Chapter 9
The Social Sharing of Emotions
in Interpersonal and in Collective Situations:
Common Psychosocial Consequences

Bernard Rimé, Dario Paez, Patrick Kanyangara, and Vincent Yzerbyt

9.1 Introduction

Research on "the social sharing of emotion" documented the fact that following an emotional episode, the person who experienced it talks with others about this episode in 80–95% of the cases (for reviews, see Rimé, 2009; Rimé, Philippeot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zcch, & Philippeot, 1998). This propensity is not dependent on the subject's level of education. It was observed at comparable importance in countries as diverse as Asian, North American, and European ones (Mesquita, 1993; Rimé, Yogo, & Pennebaker, 1996; Singh-Manoux, 1998; Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001; Yogo & Onoe, 1998). Episodes which involved fear, or anger, or sadness were shared as often as episodes of happiness or of love. However, emotional episodes involving shame and guilt were shared at a somewhat lesser degree (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998). Laboratory studies confirmed that exposure to an emotion-eliciting condition provokes sharing (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000). Progressive extinction is the normal fate of social sharing. More intense episodes are shared more repetitively and for a longer period (Rimé et al., 1998).

9.2 The Cathartic View of Emotional Expression

A widespread belief holds that merely talking about an emotional experience would dissolve the emotional impact of this experience and would thus grant emotional recovery. Various studies examined how far the mere fact of sharing a given emotional experience had such an effect. The impact of the emotional experience was assessed using indices, such as felt emotions when reaccessing the specific episode,
or frequency of intrusive thoughts, and mental rumination about this episode. Two types of research methods were involved: (1) monitoring the extent of sharing of specified emotional episodes, and (2) experimentally inducing social sharing specified emotional episodes.

In studies of the first type, the research design generally involved assessing (1) the initial intensity of emotions elicited by the episode, (2) the extent of sharing that developed after, and (3) the intensity of emotions elicited when the memory of the episode was activated later. It was tested whether a positive correlation occurred between the amount of social sharing after the emotional event and the degree of emotional recovery — or the difference between (1) and (3). Surprisingly, these studies failed to yield such a correlation and thus failed to support the prediction that sharing an emotion would reduce the emotional load (Rimé et al., 1998). In studies of the second type, experiments involving various types of sharing were conducted (Zech, 2000; Zech & Rimé, 2005). In some studies, psychology students interviewed relatives about a negative emotional event of their recent past. In other studies, participants extensively shared with an experimenter the most upsetting event of their life. In each of these studies, sharing conditions were created by instructing participants to emphasize either the factual aspects of the episode or the feelings. Control conditions involved talking about a nonemotional topic. Consistently across studies and whatever the condition, sharing emotional experiences failed to alleviate the load of the emotional memory. Yet, in a paradoxical manner, compared to the controls, participants who shared their emotions reported that the experience was ultimately beneficial, both from a cognitive standpoint (e.g., it helped in putting order in themselves) and from a social standpoint (e.g., they experienced comforting behaviors from the part of the recipient).

To sum up, both correlational and experimental studies failed to support the belief that sharing an emotion brings emotional relief. Recent clinical research conducted on the effects of psychological debriefing techniques provided data in the same direction. Psychological debriefing is a very popular group technique implemented among exposed individuals immediately after catastrophes with the purpose (PTSD) (see Dyregrov, 1997; Mitchell & Everal, 1995, for overviews). Participants describe in detail their experience. The technique clearly involves “putting emotions into words,” and its purpose is to prevent posttraumatic stress disorder. It is thus perfectly suited to test how far talking about an emotional experience is conducive to emotional recovery. Meta-analytic reviews of controlled trials consistently concluded that debriefings have no efficacy in reducing trauma-related symptoms (Arendt & Elklit, 2001; Rose & Bisson, 1998; Van Emmelen, Kamphuis, & Hulsbosch, 2002). Adverse effects were even found in some studies. Nevertheless, victims or professionals who had been exposed to a traumatic situation generally reported that taking part in a psychological debriefing was useful and beneficial to them. Thus, in line with the findings of social sharing studies, debriefing participants failed to manifest a significant alleviation of the emotional impact that the eliciting event had, but they generally reported the feelings of relief or other benefits that they attributed to the debriefing situation.

9.3 What Sharing Emotions Brings and What Sharing Emotions Does Not Bring

There are thus consistent observations according to which the social sharing of an emotion fails to bring a sizeable emotional recovery for the shared emotional experience. We proposed that a sharing situation fails to bring this effect because the cognitive ingredients requested to achieve emotional recovery are generally absent from sharing interactions (Rimé, 2009). Early after an emotion — which is precisely when most sharing takes place — people do not engage yet in the cognitive processing of their recent emotional experience. They generally refuse to abandon their frustrated goals (Klinger, 1975; Martin & Tesser, 1989). They do not consider modifying their hierarchy of motives. They stick to their existing schemas. They do not want to change their representations. They stand by their initial appraisal of the emotional situation. They do not feel ready to reframe it nor to change their perspective. Yet, the completion of these various cognitive needs is critical to emotional recovery. Thus, except when they intentionally target the cognitive processing of the emotional experience (Nils & Rimé, 2009), social sharing situations are not bound to open upon emotional recovery. Writing methods, in which participants write about traumas of their distant past (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997) are probably much more likely to stimulate a cognitive processing of these experiences and thus to favor such a recovery.

What are the benefits people find in sharing emotion? The investigation of listeners’ responses in social sharing situations suggested that an interesting interpersonal dynamic develops in such situations (Christope & Rimé, 1997). First, when they rated the intensity of their primary emotions while listening, sharing listeners manifested a remarkable salience of the emotion of interest. This finding is consistent with observations showing that emotional materials fascinate human beings (Rimé, DelFosse, & Corsini, 2005). Second, a positive linear relation occurred between the emotional intensity of the episode heard and the intensity of the listeners’ emotion. Thus, listening to an emotional story is emotion eliciting. Third, responses displayed by sharing listeners varied dramatically as a function of the intensity of the shared episode. For low intensity episodes, listeners’ responses mostly consisted of verbal manifestations. Conversely, the higher the intensity of the episode heard was, the more listeners displayed nonverbal behaviors (e.g., touching, hugging, kissing …). In sum, at increasing levels of emotional intensity, sharing interactions became increasingly verbal and increasingly nonverbal.

The interpersonal dynamic which develops in the sharing of emotions can thus be sketched as follows. A person A who experienced an emotion feels the need to share this experience and shares it effectively with a person B. The latter manifests a strong interest for the narrative. This stimulates sharing and person A consequently expresses emotions more and more. The enhanced expression arouses emotions in person B. A reciprocal stimulation of emotion develops in this manner in the dyad which leads to enhanced empathy and to emotional
communion. The empathetic feelings experienced by person B stimulate a willingness to help and support person A. If the emotional intensity of the episode shared is high, person B is likely to reduce his or her verbal communication and to switch to a nonverbal mode, with body contact or touching. In sum, emotional sharing has the potential to bring the sender and the receiver closer to one another. Both empirical and theoretical arguments support such a view. Studies of self-disclosure interactions led to views exactly in the same direction (e.g., Reis & Patrick, 1996). Laurenceau, Feldman-Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) concluded from their studies that self-disclosure of emotion emerged as a more important predictor of intimacy than did self-disclosure of facts and information. A meta-analytic review of 94 studies about self-disclosure and liking led Collins and Miller (1994) to consider that (a) people who engage in intimate disclosures tend to be liked more than people who disclose at lower levels and (b) people like others as a result of having disclosed to them. The developmental background of the human species supports this sharing-intimacy model. The infants' capacity to regulate one's emotion originated in the context of attachment—a resource that infants activate when under stress (Bowlby, 1969). Thus, in stressful situations, attachment figures provided the child with presence, appeasement, contact, comfort, support, and meaning. It may then not come as a surprise that when later in life, individuals confront an emotional experience, their typical response is to turn to the social milieu in order to find among intimates ingredients, such as appeasement, contact, comfort, support, and meaning.

Thus, social sharing interactions favor manifestations of empathy, emotional fusion, feelings of unity, prosocial behavior, social recognition and validation, consolidation of social ties, and social integration. In this manner, such interactions meet the ingredients requested to buffer the temporary destabilization of the person—insecurity, anxiety, and helplessness—which any negative emotional experience generally entails. This sheds a light on the question of the marked subjective benefits people report after having shared an emotion. They reflect the improvement in subjective well-being which results from the alleviation of the insecurity, anxiety, and helplessness elicited by the negative emotional episode.

9.4 Collective Consequences of Dyadic Sharing

Psychosocial consequences of sharing an emotional experience extend far beyond the social integration of the initial interactants. As the social sharing of emotion arouses emotion in the target and as emotion elicits social sharing, targets of social sharing then incline to share what they heard with third persons. In other words, a process of secondary social sharing develops. This was first documented by Christophe and Rime (1997), and then abundantly replicated and extended by Curci and Bellelli (2004). The latter authors' data led to conclude that some three-quarters of episodes personally confided to someone were then shared by the latter with new targets. Psychosocial consequences of sharing an emotion extend even further.

As targets of secondary sharing also experience emotion, they incline to tertiary sharing. Episodes heard in a secondary sharing were shared again with several new listeners for one third of participants and with one new listener for another third (Rime & Christophe, 1997). Emotional episodes thus open upon a process of spreading of emotional information across social networks. When an intense emotional event affects a given individual, innumerable members of this person's community are informed of it within the next hours by virtue of this sharing propagation. That such a process actually develops in real life was nicely confirmed in a field study wherein 33 college students visited a hospital morgue (Harber & Cohen, 2005). Students' emotional reactions to this experience predicted how many people they told (primary sharing), how many people their friends told (secondary sharing), and how many people their friends' friends told (tertiary sharing). Within 10 days, nearly 900 people had heard about the morgue visit through the cascade of social sharing.

To sum up, through the spreading of emotional information, most people in a community will know what happened to one of them. This propagation of emotional information has many implications. It means that emotion elicits intragroup communication. It means that members of a community keep track of the emotional experiences affecting their peers. It means that every emotional episode of some importance happening in their community open upon a sharing process likely to strengthen members' social ties. It also means that in a group, the shared social knowledge about emotional events and emotional reactions is continuously updated as a function of new individual experiences.

9.5 Effects of Reviving Emotions in Collective Rituals

Human beings also share emotions in collective contexts. Collective emotional events, such as a victory, defeat, loss, or a disaster, indeed elicit collective rituals under the form of celebrations or commemorations. As was the case for interpersonal sharing situations, it is commonly considered that collective rituals involving emotional reexposure have the power to "liquidate" the emotional impact. Paralleling what we did earlier, we now examine the validity of this cathartic explanation of collective rituals.

A prototypical case emotional expression in a collective context is found in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Such commissions were developed in countries where major violations of human rights happened—e.g., Northern Ireland, South Africa, Israel-Palestine, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile, Bosnia, Serbia-Kosovo, Haiti, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and El Salvador. In Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, victims express publicly the facts from which they or their relatives suffered. Similarly, perpetrators are expected to express publicly the facts as they occurred. Experience with truth and reconciliation revealed that participation in such tribunals may end up in a retraumatization of victims (Bronéus, 2008; Byrne, 2004; Kaminer, Stein, Mbang, & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2001). These conclusions are thus at odd with a cathartic view of social rituals and are perfectly consistent with the findings from social rituals.
sharing studies. Yet, at the same time, positive effects have also been mentioned among the outcomes of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Survivors reported pride, relief, and a feeling of completion from public expression of their sufferings in a solemn setting. Thus, in the collective context too, sharing an emotional experience failed to reduce the emotional upset, but participants who did so manifested important cognitive and social benefits. A theory proposed a century ago by a founding father of sociology can make sense from these contrasted findings (Paez, Rimé, & Basabe, 2005).

Durkheim (1912) argued in favor of the socially functional nature of shared activities of recall of emotional events, especially when they regard events which affected the social group or community. Though primarily focused on religious cults, his analysis addressed as well any collective manifestations gathering members of a given society in a ceremony proper to recreate the moral community to which they belong. Collective events, such as commemorations, celebrations, feasts, and demonstrations, all fit such a definition. They generally involve the presence of the group symbols (flags, emblems ...) and collective expressions (singing, yelling, telling words or sentences, shared movements, music, and dance) which aptly awaken the latent social dimension of every human being. Particularly central to Durkheim’s view was that in such a context, individuals’ consciousnesses echo one another. Any expression of emotions among participants vividly elicits analogous feelings in people around them so that a reciprocal stimulation of emotion follows. Such a circular process is particularly propitious to instill a collective state of emotional communion. In this state, participants’ salience of their self is lowered and their collective identity is enhanced. They thus end up experiencing unity and similarity. This is how, according to Durkheim, social rituals have the capacity to boost participants’ feelings of group belonging and of social integration. By the same token, shared beliefs and collective representations are set at the fore, thus consolidating participants’ faith in their cultural beliefs and confidence in collective action. As a consequence, participants will be able to return to their individual life endowed with feelings of self-confidence, strength, and enhanced trust in life.

Durkheim’s model of the psychosocial consequences of expressing emotions in a collective context parallels our model of the effects of emotional expression in dyadic situations. In both models, social integration of participants is achieved via a process of emotional reactivation, emotional contagion, and emotional communion. Despite the fact that it is now about a century old, no study to date tested Durkheim’s reasoning. And yet, it involves a number of quite testable predictions. The model first leads to expect that taking part in a ritual would end up in reactivating emotional upset among all participants. A second set of consequences resulting from participation in collective rituals regards social variables. After participation in a ritual, participants’ perceived societal cohesion and feelings of group belonging should be enhanced, reinforcing the perception of positive personal, interpersonal, and collective reactions (i.e., posttraumatic growth), and increasing the perception of hope and solidarity (i.e., higher positive climate). Third, those individuals who participated in a ritual should manifest higher resilience and experience positive cognitive appraisals and coping strategies, leading to experience self-esteem, self-confidence, and trust, as well as prosocial behaviors. Hereafter, we will expose studies we conducted with the purpose to assess the aspects of these predictions.

9.6 Collective Rituals and Assimilation of Collective Violence

Paez, Basabe, Ubillos, and Gonzalez-Castro (2007) examined the effects of participating in political demonstrations and protests held in reaction to the 11 March 2004 train bombings in Madrid, Spain. On that day, bomb attacks on several commuter trains had a death toll of nearly 200 people. These events triggered scenes of protest and socio-political turmoil in the country. Some 25% of the Spanish population participated in repeated massive protest demonstrations. College students (63% of sample) and their relatives (37%) (N = 661) from five Spanish regions and eight universities completed questionnaires 1, 3, and 8 weeks, respectively, after the bombing. One week after the events, respondents first rated their extent of participation in demonstrations of the previous days. They then completed scales assessing negative emotional arousal and emotional climate. Three weeks after the events, they rated scales assessing subjective social support, loneliness, posttraumatic growth and positive affect. Finally, 8 weeks after the events, they rated again all the previous psychological scales. Twenty-two percent of the respondents reported not participating in demonstrations, 11% reported attending sometimes, 14.8% a lot of times, and 52.5% reported that they attended all demonstrations. Participants were dichotomized into non-demonstrators (score 1 “not at all participating in demonstrations”) and demonstrators (scores 2, 3, and 4). Mean comparisons were carried out in order to test if differences in outcomes discriminated these two groups.

The findings supported the positive interpersonal and social effects of taking part in demonstrations. Participation in demonstrations was associated with (1) enhanced perception of social integration (perceived social support and positive affect) 3 weeks later, (2) enhanced beliefs regarding positive life changes in response to trauma, and (3) enhanced perception of a positive emotional climate (perceived hope, solidarity, and trust) 2 months later. Results also evidenced direct effects of communal coping on posttraumatic growth and social support. Taking part in demonstrations was associated with a higher social support and a lower loneliness in later weeks, thus suggesting that it reinforced people’s social resources. In addition, participating in demonstrations enhanced the belief that there can be both personal and social benefits from dealing with the trauma (posttraumatic growth), thus suggesting that it broadened cognitive resources. A structural equation analysis confirmed that the latter effect was the primary mediator of the perception of a positive emotional climate. These results fit well within a social functionalist framework of understanding participation in ceremonies and rituals. In the aftermath of a collective trauma, demonstrations reinforced feelings of collective identity, hope, and meaning, thereby improving social cohesion.
We reasoned that sharing emotions after a collective trauma would fulfill exactly the same function as participation in ceremonies and rituals. Social sharing would be functional because it contributes to the enhancement of interpersonal integration and social cohesion and to the strengthening of positive shared beliefs about society. These processes would compensate the increase in negative affect elicited by the traumatic event and maintained by the reactivation involved in social sharing. In order to test these propositions, Rimé, Paez, Martínez, and Basabe (2006) investigated the effects of the social sharing of emotions on psychological responses of Spanish respondents to the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004. The predictions were twofold. One the one hand, we hypothesized that repeated verbal emotional expression about Madrid's events sustained the intensity of the events-related emotional arousal and mental rumination. On the other hand, we expected more extended verbal emotional expression about these events to be associated with (1) enhanced social integration (i.e., lower perceived loneliness and higher perceived social support), (2) higher positive affect, (3) higher positive view of life changes or benefits from the trauma, particularly posttraumatic growth of the collective type, (4) higher similarity with others, higher social cohesion, and more positive perception of emotional climate, and (5) better knowledge of the collective traumatic event.

Data were collected from a large sample of respondents first 1 week after Madrid’s events, then 3 weeks after the events, and finally 8 weeks after the events. These events had a very high emotional impact on participants. As we expected (Rimé et al., 1998), their initial emotional responses measured 1 week after these events involved overabundant mental rumination and social sharing of emotions. An analysis of correlations between the measures of social sharing and emotional impact of 11th March events made immediately apparent that sharing emotions was associated with a higher initial emotional impact and was also predictive of a higher emotional impact at later measurement times, as predicted by our first side hypothesis. Moreover, concurrent correlations indicated that people who were still sharing emotions 2 months after the events were also higher on variables reflecting the emotional impact these events still had. These observations are in line with previous studies showing that sharing emotions has reactivating effects with regard to the shared emotional experience (Rimé et al., 1998) and that it fails to yield positive effects for emotional recovery. All in all, thus the findings totally contradicted the cathartic or discharge view of emotional expression. They were fully consistent with views that merely sharing an emotion yields emotional arousal and emotional reactivation (Rimé et al., 1998; Zech & Rimé, 2005) and that sharing an emotion cannot lead to emotional resolution unless it involves a systematic cognitive processing of the shared emotional experience (Rimé, 2009).

Paradoxically, however, as was predicted by the second side of Durkheim’s model, socially sharing emotions in the first week after March 11 events was also found associated with a good number of markers of social integration and well-being assessed in later weeks. Thus, the initial sharing of emotions was related with (1) enhanced perception of social support, reduced the feelings of loneliness and enhanced positive affect at 3 and 8 weeks, (2) enhanced perception of positive changes in reaction to trauma (i.e., posttraumatic growth), and (3) enhanced perception of contentment, hope, solidarity, and confidence in the emotional climate. Multivariate analysis by means of structural equation modeling showed that social sharing effects at time 1 on posttraumatic growth were indirect and mediated by social sharing at time 2 and by emotional arousal or intensity at time 2. Positive effect of social sharing at time 2 on positive emotional climate were mediated by posttraumatic growth. Thus, direct and indirect effects of social sharing on positive outcomes were observed. These results support theoretical views according to which the social sharing of emotions fulfils important functions to the enhancement of social cohesion and to the reconstruction of positive beliefs about the group (Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé, 2009). They also fit findings from experimental studies showing that even though sharing emotions was not conducive to emotional recovery, participants in sharing sessions reported a good number of positive benefits from such sessions (Zech & Rimé, 2005).

The above results thus supported the predictions from Durkheim’s model. On the one hand, initial social sharing of emotions was found predictive of enhanced emotional arousal and the perception of a negative emotional climate. On the other hand, the same indicator of initial sharing of emotion also predicted effects in the other direction, with enhanced social integration, positive affect, and posttraumatic growth.

9.7 Collective Rituals and Assimilation of a Genocide

We wondered whether collective rituals that instigated at a socio-political level could affect in a significant manner emotions and the emotional climate instaled in a population as a result of past conflicts, violations of human rights, or massacres. Gasparr, Bosco, Bellelli, & Paez (in press) examined the correlates of participation in secular commemorations, funerary rituals, and transitional justice in Guatemala. This country survived four decades (1960–1996) of internal armed conflict and massive political repression. Overall, between 100,000 and 200,000 people (women, children, and the elderly in their majority) were violently killed during this conflict. Some 83% of these victims were Maya. More than half of those killed were assassinated in group massacres aimed at destroying communities. Specifically, during the 1970s and 1980s, the Guatemalan army developed a “scorched earth” policy and burned to the ground over 400 villages of the Highland indigenous population. Many of those who participated in these massacres had been forced into military service. Consequences of this state-sponsored violence included the displacement of hundreds of thousands of peasants and the militarization of the countryside. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification, one million people – approximately 25% of the population of the Guatemalan Highlands – were displaced between 1981 and 1983. Peace Accords were signed in 1996, but were hardly implemented in reforms. Participation in human rights social movement, including commemorations, rituals, demonstrations, and memorials
was the collective response of Maya’s communities to the impunity and obstacles to obtain reparation and changes.

Gasparre et al. (in press) explored the psychosocial effects that participation in different types of rituals had on individuals who had been directly affected in the Guatemala genocide. The sample consisted of 59 individuals (41 women, 18 men) ranging in age from 29 to 90 years (Mean = 49.0; SD = 15.4), with 93% of them identifying themselves as Maya. Participants rated items assessing how often they did participate (1) in secular commemorations (e.g., celebrations set up in memory of the events), (2) in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth Commission or Rehmi project), and (3) in funerary and commemorative religious rituals. Following the framework proposed by Durkheim (1912), Gasparre et al. hypothesized that higher levels of participation in rituals should be associated with higher levels of social support, altruistic coping, posttraumatic growth, and engagement in human rights social movement. First of all, participation in rituals did not decrease personal negative emotions related to the collective violence experience. It was also related to higher level of rumination and to a higher social sharing about the past traumatic events. These various results all support Durkheim’s contention that participation in rituals entails a reactivation of the commemorated emotions rather than their extinction. In clear support of the second side of Durkheim’s model, however, for each of the three types of rites considered, higher participation was associated to higher support, to a superior coping by means of social support, enhanced altruistic behavior, communal coping or engagement in political action and human rights social movement, and a lesser avoidance of thoughts and responses related to the traumatic event. Moreover, participation in rituals was associated to posttraumatic growth, thus confirming that rituals reinforce positive beliefs about the self, others, and the society. This study confirms the absence of positive effects of social rituals on reminiscence and emotions related to the traumatic event as well as the positive effects the rituals entail for social variables. Moreover, they manifested that the level of participation in rituals was related to social sharing and coping by social support, confirming that interpersonal communication is embedded in collective forms of coping with a traumatic emotion. These results are important because they rest on participants who have lived through a profound social tragedy. However, the study is limited by the fact that it was retrospective based upon volunteers. The studies to be examined hereafter were adopted longitudinal designs. They were based on large samples of both victims and authors of collective violence.

In Rwanda, it is estimated that some 1,000,000 Tutsis were killed in a genocide occurred between April and July 1994. Some 130,000 persons were then accused of participation in the genocide. To deal with this past, a traditional community-based conflict resolution system called Gacaca was adapted as a Rwandan version of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. We examined whether the Gacaca tribunals exerted an impact on emotions, emotional climate, and social variables. Based upon Durkheim’s (1912) theory, it was predicted that participation in the Gacaca would involve a reactivation of negative emotions in both groups and would also impact negatively on perceived emotional climate. However, positive consequences were expected for social integration. We thus predicted that participation would impact upon intergroup perception under the form of the reduction of (1) the prejudicial reactions of survivors and prisoners toward each other and (2) the perceived homogeneity of outgroup members. In a first study, 50 survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and 50 prisoners accused of being responsible for genocidal acts completed four scales 45 days before and 45 days after their participation in the Gacaca trial (Kanyangara, B. Rimé, Philioppot, & Yzerbyt, 2007). The scales assessed (1) negative emotions presently felt with regard to the genocide, (2) perceived emotional climate, (3) negative stereotypes of the outgroup, and (4) perceived similarity among outgroup members.

As regards individual emotions, it was found that negative emotions (sadness, fear, disgust, anxiety, and shame) were significantly enhanced after participation in the Gacaca, especially among survivors. Regarding emotional climate, given the reactivation of the negative memories of extreme intergroup conflicts entailed by the Gacaca, we predicted that negative emotion would prevail. This was indeed the case. Emotional climate worsened after the Gacaca, and the decline was more marked among the survivors than among the prisoners. Thus, all the variables indexing negative emotion reflected the emotional reactivation effects predicted by Durkheim’s model. As for social variables, before Gacaca, survivors were more stereotyped against prisoners than the other way round. However, in line with the predicted effects of enhanced social integration, the negative stereotype toward the other group markedly decreased after the Gacaca, both among survivors and among prisoners. This effect was particularly pronounced for the stereotypes held by survivors toward the prisoners. As regards outgroup homogeneity, research on stereotyping and intergroup relations has demonstrated that one signature of intergroup prejudice is to consider the members of the outgroup as being similar to each other (Yzerbyt, Judd, & Cornelle, 2004). Building on Durkheim’s insights, our hypothesis was that outgroup similarity should decrease after the Gacaca. This is indeed what our results revealed, both in the survivors’ and the prisoners’ samples. Results for both indices of social cohesion were thus totally in line with Durkheim’s hypothesis. The emotionally intense social ritual of Gacaca increased social cohesion at least in two ways: by lessening the negative stereotypes attributed to the outgroup and by reducing the perceived similarity attached to outgroup members.

To sum up, the results of this first study suggested that Durkheim’s theory of social rituals can integrate positive and negative consequences of truth and reconciliation situations in a reconciling theoretical framework. However, a major weakness of our first study was the absence of control groups of participants not yet exposed to Gacaca. This limitation did not allow to ascertain that the effects observed in the before and after comparisons were attributable to participation in the Gacaca. Therefore, we conducted a new study, including such controls, both for victims and prisoners as well as much larger number of participants (B. Rimé, Kanyangara, & Yzerbyt, Paez, 2010). The data were collected between February and April 2006 in four of the five Rwandan Provinces. Victims and perpetrators belonged either to the experimental or to the control conditions. In contrast to experimental participants, control participants came from a neighborhood where no Gacaca trial had yet taken place and where no such trial was being planned within
the next year. Also, control participants had not taken part in any other Gacaca trial outside of their neighborhood. Both experimental and control participants responded twice, once before and once after the Gacaca trial that took place for the experimental participants. The two sets of ratings were collected within a period of 10 weeks. In total, 755 persons took part in the study. The experimental group comprised 384 participants of whom 200 were victims and 184 were perpetrators. The control group involved 371 participants of whom 195 were victims and 176 were perpetrators.

The collected results again fully supported Durkheim’s view that participation in a ritual entails reactivation of negative emotions. Whereas victims in the control condition did not evidence changes, victims who participated in the Gacaca subsequently manifested an increase virtually in all the assessed negative emotions. Specifically, marked significant increases were observed for anger, disgust, fear, anxiety, and sadness. At the same time, however, participation in the Gacaca led to an important decrease in self-reported shame among victims. This suggests that social rituals contribute to restore the victims’ dignity. As for perpetrators, the pattern of results for negative emotions closely resembled the one observed on victims. Consistent with the prediction, perpetrators who participated in Gacaca manifest an increase of the negative emotions of fear, sadness, and anxiety. Also, participation in the Gacaca ended up in augmenting shame among perpetrators. Their profile was thus opposite to the profile of the victims in one important respect. In sum, participation in a transitional justice ritual, such as the Gacaca, clearly has a marked emotional cost, both for victims and perpetrators. Such findings corroborate the frequent clinical observations according to which participation in a truth and reconciliation procedure involves a risk of retraumatization (Daley, 1997; Hamber, 2001, 2006; Hayner, 2001). They fully support Durkheim’s (1912) view that the emotional reactivation resulting from participants’ reciprocal stimulation are at the core of social rituals.

Psychosocial effects were indexed by means of four dependent variables: (1) ingroup identification, (2) positive stereotypes about the outgroup, (3) negative stereotypes about the outgroup, and (4) perceived outgroup homogeneity. In line with the model derived from Durkheim (1912), we expected that each of these variables would reveal that participation in the Gacaca improved social cohesion. The data supported this prediction in three out of the four tests. First, whereas ingroup identification decreased among both victims and perpetrators after the trial, their respective control groups showed a trend in the opposite direction. The only participants who reported being moderately attached to their groups were the victims in the control group. This suggests that rituals involving collective emotional expressions and the recognition of collective past deeds contributed to weaken Hutu and Tutsi’s “ethnic” identification and to construct an integrative superordinate identity. Second, an important ingredient of intergroup reconciliation is a change in stereotypes. The pattern obtained for positive stereotypes was remarkable. Indeed, both victims and perpetrators in the experimental groups started off being less positive but ended up being more positive than those in the control groups. This suggests that, at least as far as stereotypic representations of the other group are concerned, the Gacaca process had a beneficial impact on the parties involved. Negative stereotypes decreased considerably after the Gacaca, but this effect was not found in the experimental groups alone. The general decrease in negative stereotypes may partly result from the fact that the norms toward reconciliation gained in popularity in the country as time passed by. Third, we found a considerable decrement in the perceived homogeneity of the outgroup after participation in the Gacaca, both among victims and prisoners in the experimental groups. In contrast, we observed no such change for victims and perpetrators in the control groups. Thus, in line with Durkheim’s insights, these results provide yet another piece of evidence in support of the social integrative impact of participation in these social rituals. A perception of the outgroup as being homogeneous denies individual and personal characteristics to outgroup members and reduces them to a mere instantiation of their category, thus sustaining prejudice and hostile social relations.

In sum, the various results recorded for our psychosocial variables strongly support the view that participation in the Gacaca ritual enhances the social cohesion of groups which, in the past, were opposed to each other in the most dramatic way.

9.8 The Validity of Durkheim’s Model of Social Rituals

We can now formulate conclusions about the theoretical model upon which the described studies relied. Durkheim’s (1912) model of the effects of participation in a collective ritual predicts two consequences. On the one hand, rituals are expected to trigger strong reactivation of the emotions associated with the commemorated event. On the other hand, rituals are predicted to contribute to the reconstruction of participants’ collective identity by boosting group cohesion and participants’ feelings of social integration.

With respect to emotional reactivation, our findings globally supported the prediction of the model. Participation in rituals was unrelated to negative emotions in the case of Guatemala and was associated to rumination — in fact, the association was positive but nonsignificant because of the low degrees of freedom. Participation in demonstrations in Spain increased negative emotions and rumination. Both victims and perpetrators who participated in the Gacaca manifested a considerable increase in their negative emotions in the period which followed participation and, compared to before the Gacaca, victims’ perception of a negative emotional climate was higher after their participation. These findings are in perfect agreement with both the clinical observations (Daley, 1997; Hamber, 2001; Hayner, 2001) and the rare pieces of empirical evidence concerning the consequences of truth and reconciliation situations (Brounéus, 2008; Byrne, 2004; Kaminer et al., 2001). The unanimous view thus runs against a “cathartic” or discharge perspective of the expression of emotion in social context. This conclusion is consistent with the findings emerging from the research on the emotional expression between individuals (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999; Rimé, 2009). At the same time, the reactivation of negative emotions resulting from rituals like...
Gacaca involved a series of constructive consequences. The findings supported the positive psychosocial effects anticipated by Durkheim (1912). Participation in rituals in Guatemala was associated (in Guatemala) or predicted (in Spain) positive effects at interpersonal and group level, including higher social support, adaptive coping, and postrummatism growth. It also had positive effects on the perception of collective hope and solidarity in Spain. Moreover, even in the context of adversarial rituals, such as popular trials in the Gacaca, positive intergroup effects were confirmed. In spite of enhancing a negative emotional climate among victims, participation in the Gacaca improved participants’ national identification by decreasing their identification with the ethnic group, increasing their positive view of the other group, favoring a more individualized perception of members of the group and by reinforcing a positive emotional climate among perpetrators. We interpret these effects as reflecting the improvement of social cohesion which was predicted by Durkheim. To conclude, a clear understanding of a procedure such as the Gacaca requires taking into account not only the various emotions experienced before and after participation, but also the emotional climate as well as a series of psychosocial variables.

### 9.9 General Conclusion

It could be argued for long whether the social sharing of emotion represents a person to person version of collective rituals or whether collective rituals constitute a collective version of the interpersonal sharing of emotion. Our preliminary data testing hypotheses according to which social sharing of emotion and collective rituals encompass essentially the same psychosocial ingredients seemed promising. Both processes result from a similar compulsion to share emotional experiences with one’s peers. Neither social sharing nor collective rituals have the capacity to terminate the related emotional experience and to bring emotional recovery. Both processes necessarily induce the reactivation of the emotional episode upon which they focus and in the case of negative emotions at least, this will inevitably elicit a temporary rise of negative emotions. When shared with others, however, the temporary reactivation of emotions is instrumental in eliciting emotional contagion and emotional fusion among those who are involved, whether they are intimate social sharing partners or members of a large crowd. Theory and facts converged in showing that the empathic process thus elicited is instrumental in bringing interactants closer together. The resulting social integration has a good number of emotional, social, and cognitive consequences, for the group as well as for involved individuals. These consequences seem well appropriate to buffer the destabilizing effects that emotional events, whether private or collective, have for those who experience them. It can be concluded that after emotional expression in a social context, agony is relieved but not put to rest (Daley, 1997). In this framework, social processes are thus evidencing their most fundamental function: rendering individual life possible.

### References


9 Psychosocial Consequences of Sharing Emotions


B. Rimé et al.


