An Essay on Negative Emotions

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1. Introduction

Different models to describe emotions have been presented in the past. This essay shows a new approach. It relies on an elementary inner uneasiness (uneasiness emotion, UE) which is typical for negative emotions and is established through clearly distinguishable triggers.

2. Uneasiness emotion (UE)

Negative emotions (like hunger, hatred or fear) have a common denominator. The latter consists in an unpleasant inner uneasiness, which is called uneasiness emotion or UE in the following. This UE is activated through different triggers. Two categories are distinguished: simple UE-triggers and cognitive UE-triggers.

3. UE-triggers

3.1 Simple UE-triggers

Simple UE-triggers activate the UE with little processing depth. Some of them are coupled to the change of body states and are then often appearing together with other sensations. An example of a simple UE-trigger is hunger.

3.2 Cognitive UE-triggers

Cognitive UE-triggers need a higher processing depth to activate the UE. Nine different cognitive UE-triggers can be distinguished.

3.2.1 ITNOUT

ITNOUT (abbreviation of “It does not work out (like I want it to)“) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a hindrance of an own important striving.

To activate this UE the individual has to strive for an explicit or implicit goal. The individual considers it as important to reach the goal. Then an external or internal power is hindering the individual. This is delaying or preventing the reach of the goal.

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The intensity of this UE is typically small to distinct. The expression (or the overall emotional manifestation) of the UE is often anger; further expressions include frustration, stress, or sadness.

In an ITNOUT-situation individuals show different types of behavior. An individual may start a similar or a different trial to overcome the obstacle. It may approach the obstacle in a friendly or an unfriendly manner. It may look for an appropriate tool or help. It may take a different way or seize its striving. Or it may choose to wait until the obstacle has disappeared.

3.2.2 SOTINA

SOTINA (abbreviation of “Somebody takes something away from me”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a taking away of an own significant resource.

The term “resource” includes everything that is able to evoke positive feelings in the perceiving individual. The resource can be possessed by an other individual, nevertheless it can evoke positive feelings in the perceiving individual. An external or internal power then takes the resource partly or completely away.

The resulting UE can reach high intensities. Typical expressions of this UE include fear, sadness, grief, disappointment, frustration, anger and despair.

In a SOTINA-situation an individual may approach the threat in a friendly or an unfriendly way, avoid the threat, or give up the resource. It may arm itself, seek for help, protect the resource, or wait until the threat has gone.

3.2.3 NESPECT

NESPECT (abbreviation of “I am not respected”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a disrespect for the own personality.

People react very sensitive to signs of disrespect through other individuals. Such a disrespect can be of verbal, nonverbal or physical nature.

A UE which develops from the perception of disrespect (i.e. NESPECT) can reach high intensities. Typical expressions of NESPECT are fear, disappointment, anger, frustration or despair.

In a NESPECT-situation, an individual has several behavioral options. It may approach the party responsible for the disrespect in a friendly or an unfriendly way. It may avoid the party responsible or ignore the disrespect. It may seek for help. Or it may wait until the disrespect has disappeared.

3.2.4 HASAD

HASAD (abbreviation of “He/she/it has an advantage”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of an advantage of an other individual regarding a resource which is also wanted by the perceiving individual.

In contrast to SOTINA the resource here is always possessed by somebody else. But the perceiving individual would like to have such a resource too.

Typical expressions of the resulting UE are envy, frustration or anger.

An individual may show different kinds of behavior in a HASAD-situation. It may approach the advantage or the other individual in a friendly or an unfriendly way. It may avoid them. It may strive for a similar or better advantage. It may seek for help, ignore the advantage, or wait until the latter disappears.

3.2.5 NOWEL

NOWEL (abbreviation of “I don’t feel well”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a serious reduction of the own physical integrity.

This cognitive UE-trigger relates to the health of the perceiving individual, i.e. to its physical (including mental) integrity. It appears if the individual perceives a serious reduction of its health level. Critical for the appearance of NOWEL is thus the relative, not the absolute, health level.

NOWEL can reach high intensities. The typical expression of NOWEL is fear.

In a NOWEL-situation an individual may seek or take an appropriate medicine. It may ignore the NOWEL-impulse. It may seek for information or help. Or it may wait until things improve.

3.2.6 CANTDO

CANTDO (abbreviation of “I can’t do it”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a lack of resources to accomplish a strived for task.

The individual perceives a lack of its internal or external (e.g. monetary, personnel) resources to complete a wanted task.

The resulting UE can reach high intensities. Typical expressions for CANTDO are fear or despair.

Typical behavioral options in a CANTDO-situation are a last despairing effort, seeking for help, giving up, or waiting for a positive change.

3.2.7 UDINOR

UDINOR (abbreviation of “You did something not right”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of an inappropriate behavior of somebody else.

An other power shows a behavior (i.e. an action or omission) which is classified by the perceiving individual as an inappropriate behavior. An inappropriate behavior denotes a behavior which evokes a UE in the perceiving individual or which offends against its ideas.

UDINOR appears with a slight to high intensity. Its typical expression is anger.

An individual has different options in a UDINOR-situation. It may approach the other power in a friendly or an unfriendly way. It may avoid it. It may seek for help. Or it may choose to ignore the UDINOR-impulse.

3.2.8 IDINOR

IDINOR (abbreviation of “I did something not right”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of an own inappropriate behavior.

Here the perceiving individual itself shows a behavior (i.e. an action or omission) which it itself classifies as an inappropriate behavior. An inappropriate behavior is a behavior which evokes a UE in the perceiving individual or which offends against its ideas.

IDINOR can appear with a high intensity. Typical expressions of IDINOR include guilt, frustration, despair or grief.

An individual in an IDINOR-situation may correct its behavior (e.g. excuse itself), seek for help, ignore the impulse, accept its inappropriate behavior, or wait until the impulse loses its sharpness.

3.2.9 DISLIKIT

DISLIKIT (abbreviation of “I dislike it/this”) denotes the UE which develops automatically from the perception of a strong similarity to a negatively valued entry in the personal value system.

The personal value system comprises all values of an individual. Its components (like a food, an other individual or an abstract concept) are paired with individual values. A negative value means that the individual dislikes this component. The assignment of some of such values is innate, others are dependent from the age of the individual, others from body states, and others are emotion-dependent. Negative emotion-dependent values develop automatically after the appearance of a cognitive UE-trigger. If for example NESPECT is evoked in an individual, then the party responsible for the appearance of this cognitive UE-impulse is automatically negatively valued in the personal value system of the perceiving individual.

DISLIKIT appears often with a comparably small intensity. Typical expressions of this UE reach from repulsion and refusal to disgust or hatred.

Typical behavioral options of an individual in a DISLIKIT-situation are approaching the object in a friendly or an unfriendly way, turning away, avoiding the object, seeking for help, ignoring the impulse, or waiting until the disliked object has disappeared.

3.2.10 General remarks

Besides their indicative forms (e.g. ITNOUT: “It does not work out”) there are also appropriate subjunctive forms (e.g. subjunctive ITNOUT: “It could (right now) not work out”) for all cognitive UE-triggers. In addition many cognitive UE-triggers have (indicative or subjunctive) past or future forms. Finally, the cognitive UE-impulses can appear in different combinations shortly after each other.

4. Conclusions

In this essay, simple and nine cognitive triggers have been presented. They rely on an inner uneasiness of the individual. Together they form a model to describe negative emotions. Positive emotions can be expressed in a similar way.

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