîné à confronter ce qui doit être et ce qui est: je n'examinais pas ce qui se cachait sous la convention des mots. Il était entendu que j'avais une tendre affection pour toute ma famille, y compris mes plus lointains cousins. Mes parentes, ma sœur, je les aimais: ce mot couvrait tout. Les nuances de mes sentiments, leurs fluctuations, n'avaient pas droit à l'existence. Zaza était ma meilleure amie: il n'y avait rien de plus à dire. Dans un cœur bien ordonné, l'amitié occupe un rang honorable, mais elle n'a ni l'éclat du mystérieux Amour ni la dignité sacrée des tendresses filiales. Je ne mettais pas en question cette hiérarchie".

In the outcome of the first part of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), Simone de Beauvoir reports, by the way, a luminous experience, experienced when she was 10 years old – the exact moment when she knew the real place that her friend Elizabeth Mabile ("Zaza," in intimacy) occupied in her life:

One afternoon, I was getting undressed in the locker room of the institute, when Zaza appeared. We started talking, telling, commenting; the words were hurrying on my lips, and in my chest one thousand suns were shining; in a flash of joy, I said to myself: "It's her who I miss!" So profound was my ignorance about the true adventures of the heart that I had failed to recognize: "I suffer with your absence." I needed her to be in front of me to realize how much I needed her. It was a startling finding. Suddenly, conventions, routines, clichés shattered, and I was flooded by an emotion that was not foreseen in any code. I let myself stir up for that joy that spread inside me, violent and fresh as the water cascades, naked as a beautiful granite¹. (Beauvoir, 1998: 98)

Until then, the child was not able to find a correct "name" to describe the pleasant condition of the spirit and the veiled erotic impulse that gave a special tone to her relationship with Zaza. The quality and intensity of that affective experience did not harmonize with the references of her linguistic and cultural repertoire; they differed from the labels, precepts, and *performative scripts* with which she was used to.

They had taught me to confuse what has to be with what is: I did not examine what was concealed under the convention of words. It was taken for granted that I felt a tender affection for my whole family, including my furthest cousins. My parents, my sister, I loved them: this word covered everything. The nuances of my feelings, their fluctuations, had no right to exist. Zaza was my best friend: there was nothing more to say. In a well-ordered heart, friendship occupies an honorable place, but lacks the brightness of the mysterious Love and the sacred dignity of filial tenderness. I did not discuss this hierarchy². (Ibid.: 97)

Beauvoir, as other children, remained captive of the “atrocious reduction that language gives to all our affections”³ (Barthes, 1974: 118). She had learned the conventional meanings of *love*, sown in discourses, practices, and rituals that strengthen the *natural* primacy of consanguineous bonds. She had assimilated the restricted limits of a *friendly* relationship, in a disciplined heart. At the institute, on the day of revelation, when undressing in front of her friend, she also felt she had begun to unleash herself from the baggage of the crystallized meanings of affections. The moment she felt the hidden and unexplored opportunities of her *friendship* with Zaza rather than fear, guilt, or sadness, she experienced an unprecedented emotion – brightening, powerful, and invigorating. A transgressive experience, described in the language of romantic radicalism, with its typical opposition between nature and culture/society: like a waterfall, the irrepressible force of passion had broken clichés and habits put into the child’s mind. In Beauvoir’s perception, the denudation of affective conventions – although disturbing – implied the satisfaction of the contact with her *true self*, the gratifying discovery of the *authentic self*, covered by *social masks*: “I did not conceive anything better in the world than being myself and loving Zaza”⁴ (Beauvoir, 1998 [1958]: 99).

Joy (*joie*, in the original) is how Beauvoir designates, in retrospect, the vibration that animated the recognition of the *sui generis* affection for Zaza. Dictionaries and encyclopedias from the 18th century defined *joy* as a *passion*: “vivid and pleasant movement that the soul feels when having a real or imaginary good” (Potkay, 2007: 24). In *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*, the traditional emotional label is used within a context that redefines her moral guidance in a relevant way. What the Beauvoir girl had foreshadowed as *good*, the experience that she imagined to be the pinnacle of her personal achievement – the involvement with the “vivacious,” “uninhibited,” and “independent” friend –, the bourgeois society of the time was willing to assess as *bad*: an illicit intimacy, a relationship that was developing in an unevenly, ugly, wicked, sick way; harmful both from the individual and community point of view. In other words, a deplorable distortion of the legitimate meanings of *love* and *friendship*, transmitted and revered within the family, under the aegis of narratives, rituals, and specific knowledge (religious, moral, psychological, medical, pedagogical).

The *pedagogy of emotions* carried out by institutions such as family, school, and media sanctions movements of social approach and distancing, presenting – since childhood – certain types of individuals, experiences, and environments as being, *intrinsically*, lovely, fearsome, repulsive or hateful, deserving pity or contempt, sources of happiness or unhappiness. Any significant deviation

³ In the original: “l’atroce réduction que le langage (et la science psychanalytique) impriment à tous nos affects”.

⁴ In the original: “Je ne concevais rien de mieux au monde que d’être moi-même, et d’aimer Zaza”.

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regarding emotional orientations can be identified as a disorder that requires surveillance, punishment, psychotherapy, or another modality of medical treatment. Those who line up with affective guidelines receive several rewards in subjective, domestic, professional, or heavenly realms.

Intricate, partial, and occasionally sorrowful, the process of *learning emotions* is the result of a complex set of inferences, based on various sources: 1) stories and discourses about emotions; 2) standards incorporated, in a practical way, in specific circumstances; 3) the way how the condition of being a person is culturally defined and socially performed (Illouz; Gillon; Shachak, 2014: 222). Learning emotions, therefore, does not involve only knowing what name to give one's own emotions; one must also need to know how to monitor them – “to be context sensitive, to know how and how much to express an emotion to decipher others' emotions” (Ibid.).

The regulative cultural apparatuses provide advice and techniques that allow one to maximize certain emotions and restrict others, in accordance with various goals – honor, harmony, discipline, productivity. The insecurity that surrounds, with painful frequency, the public display of emotions is largely due to the fact that we deal with contradictory social expectations in certain situations. An important theorist of emotions, Martha Nussbaum, recapitulated a striking personal experience to illustrate this point. After the death of her mother, the American philosopher faced conflicting instructions about the proper way of mourning the loss of a beloved parent.

One is supposed to allow oneself to ‘cry big’ at times, but then American mores of self-help also demand that one get on with one's work, physical exercise, and commitments to others, not making a big fuss. Thus I considered canceling the lecture I had been writing, out of respect for my mother and my grief. I wanted to give some sign that, only one week after the funeral, I could not go on as if everything were all right. Canceling seemed one substitute for dressing in black, an expressive gesture no longer available. But I was told by friends that canceling a big lecture would be a bad thing. One does not defect from a commitment that way, they said, and one should be able to rise to the occasion. Besides, they said, it would be good for my psychic health to focus on something that I could control, in which I was not helpless. (Nussbaum, 2000: 42)

Contradictory recommendations have also emerged from Nussbaum's own life story, as the philosopher wondered what posture her mother would have expected from her (“prolonged sadness, or so I felt”), and what her father would have said about it (“that a person of dignity carries on in the face of misfortune,

head ‘bloodied but unbowed’”). The efforts to meet the generic disparate expectations, hypothetically formulated by her parents, resulted in pride and guilt:

At times I focused on thoughts of loss and had periods of intense weeping; but I also prided myself on making the lecture as good as it could be, tirelessly revising it, distracting myself from thoughts of grief. I felt guilty when I was grieving because I was not working on the lecture; and I felt guilty when I was working on the lecture because I was not grieving. (Ibid.: 42-43)

The night before the mentioned event, Nussbaum established, at last, the limit for the exercise of her professional activity and for her sociability during the mourning period. She would fulfill the duty of performing the lecture, but concluded, on the other hand, that it would be appropriate to refuse a dinner party given by her hosts: “Eating a celebratory meal seemed to me disrespectful. Some of my hosts understood these feelings, but others thought me peculiar. I ate quietly in someone’s home, insisting on baked chicken with no sauce” (Ibid.: 43).

The confluent or different discourses that shape experience and guide the expression of emotions of specific social groups, in a particular place and historical period, can be seized from numerous sources: sermons and political speeches; academic articles and scientific publications; etiquette books and columns of women’s magazines; children’s literature and parental advice guides; professional manuals and didactic works; codes of ethics and legal documents; films and popular novels – among other forms and cultural products that offer models of personality, self-presentation, and social *performance* in which the importance of the regulation of emotional states and postures stands out.

In an exemplary study, Nancy Schnog (1997) showed how the sentimental literature written by American women in the 19th century correlated family harmony with the feminine emotional conduct. Experiencing happiness amid the domestic assignments was not only desirable – it was a duty of the good wife. The middle-class mother had the responsibility of keeping and expressing a *joyful heart*; her primary objective was not looking out for her own well-being, but rather ensuring the contentment of the other family members.

“Happy” women kept clean and organized homes, raised disciplined and well dressed children, relieving their husbands of the burden of professional activity. However, “temperamental,” “out of control,” or “sad” women generated a real domestic chaos: meals out of time; naughty children; misaligned clothes; in addition to the absence of husbands, who sought fun in taverns. Tragic

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counterpoint of the *angel in the house* figure, the literary representation of the *temperamental woman* functioned as a warning about the evils of “negative” moods (anxiety, sadness, nervousness, and irritability), which caused, when out of control, tragic outcomes that included loneliness and even death.

The authors did not describe happiness as a transient subjective state, nor as a static character ideal – they approached it, more accurately, as a female strategy of social control within the middle-class family life. Their novels taught how to achieve the proper emotional condition, highlighting the importance, in particular, of regulating facial expression and speech. The wife whose voice showed an angry tone or whose face expressed concern could destroy her home; the woman who smiled and communicated gently raised the mood of the whole house. In those sentimental plots, happiness appeared, in short, more than as a *mere emotion*: it consisted of a *performance* that should be conducted – no truce – daily.

Douglas (2015) argues, with authority, that the standardization of women – and, therefore, a large part of their constitution as subjects identified with specific marks of gender – still occurs by the adjustment of their laugh. The author emphasizes two basic ways by which female laughter is disciplined: first, by the establishment of appropriate ways of “laughing like a woman,” in which the shape and duration of the laughter are regulated even in their most subtle details. But I would like to emphasize here the standardization of gender by the “compulsory laughter.” As Douglas observes, oppressed individuals are required, as a rule, to look mild, happy, and excited, to show deference to those in power, for pleasing privileged subjects. In the case of women, the regulations around the laughter would work to support and build “*an unrealistic archetype of femininity: docile, subservient, and self-less above all else*” (Ibid.: 148; highlighted in the original). As well as Schnog, Douglas emphasizes that the “compulsory laughter” is one of the woman’s responsibilities for producing the happiness of everyone else, above her own: “The ideal woman must laugh in order to facilitate the laughter and happiness of all those around her: refraining from laughter lets others down” (Ibid.).

Among the everyday strategies for producing *anti-standardization* effects, the author highlights precisely the *unlaughing*, in the exact moment in which it is socially expected or required. There would be countless ways of exercising this subversive practice: the woman can remain silent before a sexist joke or comment, which are usually received with laughter, letting the lack of reaction “speak for itself.” However, in certain contexts, silence can suggest complicity; in these cases, it is necessary to verbally signal the own lack of inclination to laugh – as did the black feminist theorist, writer, and activist bell hooks, during a

session of *Paris is Burning* (1990), a documentary about the dances that attracted low income homosexuals, drag queens, latinos, and black people, in the 1980's New York. During the movie, hooks hid not hide her discomfort by the fact that white viewers around her were having fun with scenes that, to her, seemed sad and sometimes tragic: "Often individuals laughed at personal testimony about hardship, pain, loneliness. Several times I yelled out in the dark: 'What is so funny about this scene? Why are you laughing?' The laughter was never innocent." (apud Doulgas, 2015: 150)

In the understanding of Douglas, *unlaughs* such as that of bell hooks break the continuity of what individuals can face, "normally," as funny, exposing the assumptions underlying certain laughs and showing that humor is, in itself, contingent.

Adopting this strategy may entail, however, the risk of more rejection; the dissatisfied individual can be considered a *killjoy*, a category constantly focused by Sara Ahmed in her relevant analyses of emotions, from a feminist and queer perspective (Ahmed, 2010, 2012, 2014). For not finding happiness in the promises traditionally directed to their gender (such as marriage and domestic routine) and, even more, for denouncing the unfortunate effects of these social obligations, feminists are accused of sabotaging the joy of those who feel pleased with "the right things."

Individuals treated as *killjoys* are usually seen as persons with a miserable life, hostile temperament, devoid of humor, responsible for "breaking the mood," "ruining festive atmospheres," and "creating problems" for free. Their own different personality or ideological blindness tends to be identified as a generator both of their own unhappiness and of the dejection of the people around them; melancholy, desolation, and exasperation are thus dissociated from their long lived social sources.

FORMS AND NORMS OF HAPPY LIFE

In previous studies, I have examined alleged journalistic deciphers of the "paths to happiness" and "secrets of happy people," undertaken since the turn of the 21st century (Freire Filho, 2012a; 2012b; 2011; 2010a; 2010b; Freire Filho; Leal, 2015). What types of personality, behavior patterns, and coexistence models were valued? What are the identities and lifestyles pointed or insinuated as problematic? Based on what truths and authorities? Which personal and collective benefits were associated with subjective well-being? In tune with which political and economic rationalities? These were the essential and interrelated questions that I sought to answer in my investigations.

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The detailed analysis of an episode of the TV show *Globo Repórter*, displayed in November 15, 2002, with the title “Happiness” (Freire Filho, 2012a) was particularly enlightening for my research. The show has mobilized striking personal stories and specialized knowledge, to deepen the identification of intrinsic factors and external circumstances that would affect personal happiness.

Two edifying cases epitomize the conservative nature of the happy life models exalted by the show, with the endorsement of an opinion poll carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE) about the level and sources of happiness of Brazilians. The national poll would have identified, for example, where most Brazilians find happiness: “Happiness is in the quiet, safe life, in soft talk, happiness lives in the inland,” reported Sonia Bridi, triggering the typical value opposition between *country* life (“pure,” “quiet,” “healthy,” “supportive” rural areas and inland regions) and *city* life (“decadent,” “unhealthy,” “treacherous,” “uncaring” capitals and metropolises), which is a current axiological system, with varied modulations, since the Greco-Roman Antiquity (Rosen; Sluiter, 2006; Williams, 1975).

The thesis was supposedly proven by the testimony of *Seu*⁵ Ranauro Soares and *Dona*⁶ Eliana, model couple living in Sete Lagoas, inland Minas Gerais. From the union almost celebrating its 50th anniversary between the realtor from Rio de Janeiro and the “inland girl” (indefinite occupation; in fact, not even her name figured in the character generator) had flourished “one big Minas Gerais family”: two children and six grandchildren. The discovery of happiness came with the birth of the first child, *Seu* Ranauro recalled, with choked voice and tearful eyes; satisfaction with life was increasing, as the offspring grew: “I think today I feel more happy, because we feel more fulfilled seeing our grandchildren and children fulfilled, so we complement that happiness we had in youth.” Sitting by his side, *Dona* Eliana agreed: “I also think I’m happier today” (this is the only moment we can hear Eliana’s voice, in the four minutes recorded in her house).

With the musical background “Shiny happy people” (by American rock band R.E.M.), 13 members of the family posed for a fictitious photographic record of the perfect domestic happiness. However, a cloud of concern hovered above that scenario of contentment: the impending departure of the youngsters to study in the big city, which is “violent” and “dangerous.” Nobody in the Soares clan seemed to nourish ambivalent thoughts and emotions regarding prohibitions and commitments intrinsic to the familiar order – not even those representing the new generation. “Is love the key to happiness?” Sonia Bridi asked at one point, in a purely rhetorical gesture. “For sure, precisely the love of family,” replied the teenage Tatiane Soares, following the fixed script. Her brother even added:

⁵ Informal way of calling a man “Mr.”

⁶ Informal way of calling a woman “Mrs.”

“Whenever you need, you have your family there to help you, to support you... In the time of scolding, the family is there to correct, teach you.” Then the camera showed all the family exchanging smiles, hugs, and kisses. The compliment to safety, discipline, and joy within the traditional family arrangement was topped by a comment from the reporter: “Research shows that the happiest ones are married people, those who live with a lot of people; this network of relationships, where everyone is helping each other, is a shield against sadness.”

How would this picture of happiness touch the heart of single people living in metropolises, without children and with little social temperament? The minute I began to speculate about their ill-fated fate, another model couple appeared on the screen: the entrepreneur and bibliophile José Mindlin (deceased in 2010) and his wife, a “love story” that had already lasted 64 years. “It’s the perfect marriage: he likes to read poetry aloud; she, to listen,” said Bridi. The narration of marital happiness again appeared as a male prerogative: “I, one day, went to college and saw a circle of boys around a blonde girl who seemed pretty to me,” recalled José Mindlin. “She said: ‘Get in the liberal party, get in the academic party etc.’ I entered the conversation and said to her: ‘All this is nonsense, if you want a good party, it’s here, you see?’ And she took me seriously, took my word,” “...I took his word,” echoed *Dona Guita* (her name was overheard in one of the dialogues; the identification of the female pair was – again – omitted from screen).

With approving intonation, presenter Sérgio Chapelin and reporter Sonia Bridi stressed the subjective nature of the meanings and itineraries of happiness in several moments of the show. The rhetoric transfer from the happy life parameters to the field of individual preferences did not result, however, in the approval of new and diverse self-realization paths. On the contrary: we witnessed a normative effort that continually rejected the possible polemic implications hidden in *subjective* concepts of happiness. With the support of the expert’s word and emotional authenticity of respondents, the show exalted the benefits of lasting heterosexual relationships – in particular, those culminating in the more traditional family formation, where the wife is content to safeguard interests of the patriarch, echoing his wishes and opinions. Without much interpretive effort, we imply the threat contained in those sentimental frames: certain sexual orientations and existential options will never lead to full and authentic happiness.

The scripts of pursuit of happiness designed by *Globo Repórter* exemplarily show how this sublime aspiration can be linked to processes of standardization of desires, regulation of behaviors and stigmatization of emotions, or states of socially and politically relevant moods, such as sadness, hopelessness, irritation

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and anger, among other feelings labeled as “negative,” “ugly,” “bad,” or “sick” (Berlant, 2011; Campbell, 1994; Cvetkovich, 2012; Frye, 1983; Love, 2007; Ngai, 2005).

INTERNET'S EMOTIONAL COURTS

In the final stage of my research on the forms and norms of happy life, I will redirect the analytical focus from media representations and prescriptions (exemplified earlier) to the public discussions developed in online forums and interactive cyberspace environments.

The internet stands out, today, as the most prodigious *archive* and *court* of experience and emotional manifestations – controversial, proscribed, or socially legitimized. Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and online communities include emotional narratives, performances, moments, and testimonies of several actors and social groups: outraged citizens and angry militants (Freire Filho, 2015); disappointed and enraged customers (Id., 2014); fervent believers and uncompromising congregation; angry or pained journalists; vilified minorities; teen fans and *antifans* (Id., 2013); couples in love; former loving partners who cry out for revenge; euphoric or engaged celebrities; patients with severe diseases, in terminal stage, or in moment of ‘overcoming’; victims of sexual abuse, moral harassment, emotional neglect, school bullying, corporate bullying etc.

Platforms of social networks and video sharing websites provide users not only the opportunity to act as emotional *confessors* or *voyeurs* of the emotions of others – they also allow them to be converted into analysts and judges. All participants consider themselves authorized to decide the legitimacy of the emotional response of others, to scout the borders of affections, disciplining behaviors inside and outside the cyberspace. Revelations and public displays of affection, sadness, happiness, disgust, shame, or resentment usually raise, promptly, solidarity messages, enthusiastic approving comments, and vehement contrary opinions. Scientific knowledge, popular psychology, sacred texts, moral beliefs, cultural stereotypes, and biographical experiences are triggered to support the fast and rating judgment of the emotional expressions and behaviors of others.

However, convictions are not always irreversible. The subject placed on the hot seat sometimes gathers cultural capital and technological knowledge to rebut the most viral accusations and criticism. Due to their alleged irrationality and tendency to break the ordinary course of social interaction, emotions almost always demand an “accountability,” consistent with the standards of rational explanation (Fischer; Jansz, 2008). To gain sympathy

or agreement of others, individuals seek to unravel – in the sequential form of a narrative – plausible causes and uncontroversial reasons for their emotional behavior. They try to convince the interlocutor or a broader audience that their conduct was not so irrational, strange, excessive, or abnormal as it could seem at first glance. Personal, social, or political reasons are brought up, to ensure the readability, correction and, who knows, even the greatness of the performed acts.

The primary function of “narratives on emotions” is to ensure the status of the individual as a responsible member of society and, more specifically, to safeguard a threatened social or professional identity. Knowing what is a convenient emotional reaction, people can emphasize, in their report, elements that configure their emotional conduct as the most natural and obvious possible, in a given context. Thus, the individual would avoid the label of “primitive,” “irrational,” “crybaby,” “hot-head,” or “childish” (Ibid.: 166).

Virtual courts are a fruitful space, because they analyze the circulation of discourses dealing with emotions – ostensible or indirectly – as a matter of *responsibility, obligation, right, or privilege*. Who can or should express, in specific situations, dejection, joy, sympathy, fear, disgust, or anger? With what intensity? For how long? In which places? The answers to these questions are associated with social adjustment interests or disputes for status and power.

The *sentences* formulated in online forums designate which type and measure of emotional expression that different social groups and actors should express under “stressful,” “grievous,” and “frustrating” circumstances, to avoid *stigmatization*, contempt, or public execration. Anger is often evaluated as a prerogative of the ruling classes; joy and sympathy, as a mandatory expression of servants. One can assign to certain social agents or groups the responsibility of being compassionate; to other layers of the population, one imposes a moral obligation of being grateful, settling in subaltern positions. Virtual judges also establish which objects, relationships, and lifestyles can genuinely promote “positive” emotional experiences. The happiness of certain social segments is interpreted as mandatory or outrageous, as deserved reward or unfair privilege.

I intend to dedicate myself to analyze, as first case studies, the reference frameworks that guided heated debates about the reasons, legitimacy, and effects of the emotional posture of two women: a prostitute who declared to be “happy” with her profession; a mother who revealed to “hate” the experience of motherhood.

The sex worker in question is Nilce Machado, from Rio Grande do Sul, President of the *Núcleo de Estudos da Prostituição* (NEP – Center for the

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Study of Prostitution). In June 2, 2013, International Day of the Prostitute, the Brazilian Ministry of Health released the campaign “No shame of using condom.” One of the six posters showed a picture of Nilce, 53 years old at the time, accompanied by the statement “I am happy being a prostitute,” a sentence that she had said in a Workshop of Communication in Health, of the same Ministry. With dissemination planned only for the internet, the campaign predefined female sexual workers as its target audience. However, the image of the “happy prostitute” ended up reaching an audience far more extensive and diverse, circulating in a hybrid media environment, formed by the interaction between traditional informational means and online platforms. As it was being spread in an expanded communicational circuit, the disconcerting poster was gaining new interpretations and emotional repercussions, moving different social actors and urging them to express their opinion. Fears and social aspirations acquired materiality in the figure of the *happy prostitute*, treated as a symbol of significant changes in the directions of Brazil during the PT (Workers’ Party) administration. In parliamentary courts, religious pulpits, and virtual forums, notions of dignity and happy life models were often opposed.

Amid pressures from Evangelical leaders, the then Health Minister Alexandre Padilha ordered, on June 4, the poster with Nilce’s polemical statement to be removed from the government’s communication channels. The posters that associated disease prevention exclusively to the use of condom still remained in the official platforms.⁷ The relaunch of the campaign “No shame of using condom” with restricted focus on the importance of condom use outraged, in turn, associations of sex workers, in addition to other social movements.

Since the release until the reformulation by higher order, the campaign with the *happy prostitute* produced successive articles in news portals, mainstream media, and television shows. This matter was even discussed in the *CNN International website*⁸, in a *CNN Mexico News*⁹, and in *ABC’s* morning talk show *The View*¹⁰. Nationally, editorials of *Zero Hora*, from Porto Alegre¹¹, and of *Gazeta do Povo*, from Curitiba¹², criticized the initiative of the Brazilian Ministry of Health. Even a scene from the remake of soap opera *Saramandaia* (Rede Globo, 11 pm, June-September 2013) alluded to the controversial campaign: in the chapter aired in August 22, Risoleta (Débora Bloch), former sex professional and conscious landlady, enters the pharmacy of Seu Zuzu (Marcos Palmeiras) to buy a box of condoms: “Sex is good... And safe sex is quite a lot better.” After being provoked by Maria Aparadeira (Ana Beatriz Nogueira), prudish and gossip wife of the establishment owner, Risoleta snaps: “You listen to me, lady, I’m not easy, I’ve been, but not

⁷ See: <<http://bit.ly/2pPG5VV>>; <<http://bit.ly/2o0CmZg>>; <<https://glo.bo/2oJewQw>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

⁸ Available from: <<http://cnn.it/2o0tdjc>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

⁹ Available from: <<http://bit.ly/2oSkuKf>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

¹⁰ Available from: <<http://bit.ly/2oKFKEv>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

¹¹ Available from: <<http://bit.ly/2pxqeyE>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

¹² Available from: <<http://bit.ly/2o0H7ls>>. Accessed on: April 12, 2017.

anymore... And I was very happy, you know? I used to say with pride ‘I am happy being a prostitute.’”

Each new report or mention to the case of the “happy prostitute” had strong repercussions, in turn, in the cyberspace *courts*. The complex web of emotional discourses highlighted various alignments and engagements: adherence to the secular liberal imagery; faithfulness to ecclesiastical doctrines; linking with social movements (feminist, LGBT, and of defense of sex workers’ rights).

The other case is about the mother Juliana Reis, 25 years old, from Rio de Janeiro. The housewife had given birth to her first child 45 days before, when she triggered a long stir on the internet. The reason? She rejected to take part in the popular “Motherhood challenge.” Initiated at the beginning of February 2016, the challenge called women to publish, on their Facebook pages, three captioned photos that translated the pleasure of motherhood; they should, then, call other friends also considered “good mothers,” inviting them to join the chain. In February 15, Juliana published a relatively long post, justifying her decision to abstain from the game:

I want to make it really clear that I love my son, but I hate being a mother. [...] I refuse to be one more tool to deceive other women that motherhood is a bed of roses and that every woman was born to play this role.

In addition, the young woman released the “Real motherhood challenge,” urging other mothers to share images and reports of discomfort and fear. Juliana’s message quickly *viralized*; in just over a day, it had almost a hundred thousand likes. Numerous aggressive and dishonorable comments were delivered against the “bad mother”; some speculated that she was suffering from postpartum depression. In February 17, Juliana’s account was blocked by Facebook, after user complaints; the page remained banned for 12 hours. Many mothers, however, showed solidarity with Juliana, revealing the difficulties experienced in motherhood and creating the hashtag #TamoJuntaJuliana. Other campaigns were also organized to repudiate the Facebook challenge: #desafiodanãomaternidade – non-motherhood challenge (the proposal was mentioning three “unpleasant sentences” uttered when someone announces the desire of not being a mother) and #desafiodapaternidade – fatherhood challenge (destined to collect examples of paternal accommodation or negligence in raising children).

In both situations, the behavior of these women was different from the emotional posture or condition culturally associated with their roles and social identities. It is conventionally expected that women will find in motherhood a unique source of self-realization, an experience of existential fullness, seeing

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the arrival of a son as the fulfillment of a higher mission; on the other hand, a noisy portion of the population expects (*considers likely* or *wants fervently*) prostitutes to live in a state of deep sorrow and disenchantment, to feel fear and shame, to stay uncomfortable or even to hold a grudge for “selling the body,” which is a “risky” and “degrading” occupation. At worst, one keeps the expectation that they, at least, have the decency or humility to externalize the appropriate *negative emotions*, in the same way that a bride is obliged to undertake a whole *emotional work*, if necessary, to show enthusiasm and seem overjoyed over the preparation and carrying out of the wedding ceremony (Hochschild, 2012; 2005). The two cases still have another significant point in common: more than as a mere personal condition, private or interior, both ratify happiness as a *political condition*, associated with the questioning of privileges and the claim for rights.

The selected case studies show, finally, the challenging breadth and complexity of the current circuit of emotion reverberation: they were discussed, with greater or lesser depth, in multiple interactive environments of cyberspace, in news portals, in the pages of mainstream media, and in television shows (varieties and news programs). The focus of the comments often crossed the restricted perimeter of the mentioned *emotional events* – people established parallels and connections between the attitude of the protagonists and behavioral changes and political facts underway in the country.

I sought to combine in each case study the analysis of the conflicting interpretations made by a legion of informal arbitrators with the examination of the different frameworks built in the reports of the press and media. In addition to highlight the general implications of emotional ideals and standards that, along with other disciplinary forces, constrain and produce identities, this investigative effort will be able to outline a vivid panorama of social aspirations, moral conflicts, and political polarizations that recently appeared in the Brazilian public life. ■

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