

Anger, Affective Injustice and Emotion Regulation

Alfred Archer (Tilburg University) and Georgina Mills (Tilburg University)

Abstract

Victims of oppression are often called to let go of their anger in order to facilitate better discussion to bring about the end of their oppression. According to Amia Srinivasan (2018), this constitutes an affective injustice. In this paper, we use research on emotion regulation to shed light on the nature of affective injustice. By drawing on the literature on emotion regulation, we illustrate specifically what kind of work is put upon people who are experiencing affective injustice and why it is damaging. We begin by explaining affective injustice and how it can amount to a call for emotion regulation. Then we explain the various techniques that can be used to regulate emotions and explain how each might be harmful here. In the penultimate section of the paper, we explain how the upshot of this is that victims of affective injustice are left with a dilemma. Either they try to regulate their anger in a way that involves ignoring the fact of their oppression or they regulate it in a way that is likely to be harmful for them. Finally, we consider whether there are any good solutions to this dilemma, and how this issue opens up the possibility for further research into emotion regulation and moral philosophy.

Introduction

When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of hopelessness’, ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’.

Audre Lorde (1984: 125)

Victims of oppression are often asked to let go of the anger they experience in response to their oppression in order to improve their chances of bringing about an end to that oppression. According to Amia Srinivasan (2018), this situation is (sometimes) one where these victims must manage the normative conflict between their apt and fitting emotional response and what it would be best all-things-considered to feel. This conflict constitutes what Srinivasan calls an *affective injustice*, which we can understand broadly as an injustice faced by someone specifically in their capacity as an affective being.

In this paper, we will extend Srinivasan’s analysis of this form of injustice by drawing on the psychological literature on emotion regulation, the various ways in which people attempt to manage their emotional life. We will argue first that the demand faced by victims of oppression in the cases that Srinivasan considers is a demand that they regulate their emotions. We will then look at the various emotion regulation strategies that victims of oppression might deploy in order to fulfill this demand. These include situational strategies (managing the situations one finds oneself in), attentional strategies (managing what one attends to), cognitive strategies (managing how one appraises one’s situation) and response modulation strategies (managing one’s behavior in response to emotionally expressive behavior). We will argue that none of these strategies offers an appropriate response for victims of oppression seeking to regulate away the anger they feel in response to their oppression. These strategies either involve victims of oppression turning away from the injustice

that they face or have harmful outcomes for those employing them. This means that victims of oppression attempting to regulate their anger are faced with a dilemma. Either they try to regulate their anger in a way that involves ignoring the fact of their oppression or they regulate it in a way that is likely to be harmful for them. We will finish by exploring some implications of this discussion for how victims of oppression ought to respond to their anger.

By analyzing the affective injustice Srinivasan discusses in terms of emotion regulation and investigating the regulation strategies available to those facing this form of injustice, we intend to provide a deeper understanding of the injustice facing victims of oppression. In addition, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of affective injustice by showing how the demand to regulate one's emotions can constitute a form of affective injustice and how it can serve to reinforce social injustice. Finally, we intend this paper to highlight the potential of empirical work on emotion regulation to illuminate philosophical discussion of emotions. Despite the widespread discussion of emotion regulation in psychology (For details see Gross 2015:2) and its spread to anthropology (Tarlow 2012), economics (Harris et al 2013), political science (Halperin 2014) and sociology (Lively & Weed 2014), emotional regulation has been surprisingly neglected in philosophical discussions of the emotions.¹ We hope that by showing how the literature on emotion regulation can inform our understanding of affective injustice that other philosophers will be inspired to investigate how this literature can inform other philosophical issues related to the emotions.

Before we begin, it is worth differentiating our project from two related but different lines of inquiry. First, we will not primarily be examining the forms of affective injustice discussed by Shiloh Whitney (2018) which involve the lack of uptake given to the emotions of oppressed groups. One example of such a case is where a man views a woman's anger as indicating that the woman is mentally unstable rather than telling him something about the world (Frye 1983). Whitney explains how this lack of uptake results in three different form of affective injustice: affective marginalization, affective exploitation and affective violence. While we will discuss affective exploitation in the final section of our paper, we will not do so in relation to this lack of uptake but rather in relation to the need to engage in emotion regulation. Second, while we will be investigating the interconnection between emotion regulation and oppression, our primary focus will not be on the emotion regulation that the privileged need to engage in. This issue is one that Liebow and Glazer (Forthcoming) pursue in detail in relation to white fragility, and while we will touch upon this issue in the final section, our focus will be on the demands made of the oppressed to regulate their emotions.

1. Anger and Affective Injustice

Srinivasan's 2018 paper "The Aptness of anger" is significant in its characterisation of demands against emotion as an injustice in itself. In the paper, Srinivasan acknowledges that, whilst it may be true that anger is counterproductive against certain goals, it can an appropriate emotional response. An emotion is fitting, or appropriate, when the evaluation involved in the emotion fits the target of

¹Though not completely neglected, see for example Liebow and Glazer (Forthcoming)

the emotion.² When anger is appropriate but risks exacerbating harm, the person experiencing the anger is forced into a conflict which Srinivasan describes as affective injustice. It is a conflict in which there are reasons to relinquish legitimate anger. What Srinivasan adds to the existing literature on anger and moral reasoning is an account of how this kind of conflict is an injustice in itself, on top of whatever moral circumstances led to the anger initially. This paper builds on Srinivasan's work by using research on emotion regulation to explore how this injustice manifests and what is so pernicious and damaging about it.

The example that Srinivasan begins with is a 1965 debate in Cambridge Union on the motion 'The American dream has been achieved at the expense of the American Negro'. During this debate James Baldwin illustrates the truth of the motion as a matter of historical record, and meets argument from William F. Buckley Jr. who does not deny the truth of Baldwin's claims, but dismisses them on the basis of lack of pragmatic value. Buckley goes on to argue that black anger, if maintained, will be met with white violence. Srinivasan gives this example to show that, though black Americans now had a place in society at the time of the debate, their anger did not. Srinivasan goes on to illustrate this as an injustice specific to emotions. People who have experienced a genuine moral violation also have the added injustice of not being allowed to have an appropriate and fitting emotional response to it. This can occur across systems of oppression and can also be seen when talking about sexism, homophobia, and even in abusive family dynamics.³

To make her argument, Srinivasan (2018: 127-131) illustrates the conditions for anger to be considered appropriate. Anger is appropriate when it is a properly motivated and proportional response to a genuine moral violation. A desire for revenge or suffering of the perpetrator are not a necessary part of anger, putting Srinivasan's account in contrast to some accounts of anger (e.g. Nussbaum 2016). Importantly, this alone eradicates several criticisms of anger's appropriateness, under Srinivasan's account anger may lead to the suffering of the perpetrator, but that is incidental and not anger's goal. Appropriate anger meets several conditions. First, it must be a response to a genuine moral violation rather than a violation of someone's wishes or desires that are not grounded in any moral values. Secondly, it must be properly motivated by a personal reason to feel anger. This is not restricted to the moral violation being of the angry person specifically, it is possible to be angry through empathy, solidarity, or protectiveness, but there must be a fitting connection. Finally, Srinivasan states that anger must be proportional to the moral violation that caused it.

Even when anger meets all of these conditions, it can be policed, silenced, and discouraged. This pressure can come from well-wishers as well as ill-wishers, and even from the practicalities of trying to exact change. As Srinivasan as well as other philosophers acknowledge, anger can sometimes result in the alienation of those witnessing it, which can mean that any kind of acknowledgement or positive change that the angry person may want could be harder to get (e.g. Pettigrove 2012). This may provide a reason not to be angry, even when anger is appropriate. Srinivasan's paper distinguishes between having reasons not to be angry because anger is impractical and having reasons not to be angry because anger is not appropriate. Having an instrumental reason to abandon appropriate anger forces the angry person into an unjust conflict in which they are tasked with the psychologically laborious burden of setting aside an appropriate response to a moral violation in

² D'Arms and Jacobsen (2000)

³ Mills (Ms.)

order to be heard. It also creates a normative conflict which, again, is psychologically burdensome, as the victim not only has to forgo an appropriate response but is also put upon to knowingly ignore a perfectly legitimate moral judgement: that what they are faced with was a moral violation and it is right that they're angry.

2. Affective Injustice as a Demand for Emotion Regulation

In the previous section, we explained Srinivasan's account of an important form of affective injustice faced by victims of oppression. As we have seen, Srinivasan views this form of injustice as consisting of the conflict of managing one's apt emotional responses to oppression and the need to improve one's situation. This conflict creates both a psychic tax and a normative conflict for victims of oppression. In this section, we will analyze this affective injustice in terms of emotion regulation. We will argue that the demand being made of victims of oppression here is a demand that they regulate away their anger.

According to James Gross's influential definition, emotional regulation "refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions," (1998: 275). In other words, emotion regulation is the process by which we manage our own emotional lives. When we regulate our emotions, we seek to control which emotions we will experience and how we will express those emotions. Of course, we do not have the ability to fully determine our emotional lives. Nevertheless, we do have some ability to control what we feel. For example, someone may try to make themselves happy by listening to cheerful music, to calm their anxiety by engaging in mindful meditation or to rekindle their love for their romantic partner by going on a romantic weekend. It is worth noting that these are all cases of *intrinsic* emotion regulation.⁴ This is when people try to manage their own emotions and has been the central focus of the literature on emotion regulation (Gross 2014). However, it is also possible to engage in *extrinsic* emotion regulation. This is when people try to regulate other people's emotions. For example, someone may try to make someone happy by buying them a gift or to make someone feel ashamed by highlighting their deficiencies in front of others.

In the example Srinivasan gave of Baldwin and Buckley, we can see Buckley's request to move away from discussing historical injustice to focus instead on practical forward-looking political issues as not only an affective injustice but also a call for emotion regulation. Buckley does not deny the reality of the oppression of black people, what he denies is the need to discuss it. Though Baldwin argued for the motion by stating historically accurate facts, Buckley discouraged this discussion on the grounds that it was no longer useful. Buckley is aware of the fact that what Baldwin is saying is true, but wants to put any emotional response to what is clearly an extreme moral violation in the past. By doing so, Buckley expects that any anger that black Americans may feel about the fact that they or other black Americans have experienced centuries of racist oppression is their own problem and has no business in public discussion. If they want to make positive change, then they should not bring this anger into political discussions. In other words, they must regulate away their anger in order to make themselves more palatable to their audience.

⁴ We take the distinction from Gross (2015: 5).

3. Emotion Regulation Strategies

We have argued that the form of affective injustice Srinivasan is considering is a demand that victims of oppression regulate away their anger. We are now in a position to ask how victims of oppression might do so. If it is judged that it really would be better to abandon one's apt but counterproductive anger then what strategies might be used to do so? In this section, we will examine the various strategies of emotion regulation that victims of oppression could utilize in order to regulate away their anger. These are: situation management, attentional deployment, reappraisal and response modulation (Gross 2015; Gross et al 2019). In this section, we will explore each of these in turn and argue that each provides a problematic response to the affective injustice described by Srinivasan. For each strategy, we will explain what it involves, how it could be applied to the case of victims of oppression who are being asked to regulate their anger, and why this is a problematic way of responding to this situation.

3.1 Situation Management

One way to manage your emotions is to manage the situations in which you find yourself. The most straightforward way to do so is to select situations with the aim of generating or avoiding certain emotions. For example, someone may seek to avoid situations in which they have to converse with an arrogant and intimidating coworker in order to avoid feeling anxiety (Gross 2015). Similarly, someone may arrange to spend time with friends in an attempt to feel happiness. In addition to situation selection, one might also seek to modify existing situations. When speaking to a friend one may deliberately steer the conversation towards topics that are likely to cheer you up (Gross et al 2019).

These strategies provide one way in which victims of oppression might seek to avoid feeling anger at their oppression. A British Pakistani who has suffered from racism may avoid situations in which they will be confronted by racist views. They may for example choose not to socialize with co-workers they know to be racist. They may choose to live in areas where many other British Pakistanis live in order to feel safer and more at home. Alternatively, they may seek to manage existing situations. When conversing with the racist co-worker they may steer the conversation away from topics like immigration that are likely to lead to their racist attitudes being expressed. They may turn off the news to avoid hearing a report about racist violence. In these ways, they be able to reduce the number of occasions in which they feel anger in response to racism.

This response may be an important strategy for those overburdened by the anger they are feeling in response to their oppression. However, it is clearly problematic as a general response to the problem, for at least two reasons. First, it is likely to lead to the further marginalization of those suffering from racism. If victims of racism simply avoid talking to racists or engaging in conversations about immigration then victims of racism will be unable to fully participate in the life of the society they live in. As Iris Young (1990: 53) points out, "marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression." Denying people participation in social life is not only likely to lead to material harms but is a substantial harm in its own right. Therefore, this way of regulating away

the anger oppressed people experience involves increasing the oppression they face. The second, related, problem with this response is that it will make it harder to challenge and fight back against oppression. If victims of oppression avoid talking to racists or engaging in conversations about immigration then they will be unable to influence these discussions in a positive way. The marginalization then will make it more difficult to bring about social change.

This does not mean that victims of racism have a duty to engage in such discussions. Nor does it mean that privileged people are entitled to demand that victims of oppression educate them about the nature of their oppression. As Nora Bernstein (2016) has convincingly argued, this demand amounts to epistemic exploitation. However, it is also wrong for victims of racism to be excluded from such discussions. If the demand that victims of oppression regulate away their anger involves their avoiding situations likely to provoke it then this amounts to a demand that marginalized people further socially exclude themselves and avoid taking part in attempts to challenge oppression.

It is also important to note that, even if one is willing to engage in situation management as a tactic for emotion regulation in spite of the drawbacks, this can trigger further criticism. A common marker of structurally racist societies is the belief in mandatory assimilation. Frequently, members of one race will point to communities of minority races and argue that, by maintaining this community, they have failed to assimilate with the rest of the population and that this is wrong. It is the reasoning behind the commonly heard reprimand of “Speak English! You’re in America!” and it is often used as part of anti-immigrant rhetoric, as well as racist discourse against non-immigrant racial groups. The same belief in mandatory assimilation is also sometimes heard as an argument against gay clubs and bars. This means that situation management as an emotion regulation strategy can still result in one becoming a target for further racist or homophobic behaviour.

That being said, we must emphasize that these reasons do not constitute reasons not to engage in situation management. Situation management could be an important part of creating a safe space. This might be important for personal or community wellbeing and may enable people who are frequent targets of oppressive behaviour to have environments where they can be sure not to encounter it.⁵ Whilst this might be emotion regulation, it is done by the individual or community for their own sake, not for the sake of keeping their apt emotions from those who might be upset by them.

3.2 Attentional Deployment

The next set of strategies we will consider involve deploying one’s attention in a certain way in order to influence one’s emotions. For example, someone who is scared of flying may try and calm their fear by distracting themselves from their flight by playing a video game. Similarly, someone may seek to alleviate their boredom in a tedious business meeting by thinking about their upcoming holiday (Gross 2015: 8). Shifting one’s of attention can involve literally looking away from something that is eliciting an undesired emotion or directing one’s internal focus elsewhere.

⁵ See Collins (2000: Ch. 5) for a discussion of the value of safe spaces.

This set of strategies offers another way in which victims of oppression might seek to regulate away their anger. A woman in a sexist environment may choose to stop listening when her colleagues are engaging in sexist banter with each other and think about something else instead. She may choose to look away when she sees a male colleague act inappropriately to a female colleague. When reports about the level of sexism in society come on the news, she may choose to look at social media on her phone rather than paying attention to the report. By deploying these strategies, she may effectively control her anger and reduce the occasions in which she gets angry at sexist oppression. Moreover, this strategy has been found to be an effective way to lessen negative and painful emotional responses (Bennett et al 2007; Rusting 1998).

However, there are clear problems with advocating this as a general strategy for those seeking to regulate the anger they feel in response to their oppression. First, this shares the same problems as the previous strategy. If victims of sexism engage in distraction techniques whenever they are confronted with sexism then this will make it harder to challenge sexist attitudes and behavior. The second more distinctive problem with this strategy is that it seems likely to put victims of oppression in a worse epistemic position to respond to their oppression. Choosing to distract oneself whenever one is confronted by sexism would decrease someone's awareness of the nature of sexism and how it operates. One will be less aware of the various forms sexist behavior can take from outright assault to harassment, creepiness, microaggressions, gaslighting and negging. Failing to pay attention to the details of one's oppression will deprive one of information that will be important for basic safety (eg. who is the office creep who you should make sure never to be alone with) as well as hermeneutical resources that help you understand the nature of this oppression.⁶ By choosing not to pay attention, one is depriving oneself of vital epistemic resources to understand, challenge and survive one's oppression.

Of course, this does not mean that victims have a duty to attend as much as possible to their oppression or that distraction is never a useful coping strategy here. It would, though, be inappropriate to demand that victims of oppression regulate away the anger they feel in response to oppression by utilizing distraction strategies. To do so would be to suggest that they ought to engage in strategies that will deprive them of vital epistemic resources.

3.3 Cognitive Reappraisal

Another set of strategies that can be used to regulate emotions are cognitive reappraisal strategies.⁷ These strategies involve changing how one evaluates the situation that is provoking the emotional response. For example, in response to doing badly in a job interview one may try to reduce one's

⁶ See Fricker (2007: Ch.9) for a discussion of the importance of hermeneutical resources for the development of the self and McClure (2019) for a discussion of microaggressions, creepiness and sexual assault.

⁷ Gross (2015: 9) prefers the term 'cognitive change' to refer to the broad range of strategies that have to do with how one thinks about a particular situation. However, as he notes the term reappraisal is used so broadly to refer to all kinds of cognitive change strategy. We will follow the main trend in the psychological literature by referring to all of these strategies as reappraisal strategies.

negative emotions by taking a broader perspective on one's abilities and talents (Schartau et al 2009). Similarly, the candidate may reevaluate the significance of the emotion-eliciting event by telling herself that more opportunities will arise and that this was not their only chance of getting a job (Gross 2015: 9). More questionably, the candidate might engage in 'sour grapes' behavior and decide that they never wanted the job in the first place (See Elster 1983). Finally, someone may seek to regulate their negative emotions by taking a more distanced approach to their situation (Kross et al 2005; Ayduk & Kross 2008; Kross & Ayduk 2008).

These strategies offer another way in which victims of oppression might seek to regulate away their anger. Someone who has been targeted by racist abuse may seek to reduce the anger they feel in response by taking a broader perspective. For example, a footballer targeted with racist abuse by a minority of supporters may adopt a broader perspective by focusing on the fact that the majority of supporters are not acting in an abusive way. Alternatively, they may tell themselves that although this is a very bad situation, it is not catastrophic and that they are capable of tolerating it. Or they may seek to take a more distanced approach to this abuse and evaluate the abuse from a 3rd person rather than a 1st person perspective.

Reappraisal strategies have been found to be an effective for controlling the experience and expression of negative emotions. In comparison to deploying no emotion regulation strategy, using reappraisal to regulate negative emotions has been found to decrease negative emotional experience (Feinberg et al 2012; Gross 1998; Kross & Ayduck 2008). Deploying reappraisal strategies as opposed to suppression strategies (which we will discuss shortly) has been associated with a range of positive life outcomes. People who employ reappraisal strategies report having more positive and fewer negative emotional experiences (Brans et al., 2013; Gross and John 2003; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008), higher levels of psychological well-being (John & Gross, 2004; Kelley et al 2019; McRae et al 2012) and are at a lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease (Appleton & Kubzansky, 2014; Gianaros et al., 2014). In relation to anger in particular, reappraisal has been found to be more effective at reducing feelings of anger (Szasz et al 2011; Memedovic et al 2010) and at reducing the amount at which blood pressure increases in response to provocation (Memedovic et al 2010).

While reappraisal strategies offer a useful tool for regulating emotions, there are problems accepting this as a general strategy for those seeking to regulate the anger they feel in response to their oppression. This is most obviously the case if the reevaluation that takes place involves reevaluating whether the oppression is wrong. For example, suppose a woman responds to the anger she feels in response to sexual harassment by changing her judgement of whether the behavior constitutes harassment. Assuming her original judgement was correct, this does not constitute an appropriate way to respond to the injustice. This response ignores the problem and gives up on attempts to challenge the injustice.

The case is less clear with other forms of reevaluation. Taking a broader perspective, for example, is compatible with maintaining the judgement that you have been wronged in some way. Someone who is the victim of a minor wrongdoing for example might be able to let go of their anger by telling themselves that they are generally very fortunate in life. This judgement does not involve giving up on the idea that a wrong has been done. However, there are two problems with this approach. First, it comes close to ignoring the problem. By reevaluating the situation in this way, the victim of oppression is coming dangerously close to distracting herself from the wrongful behavior she has

been subjected to. Second, taking a broader perspective in response to injustice may actually increase the anger one feels in response to injustice. If a woman who has suffered harassment takes a broader perspective on this incident, she may connect it up to the many incidents of harassment and other forms of oppressive behavior she has faced throughout her life. Indeed, it is part of the nature of many forms of oppression that they are pervasive and pollute many areas of life. Taking a broader perspective may be precisely what allows one to see the link between many small incidents which individually may be minor but together add up to a damaging form of oppression. This means that in response to such forms of oppression, taking a broader perspective might be an ineffective way of reducing one's anger.

Distancing may also seem to be a strategy that would allow victims of oppression to regulate their anger while holding onto the judgment that they have been wronged. By taking a third-person perspective the victim of sexual harassment may be able to reduce the anger she feels at her harasser whilst holding onto the view that he has wronged her. However, this response also faces problems. While this approach does not ignore the problem, it does involve taking a detached perspective on the wrongdoing. This perspective is in tension with the most forceful forms of address with which a victim may direct to her wrongdoer. There is a special force in a victim addressing a wrongdoer in from their perspective as a victim. "You wronged me" makes a more forceful claim than "you have done wrong". Taking a detached perspective on the wrongdoing seems at least to be in tension with making this address from the point of view of a victim and so has the potential to undermine victims' ability to address their wrongdoer in the most forceful way. An additional problem with this strategy is that, at best, it will only be available to victims of oppression who are angry in response to a wrong that has been done to them. If instead the source of their anger is the wrong done to other people then they already have a third-person perspective. The applicability of this strategy seems limited, then, to cases where people are angry on their own behalf.

We have surveyed a number of ways in which a victim of oppression might seek to employ reappraisal strategies in order to regulate away the anger they feel in response to their oppression. We have argued that there are problems with adopting any of the strategies considered for this purpose. This does not mean though that none of the strategies considered will ever be appropriate. It does mean though that these strategies are fraught with risks in this context and that these strategies should be treated with caution. Moreover, finding an appropriate strategy to use that will not involve abandoning one's attempts to challenge oppression is itself a form of additional emotional labor that victims of oppression would be burdened with if they take this approach.

3.4 Response Modulation

The final set of strategies we will consider are response modulation strategies that involve managing how one responds to an emotion one is experiencing. Gross (2015: 9) points to various different things one might do to alter how one responds to an emotion. Someone might use alcohol, other recreational drugs or food to try to stop themselves from feeling a particular emotion. Alternatively, one might play sport or so some other form of physical activity to change how one is feeling. The most commonly investigated form of response modulation strategy though, and the one we will focus on here, is that of expressive suppression. This involves attempting to prevent oneself from

expressing the emotion one is experiencing. For example, someone who feels amusement at a funeral may do everything they can to prevent themselves from expressing this emotion. This will include trying to control their facial muscles to prevent themselves from smiling and exhaling and coughing to prevent laughter. Similarly, someone who is feeling sad at a friend's birthday party might deliberately try to stop herself communicating this through their body language by forcing their facial muscles into a smile.

Expressive suppression is another way in which victims of oppression might seek to comply with the demand not to act in an angry way. In the situation described by Audre Lorde (1984: 125) of a black woman trying to explain the racism she experiences to white women, she may deliberately suppress her anger in order to avoid creating 'a mood of hopelessness'. She forces a smile and controls her voice so that it does not express the anger she is feeling. In doing so, she may successfully suppress the expression of her anger and prevent the white women from feeling uncomfortable.

However, emotional suppression has been found to lead to several harmful consequences for those who deploy it. First, it has been found to decrease positive emotional experiences but not lead to a decrease in negative emotions (Brans et al 2013; Gross 1998; Stepper & Strack 1993; Strack et al 1988). It has also been found to have negative effects on well-being (Chervonsky and Hunt 2017; Gross 2003), lead to higher levels of physiological arousal (Goldin et al 2008; Hoffman et al 2009) and to increase cardiovascular arousal both in the person suppressing the emotion and in those socially interacting with them (Ben-Naim et al 2013; Butler et al 2003). Emotional suppression has also been linked to impaired cognitive function, in particular in relation to memory. In a study by Richards and Gross (1999) participants were presented with a series of slides of injured men together with some biographical information about them and then instructed to either engage in cognitive reappraisal or emotional suppression. The suppression group performed significantly worse in the subsequent memory test than the reappraisal group. These findings are supported by several subsequent studies (Bonanno et al 2004; Richards and Gross 2000; Richards and Gross 2006). In relation to anger specifically, emotional suppression is linked to increased risk of cardiovascular disease (Dembroski 1985; Denollet et al 2011; Harburg et al 2003; John and Gross 2004) and is less successful than reappraisal at reducing anger and frustration.

There is also good reason to think that suppressing anger may lead to it coming out elsewhere. A frequent observation among those writing about anger is that anger that is suppressed will find an outlet in other situations. In Soraya Chemaly's (2018: xx) words "Anger is like water. No matter how hard a person tries to dam, divert, or deny it, it will find a way, usually along the path of least resistance." In a moving passage, Chemaly (2018: xii) describes witnessing the eruption of her mother's suppressed anger: "one day when I was fifteen, I was dumbfounded to see my mother standing on the veranda outside our kitchen, chucking one china plate after another as far and as hard as she could into the hot, humid air [...] shattering to pieces on the terrace far below." Similarly, Audre Lorde (1984: 141) describes anger as, "A boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point, leaping out of my consciousness like a fire on the landscape." Lorde observes that she would often inappropriately direct her suppressed anger at other Black women:

Other Black women are not the root cause nor the source of that pool of anger. I know this, no matter what the particular situation may be between me and another Black woman at the moment. Then why does my anger unleash itself most tellingly against another Black woman

at the least excuse? Why do I judge her in a more critical light than any other, becoming enraged when she does not measure up? (1984: 141)

Frantz Fanon provides a similar account in his description of the effects of colonization. Colonized people feel great anger in response to their oppression but learn quickly not to express this to their oppressors. As Fanon (1961 [2003]: 42) puts the point: “The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet.” This leads to a bottled up form of anger that is will inevitably find an outlet elsewhere: “The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression.” (Fanon 1961 [2003]: 40). This anger will likely find its outlet not against those who have caused it but against fellow colonized people: “The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people.” (Fanon 1961 [2003]: 40) Suppressing anger then, often leads to it finding an outlet elsewhere. In the case of those who are angry in response to oppression, the anger often finds an outlet against other victims of that oppression.

In summary then, suppression is often a harmful emotion regulation strategy. The suppression of negative emotions is associated with harmful consequences for wellbeing, including an increased risk in heart disease. In addition, those who suppress the anger they feel at their oppressors often find themselves unleashing it against their fellow victims of oppression. Asking that victims of oppression regulate their anger by engaging in emotional suppression then, involves asking them to accept the likely negative consequences of emotional suppression for their health and well-being, as well as potentially leading to unjustified anger being unleashed against their fellow victims of oppression.

4. The Dilemma Facing Victims of Injustice

In the previous section, we examined the various strategies available to victims of oppression wishing to regulate away the anger they feel in response to injustice. We pointed out various problems with adopting any of these solutions in this context. Situation management strategies risk further marginalizing victims of oppression and making it harder for them to challenge that oppression. Attentional deployment strategies also risk making challenging oppression harder, as well as depriving victims of oppression with important epistemic resources to understand and survive their oppression. Different forms of cognitive reappraisal strategy risk either changing one’s judgement that oppression is taking place, undermining victims’ ability to respond in the most forceful way, or actually intensifying the anger. Finally, suppression is a regulative strategy associated with significant costs to those who employ it including harms to health, well being, and the relationships with one’s fellow victims of oppression.

This means that victims of oppression seeking to regulate away the anger they feel in response to their oppression face a dilemma. On the one hand, they can engage in regulation strategies that will be counter productive from the point of view of alleviating their oppression. This may be because the strategy will lead to further marginalization, make challenging the oppression harder, undermine important resources needed to alleviate it or involve changing one’s judgment that one is oppressed. Alternatively, victims of oppression can engage in emotional suppression, which is a regulative strategy associated with harms to health, well being and the relationships with one’s fellow victims of

oppression. The choice facing victims of oppression then is either to regulate their anger in a way that will make it harder for them to combat their oppression or to engage in an act of self-harm by employing a damaging emotion regulation strategy.

What this shows is that the situation facing victims of oppression who are asked not be angry in order to advance their interest is even worse than Srinivasan's account of it. Not only are they faced with the normative conflict between an apt emotional response and the need to advance their interest and the psychic costs and emotional labor that go along with it. But their situation is also such that they cannot deploy any of the standard emotion regulation strategies without further cost, either to the cause of challenging their oppression or to their own well-being.

5. How to Respond?

So far, what we have accomplished is an expansion of the implications of affective injustice as outlined by Srinivasan. Whilst Srinivasan does acknowledge that engaging in emotional regulation is psychologically burdensome, what we hope to have achieved here is a fleshed-out account of how specific emotional regulation strategies can be harmful. We have also illustrated that the harm caused by regulating appropriate emotions forces victims of injustice into a tighter dilemma than we may have initially hoped. We now have reason to doubt that it is genuinely the case that, in the face of some injustices, victims would do better to regulate their emotions. Not only is it an injustice for them to face pressure or obligation to do so, as Srinivasan shows, but also it may be damaging to do so. This is building on Srinivasan's account of affective injustice; it is not only unfair but also could be just as harmful as the negative consequences of leaving emotions unregulated.

This leaves us wondering what to do next? What is the best course of action when experiencing the unpleasant emotional consequences of oppression? Importantly, it would be a mistake to be absolutely prescriptive in answering this question. As we saw in section 3, the results of engaging in emotional regulation strategies can depend on the individual and there are many factors that can affect the outcome. What we hope to do instead is suggest some crucial considerations that need to be taken into account with any given course of action.

5.1 What we are not suggesting

An aspect of emotional regulation that we haven't covered here is temper regulation. In Seneca's *On Anger* and in several philosophical works since, anger has been characterised as a loss of control. It is important to distinguish between being angry and reacting to anger. We do not mean to discourage tactics to control the instantaneous response that one might have while angry, only to give reasons against encouraging controlling anger's existence. In cases where anger is appropriate, controlling one's reaction to anger is different from regulating the anger itself. For instance, there is no harm to our knowledge in using the common "count to ten" tactic between an event and expressing anger at that event. We could even go so far as to suggest that this kind of tactic is less emotion regulation than communication regulation.

One worry is that one could consider the "count to ten" method as the relevant part of emotion regulation, and the more violent reaction to anger as the part of anger that needs regulating. If this

were right then it would not be the emotion that would need to be regulated but rather the responsive expression of emotion. However, as DiAngelo (2011) writes, white fragility is so prevalent that even the smallest amount of racial stress can result in defensive behaviour. The result of this is that any discussion of race, no matter how calmly operated, can result in the same negative response. It is not limited to cases where a quick temper is the manifestation of anger in question. This, in addition to philosophers who advise against anger, either for moral or practical reasons (e.g. Nussbaum 2016, Pettigrove 2012) do not only have the quick temper in mind when dispensing this advice. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully consider anger as a communication strategy and temper regulation as a communication strategy, but this could be an important subject for further research. In the meantime, we will discuss a few ways to deal with affective injustice in light of emotion regulation.

5.2 Combatting Perpetrator Fragility

Having established what we do not mean to suggest, we move on to what we could suggest as an alternative to emotion regulation in cases of oppression. Reasons to engage in emotional regulation are largely to do with the potential negative reactions of others towards the affectivity of the angry individual. In the case of racial oppression, reasons to engage in emotion regulation can come from failures of emotion regulation in white people. Robin DiAngelo (2011) identifies white fragility as an emotional state in which white people become distressed at relatively small amounts of discussion of race, and as a result, this discussion can become easily derailed.

In their forthcoming article, Liebow and Glazer outline ways in which emotion regulation can be used to combat white fragility. When we consider white fragility as a failure of emotion regulation, it throws into sharp relief the affective injustice at play in cases of racial injustice. Victims of racial injustice are asked to engage in potentially damaging strategies of emotion regulation because of white people's failure to engage in helpful emotion regulation strategies. The psychological and emotional burden of engaging in difficult emotion regulation is unfairly placed on the wrong party. Whilst it is a difficult goal to achieve, ideally the solution will be that white people will get better at emotion regulation so that victims of racial oppression are no longer saddled with the task of regulating their appropriate emotions to placate white people who cannot regulate their unhelpful emotions. White people need to start doing the necessary affective labour, rather than displacing it on victims of racial injustice. Whilst this may not be a useful strategy up against someone who is unwilling to address their fragility, it should be held as the goal of emotion regulation in contexts of racism and racist oppression. This can be expanded to include other forms of oppression. For instance, if men react negatively to discussion of female oppression, the pressure to deal with their negative emotions should be on them, rather than on the oppressed woman to regulate her reaction to oppression of women. This is also important to consider in a non-political interpersonal context. In some families, if there is one volatile person in the family, the group can take on a dynamic where the volatility of that individual is taken as a given and responsibility is placed on everyone else in the group not to "set them off" rather than making that person responsible for their own emotions. This can be especially damaging in scenarios where the volatile party is abusive.⁸ Whilst this dynamic can be accepted by the members of the group it affects, to the external observer it seems unfair and

⁸ See Mills (Ms.)

enabling abusive behaviour. Yet, when this is expanded to the political context, the fragility of the powerful group is at times accepted as something that the oppressed group has to work around. This could be said to amount to affective exploitation of the oppressed group.⁹ By acknowledging this affective injustice and seeking to change the distribution of affective labour, we may be able to make discussions of inequality fairer.

5.3 Channel anger in the right kinds of ways

A second way to approach emotion regulation might be to consider the target of the emotion. Lorde (1984) makes the case against suppression of anger, not only on the basis that anger is useful, but also because she claims that the suppression of anger can lead to it coming out in other ways. In her example, suppression of anger against white people can come out as anger against other black people. She argues in favour of redirecting anger towards the appropriate target. Lorde describes “How to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it has been one of the major tasks of my life.” (1984: 141). Training one’s anger is still a psychologically laborious task, so there is still an injustice to its necessity on top of the injustice that caused the initial anger. However, there is no part of being a victim of injustice that is not psychologically laborious, and we can learn from Lorde that anger can be useful in understanding one’s oppression and damaging when suppressed. It does still leave us with the difficulty of establishing who or what is a good target for anger?

One solution might be that anger could be directed against structures of oppression rather than agents perpetuating this oppression, as that is less likely to invite the negative backlash. Unfortunately, it is clear from backlash against such anti-racist movements such as black lives matter or taking a knee that even directing anger towards systems instead of individuals can still trigger a negative response. In 2016 when American football player Colin Kaepernick knelt during the national anthem in protest of the racism and violence in the police force, there was a huge backlash including calls for him to be fired. Kaepernick demonstrated a calm, measured expression of protest against a system and was still met with an intensely angry response. With this in mind, it is perhaps naïvely optimistic to hope that if anger is directed at systems instead of people it will not risk the same backlash. Also, to proceed with the goal of redirecting anger at systems instead of individuals can still involve an affective injustice. If an individual behaves in a racist way, it is appropriate to be angry with them, and undertaking the affective labour of redirecting anger towards the system that produced the racist is still unfairly landing the angry person with psychological work through no fault of their own.

Conclusion

What we aim to have accomplished here is an expansion of Amia Srinivasan’s account of affective injustice that illustrates how specifically it is harmful. Our starting point was the link between affective injustice and emotional regulation. We argued that to demand someone forgo their anger when their anger is appropriate may not only constitute an affective injustice, as Srinivasan argues, but it may also unfairly ask them to engage in potentially harmful emotion regulation. The strategies

⁹ The term “affective exploitation” comes from Whitney (2018).

that someone might use for emotion regulation have been considered one by one, along with considerations of how they might be harmful. Given these harms, we can conclude that asking someone to regulate an appropriate emotional response because it is in their interest is not only an affective injustice, it may also be misguided as we have illustrated that it may not be in their best interest overall. A better course of action may be for those who react badly to apt emotions to learn to better manage their own emotions so that they no longer react badly, rather than ask others to regulate apt emotions.

Crucially, we are not concluding that it is definitely bad to engage in emotion regulation when one's emotions are appropriate, only that it is short sighted to argue for the regulation of fitting emotions. Given that the pressure to regulate apt anger often comes from an external pressure, rather than an internal one, we can conclude that it is often fine to engage in emotion regulation for the sake of oneself. However, it can be unjust to ask someone to engage in it for their own sake or for the sake of some external force.

We considered other strategies for emotion regulation, such as directing anger at systems of oppression. Whilst there is merit in these strategies when compared with other strategies, they carry the same risks of backlash as unregulated anger. This opens up important questions for further research, such as are there any good strategies for the regulation of apt emotion that do not carry risks of negative consequences? Also, are there other contexts in which the demand to regulate emotions is an affective injustice? In this paper, we have focused on anger in the face of oppression and discrimination, but it is possible that the same concerns could be applied to other emotions in other contexts. Finally, we are also left considering whether literature on emotion regulation can also be informative in other areas of philosophy of emotion and ethics. Given that many ethicists and philosophers of emotion dedicate research to how people should feel, it seems reasonable that those areas of philosophy could be combined with research on emotion regulation in future projects.¹⁰

Bibliography

Appleton, A. A., & Kubzansky, L. D. (2014). Emotion regulation and cardiovascular disease risk. In

J.J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (2nd ed.), New York, NY: Guilford Press:

pp. 596-612

Ayduk, Ö., & Kross, E. (2008). Enhancing the pace of recovery: Self-distanced analysis of negative experiences reduces blood pressure reactivity. *Psychological science*, *19*(3), 229-231.

¹⁰ Thank you to Amanda Cawston, Carlo Garofalo and Tilburg University's Emotions and Moral Psychology Reading Group for helpful discussion of some of the ideas in this paper. Alfred Archer's work on this paper was supported by the NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). Grant Number 016.Veni.174.104.

- Ben-Naim, S., Hirschberger, G., Ein-Dor, T., & Mikulincer, M. (2013). An experimental study of emotion regulation during relationship conflict interactions: The moderating role of attachment orientations. *Emotion*, 13, 506–519.
- Bennett, P., Phelps, C., Brain, K., Hood, K., & Gray, J. (2007). A randomized controlled trial of a brief self-help coping intervention designed to reduce distress when awaiting genetic risk information. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 63, 59–64.
- Berenstain, Nora (2016). Epistemic Exploitation. *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 3:569-590.
- Bonanno, G.A., Papa, A., O'Neill, K., Westphal, M., Coifman, K. (2004). The importance of being flexible: The ability to enhance and suppress emotional expressions predicts long-term adjustment. *Psychological Science*, 15, 482–487
- Brans, K., Koval, P., Verduyn, P., Lim, Y. L., & Kuppens, P. (2013). The regulation of negative and positive affect in daily life. *Emotion*, 13(5), 926.
- Butler, E. A., Egloff, B., Wilhelm, F. W., Smith, N. C., Erickson, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2003). The social consequences of expressive suppression. *Emotion*, 3, 48–67.
- Chemaly, S. (2018). *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*. London: Simon and Schuster
- Chervonsky, E., & Hunt, C. (2017). Suppression and expression of emotion in social and interpersonal outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Emotion*, 17(4), 669
- Collins, P.H. (2000) *Black Feminist Thought*. Routledge
- DiAngelo, R. (2011) *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, Vol 3 (3) pp 54-70.
- Elster, J. (1983). *Sour grapes: studies in the subversion of rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- Fanon, Frantz (1963 [2003]) *The Wretched of the Earth* Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin Books.
- Fricker, Miranda (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Frye, Marilyn. 1983. "A Note on Anger." In *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 84–94. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.
- Gianaros, P. J., Marsland, A. L., Kuan, D. C. H., Schirda, B. L., Jennings, J. R., Sheu, L. K., ... & Manuck, S. B. (2014). An inflammatory pathway links atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease risk to neural activity evoked by the cognitive regulation of emotion. *Biological psychiatry*, 75(9), 738-745
- Goldin, P. R., McRae, K., Ramel, W., & Gross, J. J. (2008). The neural bases of emotion regulation: Reappraisal and suppression of negative emotion. *Biological Psychiatry*, 63, 577–586
- Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: an integrative review. *Review of general psychology*, 2(3), 271.
- Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2014). *Handbook of emotion regulation* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1-26.
- Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 85(2), 348.
- Gross, James J., Helen Uusberg, and Andero Uusberg. (2019) "Mental illness and well-being: an affect regulation perspective." *World Psychiatry* 18.2: 130-139

- Halperin, E. (2014). Emotion, emotion regulation, and conflict resolution. *Emotion Review*, 6, 68–76.
- Harris, A., Hare, T., & Rangel, A. (2013). Temporally dissociable mechanisms of self-control: Early attentional filtering versus late value modulation. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 33, 18917– 18931.
- S.G. Hofmann, S. Heering, A.T. Sawyer, A. Asnaani (2009) How to handle anxiety: the effects of reappraisal, acceptance, and suppression strategies on anxious arousal *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 47 pp. 389-394
- Jaggar, A. M. (1989). Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *Inquiry*, 32(2), 151-176.
- John, O. P., & Gross, J. J. (2004). Healthy and unhealthy emotion regulation: Personality processes, individual differences, and life span development. *Journal of personality*, 72(6), 1301-1334.
- Kelley, N. J., Glazer, J. E., Pornpattananangkul, N., & Nusslock, R. (2019). Reappraisal and suppression emotion-regulation tendencies differentially predict reward-responsivity and psychological well-being. *Biological psychology*, 140, 35-47.
- Kross, E., Ayduk, O., Mischel, W. (2005). When asking “why” does not hurt: Distinguishing rumination from reflective processing of negative emotions. *Psychological Science*, 16, 709–715.
- Kross, E., & Ayduk, O. (2008). Facilitating adaptive emotional analysis: Short-term and long-term outcomes distinguishing distanced-analysis of negative emotions from immersed-analysis and distraction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(7), 924-938.
- Liebow, N., & Glazer, T. (Forthcoming). White tears: emotion regulation and white fragility. *Inquiry*, 1-21.

- Lively, K. J., & Weed, E. A. (2014). Emotion management: Sociological insight into what, how, why, and to what end? *Emotion Review*, 6, 202–207.
- Lorde, Audre (1984 [2019]) *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin).
- McClure, Emma (2019). Theorizing a Spectrum of Aggression: Microaggressions, Creepiness, and Sexual Assault. *The Pluralist* 14 (1):91-101.
- McRae, K., Jacobs, S. E., Ray, R. D., John, O. P., & Gross, J. J. (2012). Individual differences in reappraisal ability: Links to reappraisal frequency, well-being, and cognitive control. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46(1), 2-7
- Memedovic, S., Grisham, J. R., Denson, T. F., & Moulds, M. L. (2010). The effects of trait reappraisal and suppression on anger and blood pressure in response to provocation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 44(4), 540-543
- Mills, Georgina (Unpublished Manuscript) Swallowing Traumatic Anger: Family Abuse and the Pressure to Forgive.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (2016). *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nezlek, J. B., & Kuppens, P. (2008). Regulating positive and negative emotions in daily life. *Journal of personality*, 76(3), 561-580
- Pettigrove, G. (2012). Meekness and 'Moral' Anger. *Ethics* 122 (2), 341-370.
- Richards, J. M., & Gross, J. J. (1999). Composure at any cost? The cognitive consequences of emotion suppression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 1033–1044.

- Richards, J. M., & Gross, J. J. (2000). Emotion regulation and memory: The cognitive costs of keeping one's cool. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 410–424.
- Richards, J. M., & Gross, J. J. (2006). Personality and emotional memory: How regulating emotion impairs memory for emotional events. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40, 631–651.
- Rusting, C. L. (1998). Personality, mood, and cognitive processing of emotional information: Three conceptual frameworks. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124, 165–196.
- Schartau, P. E., Dalglish, T., & Dunn, B. D. (2009). Seeing the bigger picture: training in perspective broadening reduces self-reported affect and psychophysiological response to distressing films and autobiographical memories. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 118(1), 15.
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. 1928. On anger. Pp. 106–355 in *Moral Essays*, vol. 1, trans. John W. Basore. London: Heinemann.
- Srinivasan, Amia (2018). The Aptness of Anger. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 (2):123-144.
- Stepper, S., & Strack, F. (1993). Proprioceptive determinants of emotional and nonemotional feelings. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 211–220.
- Strack, F., Martin, L. L., & Stepper, S. (1988). Inhibiting and facilitating conditions of the human smile: A nonobtrusive test of the facial feedback hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 768–777.
- Szasz, P. L., Szentagotai, A., & Hofmann, S. G. (2011). The effect of emotion regulation strategies on anger. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 49(2), 114-119.
- Tarlow, S. (2012). The archaeology of emotion and affect. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 169–185.

Whitney, Shiloh (2018). Affective Intentionality and Affective Injustice: Merleau-Ponty and Fanon on the Body Schema as a Theory of Affect. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 56 (4):488-515.

Young, Iris Marion (1990) "Five Faces of Oppression." in Iris Marion Young *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).