

Masks and Roles in Daily Life Young People and the Management of Emotions¹

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Summary. In this paper, I will analyse the outcome of the research I undertook in four Italian cities on young people between 18 and 20 years old. The general hypothesis of this research is that there is a difference between private emotions and the emotions manifested in daily interaction. Young people perform emotional work in order to select the emotions to be manifested according to the social context around them and the people inhabiting it. In this article, I will focus on two main points: a description of the main emotions experienced by young people in their daily life; the influence of places and subjects in the manifestation of emotions.

Keywords: emotions, young people, daily life, masks, public places.

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Received: 23.11.2015 – Revision: 10.12.2015 – Accepted: 28.12.2015

Introduction

In contemporary society, we are immersed in emotional interaction: we enter in contact with, and relate to, the others through a kaleidoscope of both positive and negative emotions (Nussbaum, 2001). The emotions conveyed by an encounter, entering or staying within a group, associating with a social place rather than another, provide us with insight on our ‘being in the world’, our level of appreciation of that person, of that group, of that context (Turner & Stets, 2005). They tell us about how comfortable we feel in the society we interact with and, at the same time, how bound we

are by that same society to adopt certain behaviours and to express specific emotions (Cerulo, 2015b; Hochschild, 1979; Illouz, 2007; Thoits, 1990).

The latter point, in particular, has emerged from the sociological studies produced since the late nineteenth century until today, on the relationship between emotions and society. From the dynamics of individuals in a crowd (Le Bon, 1895) to the studies on authoritarian personality (Adorno, 1950), from the *hikikomori* phenomenon (Zielenziger, 2006) to the script-faithful behaviour characterising talk and reality-show audiences, and the theory on the apparent commercialization and dramatization of emotions in a political and social context (Illouz, 2007). Not to mention the construction of the *blasé* individual (Simmel, 1903) and the one of a postmodern subject fallen into forms of irresponsibility and slackness (Ehrenreich, 1983) and social and emotional indifference (Sennett, 1977).

Many of the above mentioned studies focus on the process of socialization characterizing each individual, and the various cultures channelled by the different contexts in which the daily life of the subject takes place (Cerulo, 2015b).

Starting from these reflections, in the last two years we have undertaken a study on the emotions manifested by young people between eighteen and twenty years of age, enrolled in Social or Political Sciences degree programs in four Italian cities: Turin, Perugia, Cosenza, Palermo (Cerulo 2015a). We will focus on the analysis of two main points, which characterize this research: describing and analysing the main emotions experienced by the young interviewees; investigating the relationship between emotions and social behaviours manifested according to the public or private space the subjects associate with, referring to the context which that place (as well as its rules and the people attending it) creates.

Methodology

This research is a study typical of the sociology of emotions. Following its guidelines, it focuses on the behaviours and social actions of the analysed subjects, the constructed face to face interactions, the social places attended (Turner & Stets, 2005). We have investigated the case of students enrolled in social sciences degree programs: subjects, one would assume, in possession of cognitive and interpretative tools adequate to respond to our questions, to understand them and analyze them from the scientific perspective which characterizes social sciences. The students

were asked to ‘rationalize’ their behaviours and actions, to pause and reflect on their emotions – those experienced and those manifested – in order not to let emotionality influence their responses, and engage in self-analysis, narrate themselves according to the autobiographical method. It is through the reflection on one’s own emotions that it is possible to understand the relationship between a behaviour and the social situation this takes place in, thus unveiling manifest and tacit social and behavioural norms (Hochschild, 1979; Kemper, 1990; Thoits, 2004). This is the reason why the students were asked to thematise and name their emotions: to proceed to a thematisation of emotions and the social context in which they are manifested².

In this essay, 345 open ended interviews are analyzed, after having been proposed to the students, following the autobiographical method (Kaufmann, 1996). Starting with four questions which triggered the narration, the young interviewees – between eighteen and twenty years of age, enrolled in the Political and/or Social Sciences three-year degree program in the Torino, Perugia, Cosenza and Palermo universities – were asked to talk about their daily life, in maximum two hours, as if compiling an autobiographical diary entry. The aim was to identify and interpret, in Weberian terms, the subjective sense of social actions performed by young people trying to handle their emotions and translating these into social behaviours.

When identifying the 345 young people-sample units, we used the purposive sampling method (Silverman, 2011): taking into account the MIUR³ data indicating the 1,2:3 man-woman ratio in the previously mentioned degree programs, in our survey such ratio meant 90 male interview-autobiographical diaries and 255 female ones. These were subdivided as follows: Torino 80 women and 30 men (October 2013, March 2014), Perugia 55 women and 15 men (November 2013, June 2014), Cosenza 80 women and 30 men (October 2013, June 2014), Palermo 50 women and 15 men (December 2013, October 2014).

All the students were talked through the key concepts of the research during a preliminary lesson, in order to help them understand the questions and establish the interviewer-interviewee trust which is crucial in qualitative research, even in the case of a written document such as this (Gobo, 2008).

Results

Emotions are connected to physiological processes and reactions taking place in our bodies. However, in order for them to become emotions, these processes and emotions must be interpreted in terms of symbols and social categories. In other words, they have to be *named* and we have to attribute a meaning to the physical sensation, as well as the surrounding context (Hewitt, 1976). The process of *naming* allows us to organise specific sensations – an increased heart rate, perspiration etc. – and attribute to them the meaning of rage. This further allows us to see ourselves as ‘angry’ and, in the light of such definition, to play out forms of social acting through a reflection on whether – and how – we could express that specific emotion in a certain social situation (Sandstrom et al., 2013).

Following the concepts of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), we have asked the interviewees to:

- 1) Think about their daily life and recall the face-to-face interactions they are immersed in everyday.
- 2) Think about the bodily sensations experienced, and how they generally ‘feel’ throughout these interactions: from queuing at the post office to cohabiting, from lectures to activities in their free-time, etc.
- 3) Give a name to these sensations: to name their own emotions, using the classic ‘four main emotions’ sociological scheme (happiness, rage, sadness, fear (Turner, 2011) – and giving space to their auto-analytical capabilities, inviting them to assign a name to their feeling.

Table 1 sums up national-scale results. Happiness and rage are found at the top. Further down, at a considerable distance, we find sadness and fear. What is new compared to classic socio-psychological taxonomy, is that joy and anxiety are placed second and third respectively.

TABLE 1

Question: name what you feel. What emotions would you say you are mainly experiencing in daily life situations (name maximum three)?

	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
Happiness	38,5%	32%	30,5%	30%
Joy	30%	28%	22%	40%
Rage	23%	30,5%	27,5%	38%
Anxiety	25%	21%	23%	21%
Sadness	6,5%	17%	20%	23,5%
Fear	6,5%	20,5%	8%	13%

Here are some considerations:

- as it was young students we were working with, we expected positive emotions to be at the top. And that is exactly what we find: happiness, ranking the highest, is followed by joy. In the comments received by the students, many highlighted the light-heartedness, lightness, freedom in their interactions and daily life which characterize their age.

- The load of negativity is still consistently present. Rage and anxiety rank third and fourth and further down we immediately find two other negative emotions, sadness and fear. In this case, three out of the four mentioned are main emotions. Anxiety, which has very high percentages, can be interpreted as the main emotion of our age, an age in which we are immersed in numerous nervous and interactional stimuli, forced to act on different daily stages. When projected, especially in the case of young people, towards an unpromising working future, it is easy to become a victim of anxious thoughts or behaviours.

- Anxiety is more ‘in vogue’ than sadness. Young people do not define themselves as sad, but they admit being constantly “anxious” about “an answer, an exam result, a parent’s medical visit, their sentimental situation, the future. We could interpret such data by considering the fact that for us to feel sad, something must have happened. On the other hand, we may feel anxious about future events that could delay their manifestation, no matter how imminent or indelible they may appear (as a sort of *Waiting for Godot*), as well as the fact that they may not be negative at all. Sadness is related to something that has been, that has already happened. Anxiety, on the other hand, characterizes that ‘which is to come’, with the full load of ghosts and paranoias it carries.

- Finally, love occupies an extremely low position, which, considered the age range of the interviewees, could seem unexpected. As we will see shortly, when it comes to gender differences, a strong disillusion towards the romantic ideal which is the enchantment of our youth appears. The interpretation of such data is reminiscent of a few American studies which analyze the collapse of trust in love. Bell Hooks, for example, argues that what counts today is money, the economic well-being that allows one to satisfy his/her desire of material, and sometimes immaterial, objects. The partners who, through society, have become used to such action and thought practices, are treated as 'objects' which can be freely taken, used and discarded (Hooks, 2001).

Gender differences

The gender difference enables us to reflect on differences and similarities providing further interpretations of the relationship between emotions and the daily life of young people.

Table 2, which sums up the female response, on the one hand confirms the presence of the happiness, joy, rage and anxiety emotions at the top four positions; on the other, it shows the emergence of a previously absent pair of emotions. This is constituted by the cheerfulness-nervousness binomial that many students, from Torino to Palermo, have mentioned among the main emotions experienced, writing them together, exactly as they appear in the table, separated by a dash. Cheerfulness-nervousness experienced simultaneously, as Janus' two faces, are the proof of an emotive cyclothymia which seemingly characterizes the women interviewed. Suspended between the euphoria and excitement caused by cheerfulness – because of news received, or being involved in a enjoyable and relaxed social situation – the girls claim to feel the constant risk for an emotive reversal due to moments of nervousness only seconds away:

... And cheerfulness when I am with my friends, or when I go out in the evening, to dance or at university. But there are also moments of nervousness, at the same time. I don't know how to explain it: I feel cheerful but I can become nervous in the same moment. Cheerful because I am in a certain place, nervous because the person I expected to see is not there, things like that. (f, 19, To)⁴.

I experience a mixture of emotions, cheerfulness and nervousness at the same time: I am at home with my boyfriend and I am happy, then, in the same moment, I think about a discussion I had with my parents and I feel nervous. It's 50/50. (f, 19, Cs).

TABLE 2
Women's emotions

	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
Happiness	40%	33%	30%	29%
Joy	24%	34%	24%	46%
Rage	20%	30%	27%	36%
Anxiety	32%	27%	23%	27%
Sadness	8%	20%	22%	23%
Fear	6%	17%	9%	18%
Cheerfulness and nervousness	10%	12%	10%	6%
Love	8%	8%	22%	5%

Such an example of emotive cyclothymia reflects the necessity to play more than one role on a stage, with a consequent likely loss of personality (Goffman, 1959). We would also interpret this as a sign of the inability to act calmly in many daily social situations in which, rather than acting, we are compelled to re-act to the continuous stimuli coming from the surrounding environment as well as acknowledging the continuous variations which can modify our expectations on the development of a certain social interaction.

Lastly, love, considered as an emotion in this study and mentioned by the female students interviewed, particularly the Southern Italian ones, exclusively as a sentimental relation towards a partner (and not towards a member of the family or an ideal). The answers received reveal a positive role assigned to this emotion, as well as a sense of commitment in building it and maintaining it together with one's partner. We are not before girls who purely 'use' love as the confirmation of having 'conquered' the other in order to show the group one's seductive skills (Sessions-Stepp, 2007). It is neither the case of sociological forms of love understood as 'pure relationships', which are maintained in so far as they provide satisfaction to both partners (Giddens, 1922). In this case, what we are faced with is an emotion built with great effort, with future prospects (regardless of the young age), considering that the emotion felt towards the partner represents a point of reference in times of adversity and among the disappointments of daily life.

If we look at table 3, illustrating the data reporting the emotions experienced by men, we notice significant similarities with the female data. For men as well, happiness and joy occupy the first two positions, followed by rage (with a higher percentage than women) and anxiety (with a lower percentage). Sadness and fear follow, but again with much lower percentages (with local exceptions) than the preceding emotions.

TABLE 3
Men's emotions

	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
Happiness	37%	31%	31%	31%
Joy	34%	22%	20%	34%
Rage	26%	31%	28%	40%
Anxiety	18%	15%	23%	15%
Boredom	21%	16%	14%	15%
Sadness	5%	14%	18%	24%
Fear	7%	24%	7%	8%

The differences can be summed up in two peculiar cases:

- the presence of boredom, an emotion which is absent in women, taking the place of the female 'cheerfulness-nervousness'. In the place of cyclothymic emotive forms, boys seem to feel a decidedly negative emotion, which corresponds to the lack of stimuli, the inability to act, and the lack of participation in their own lives. The students who claim to manifest boredom on a daily basis appear as contemporary *blasé* individuals: subjects with no stimuli towards the actions of the present and without any trust in the future, who could represent an update of the Simmelian definition (Simmel, 1903). Like in the case theorized by Simmel, they are subjected by society to an intense stimuli bombardment and the request for an intellectualization-intensification of their nervous life in order to get on with all their daily commitments; however, their practical response seems to be locking themselves up in a private-friendly world, in which imagination plays a major role, almost refusing to be affected by the social stimuli and, therefore, give form to new social actions:

I used to join strikes at school, like everybody else, but here at university we have had to calm down. Everybody says negative things, that there is no future. The

present as well has become boring and I prefer to stay home and think about my own things. (m, 20, PG).

Bored, so bored, because I often don't know what to do and I don't want to do anything. I don't feel inspired, I don't know... maybe it's the society not promising anything good, the crisis, etc. (m, 20, CS).

These subjects seem to live an average daily life, always performing the same actions and, if it were not for their university attendance (with regards to which more than one interviewee is ironical), they would be labelled as belonging to the NEET category, that is to say the contemporary young people not busy in either work activities, or formative actions (Bynner & Parsons, 2002)⁵. 'Slackers', the product of contemporaneity or, perhaps, hugely disappointed by society.

I don't know whether to carry on with university or not. I am very bored. Everything has been the same, with the exception of the early months. Maybe it's better to stay home and come here whenever I feel like it. I don't know, it's as if a negative message were coming from society (m, 19, TO).

As important as it is to remember that boredom ranks fifth among the most frequently experienced emotions, it is also important to register and highlight these stifled cries of alarm, which emerge as criticism against the many negative trends that contemporary society throws at young people. The 'negative message' which they receive from society is a bleak depiction of the near future (unemployment, world crisis, never-ending precariousness, etc.) which consequently creates a heavy present, filled with dark expectations of what will be.

- The second difference with regards to the female answers concerns love, which does not appear at all in the men's statements. This may be due to a sort of *machismo* on the part of the boys, or to their not considering love as worthy of mention. Whatever the reason may be, there is no trace of it in the interviews carried out.

Places of encounter, places of concealment

Table 4 lists the social places in which it is possible to witness what we could define as *emotive concealment*: the emotions manifested are different from those experienced internally.

TABLE 4

Question: which are the places where you do not manifest your emotions adapting yourself to those channeled by the social context?

	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
University	34%	31,5%	22%	27%
Family	22,5%	29,5%	24,5%	18%
Public places	30%	22,5%	12%	30%
Ceremonies-parties	21%	43,5%	33%	36,5%
Friendhsip	16,5%	31,5%	20%	29%
Work	15%	8,5%	4,5%	3%
Partner	1,5%	6,5%	9%	9%

There are seven social environments mentioned by the interviewees in which they claim to enact a greater emotive concealment and, consequently, emotive work, making an effort to repress inner emotions and manifest those ‘suggested’ by the social context.

Ranking first – except for Torino – is what for many American sociologists represents the main stage on which to work on emotions in order to adapt them to the performance enacted: the feast-ceremony. In this category are included: weddings, funerals, birthdays, religious ceremonies, various celebrations (end of year, Christmas, the carnival). Nearly all the interviewees have admitted to work on their emotions in these circumstances, mainly with the aim of not disappointing the others’ expectations on a special day. The ritual must be upheld by using emotions adequate to it, that is to say those established by one’s emotive culture.

The ‘university’ category ranks second, an environment in which the emotive work is carried out both towards, and in presence of, the lecturers and towards their colleagues. This happens because, in many cases, one’s companions have not been – and will not be - known for long, as the teaching varies according to the chosen course of study. It is, on the other hand, clear why it is necessary to maintain a respectful and submissive attitude towards the lecturers, due to the considerable difference in roles as well as the power held by the teaching body, who will decide the academic ‘future’ of the students, at least as far as grades are concerned.

University does not appear to be the most appropriate place to show one’s inner emotions, thus running the risk to incur in social ‘punishment’.

Those with a stronger personality think carefully before letting themselves go emotionally. On the other hand, those who are shy tend to withdraw within themselves even more, in an environment that, in its rituals, appears rather formal and, in the students' words, threatening towards the daring students who decide to show themselves as authentically emotive:

At university one needs to share the ideas of the group, adapt in order to avoid marginalization. It is better to keep one's emotions inside, there will be different future occasions to manifest them (f, 20, To).

At university, almost every time I am with my colleagues, I tend to manifest different emotions from what I feel because I try to seem as normal and intelligent as possible, manifesting *their* emotions. Those which make me appear accepted (m, 20, To).

Ranking third are the 'family' and 'third places' categories. There are, in fact, many percentage point differences according to each city, but in both cases the interviewees admit the need to work on their own emotions and to conceal the personal or authentic ones in order to have as few problems as possible, both towards their parents-relatives and the many strangers met in the city's public places.

According to the answers obtained, the family emerges as a seemingly complicated place as far as emotions are concerned. This is true for both the young people who still live with their parents, and must therefore submit to the family's rules (the time they are meant to be back home, information on friendships and acquaintances, control over different aspects of daily life), and for those who share a flat with other people and who must deal with the house management rules (times, cleaning, expenses, bills payment) and respect the ones of a shared life:

You cannot show your emotions to your housemate because you need to safeguard the individual and common good (m, 20, To).

In the house, with my housemates, I feel I need to adapt myself to the idea that the others have of me (f, 19, Pg).

As far as public places are concerned, offices and waiting rooms (post office, banks, Council, etc.), public transport (bus and underground trains), religious or association centres, etc. However, young people add to these those places that sociological literature defines as 'third', that is to say intermediate spaces between the intimate-private sphere and the public-familial one which we all, in a way or another, experience every day: cafes, squares, parks, pubs, supermarkets, etc. From the interactions with

strangers to the respect towards the different forms of civic education emerges the youth's awareness of having to adapt and respect the others occupying those same spaces, who are queuing or waiting just as them and who therefore have the same rights. In such places, it is necessary to adopt an emotive decorum, that is to say the manifestation of emotions which allow everyone to carry out the practices that caused them to occupy those spaces:

Social situations require decorum. In these situations, one must repress his/her emotions or regulate them, at least. This is primarily about having good manners towards the social group surrounding us and towards the situation itself (f, 19, Pg). In daily situations during which I am in contact with other people, in public places, I do not show my emotions and therefore I do not follow social rules: my civic sense compels me to adopt a different behaviour from the one I would be inclined to (m, 20, Pg).

We could interpret these two behaviours by referring to two necessities/needs: the first is to respect social rules and the individuals-citizens-companions, in order to ensure a respectful, shared life; the second is related to the theory of social masking in daily life interactions, that is to say playing different roles depending on who is before us and the stages we tread.

Friendship emerges as one of the significant places in which one's emotions are concealed. The responses clearly point out to this and are unexpected, especially if one considers the common idea of friendship, understood as something deep, sincere, free from instrumental or power logics. It does not appear to be so. From what the young interviewees have stated, it seems that with one's friends one should conceal his/her emotions and wear a social mask, achieving detachment from one's inner states. The main reason why the concealment takes place is to make the friendship last. As paradoxical as it may seem, it is preferred to fake one's manifestations but preserve the friendship, rather than express what is felt inside and compromise the relationship:

I hide some of my emotions with my friends to avoid being isolated or generate useless arguments (f, 20, To).

With friends who express different opinions from mine I prefer staying quiet, repressing my disagreement rather than discuss, debate and state what I think (f, 20, Pa).

Such concealment seems, on the one hand, related to many interviewees' feeble individual personality, leading them to follow others, not contradict the rival or the choices of the majority of the group, due to

the lack of ability or will to deal with the discussion which could ensue. It is better to avoid useless disagreements and accept what has been accepted by friends:

I do not manifest my emotions among my friends, when in different situations everyone thinks in the same way, and I join their views (f, 19, Pg).
When you go out you have to conceal your negative emotions for the sake of peaceful co-existence (f, 19, Cs).

As expressed by the last student, the difference between positive and negative emotions in friendship seems to be valid and, particularly when experiencing negative ones, one is very careful not to express them, for fear that a friend or a dear person may be hurt or for fear of being judged (and criticized):

It depends on the type of emotion-feeling. If I experience positive emotions, I have no problem in manifesting them. If I experience a negative emotion, which can be interpreted in the wrong way, I try to repress it because of how I would be judged socially and so that I do not hurt those close to me, my friends (f, 20, Pa).
One's own emotions are not manifested with one's friends, they are repressed. And we repress them because we try to appear as better than what we are, ignoring the fact that it is originality which characterizes us as individuals, and this should be clear among friends (f, 19, Cs).

Finally, emotions are modified, hidden or disguised even with one's boyfriend or girlfriend, as various students explain. The main reasons are those provided in the case of friendship: avoid causing useless discussions, fear of ruining the relationship (<to avoid clashes>, as dozens of students from Torino to Palermo stated), fear of being left alone. Freedom and originality are sacrificed in exchange for a little security, even though one would be keen to ask of what sort of security we are talking about:

In order to make my boyfriend feel well and give him the impression that I am a calm, balanced girl, in order to maintain a peaceful relationship, I hide both positive and negative emotions! I behave as he says I should (f, 20, Pa).

'Masking, hiding, repressing' recur throughout this interview. What is observed in different places and contexts is young people's detachment from their authentic emotions. As we have seen, there are different reasons

behind such behaviour, but both sexes, we believe, equally acknowledge their detachment.

Tables 5 and 6 report the percentage points for each gender.

TABLE 5
Places where masking occurs – Women

<i>Women</i>	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
University	37%	42%	27%	30%
Family	23%	34%	29%	25%
Public places	20%	25%	17%	29%
Ceremonies-parties	20%	52%	36%	39%
Friendship	13%	33%	15%	39%
Work	18%	9%	5%	3%
Partner	3%	8%	8%	8%

TABLE 6
Places where masking occurs – Men

<i>Men</i>	Torino	Perugia	Cosenza	Palermo
University	31%	20%	17%	24%
Family	22%	25%	20%	9%
Public places	40%	20%	7%	31%
Ceremonies-parties	22%	35%	30%	34%
Friendship	20%	30%	25%	19%
Work	13%	8%	3%	3%
Partner	0%	5%	10%	8%

As it can be observed, there are no great differences compared to the table reporting the overall responses. University emerges as the first place for emotional ‘masking’, especially for women, while in the case of

men the percentage points are considerably lower and relate to different contexts, such as family, ceremonies-parties and friendship.

The family continues representing the main place for concealing one's emotions, for women as well, while public places and friend relationships are slightly losing ground.

A greater female emotionality is at work in the professional environment. Moreover, the percentage lowers towards the south. Two aspects must be pointed out:

- 1) in the professional environment we talk about emotional labour, according to the original Hochschild's definition and conceptualization (Hochschild, 1979). Emotional labour distinguishes itself from emotive labour because it is part of the worker's professional tasks: one is remunerated for putting it in practice; it becomes a second skin for the worker who, with time and practice, starts performing it automatically, regarding it as a necessary tool for the completion of his professional tasks.
- 2) Emotive labour, as highlighted by the students, is, on the other hand, modified each time by social contexts and daily situations, and the people one interacts with (emotional labour is nearly always confined to the same work situation and often performed in a well-known, and often attended, place).
- 3) In the answers regarding the work context, we must consider the role played by unemployment in the interviewees' daily life. If the percentage points are so low – usually under 10% - it is not so much because the subjects do not want, or do not need, to work, but because, as many have stated, there is a considerable lack of job opportunities and therefore no possibility to work on emotions in a professional context. The issue intensifies in the South: the highest rate of unemployed young people is found in Palermo.

Discussion

Some final remarks. Most responses show an awareness of such social behaviours on young people's part. Many confess to intentionally perform an 'emotive concealment', for the different reasons discussed above. There is an emotive awareness in not expressing one's emotions, 'picking' the ones most relevant to the context-circumstance-person one is involved in. We would define this behaviour as a strategic or instrumental

social acting aimed at specific targets: from avoiding useless arguments to the fear of being criticized for what one feels, from the necessity to adapt to the group's rules to the fear of being left alone with one's inner turmoil, to the necessity of preserving or not ruining one's social reputation (as Norbert Elias writes, the watchful self-control and uninterrupted observation of the others are among the basic premises of the preservation of one's social prestige (Elias, 1939). Borrowing Weberian and Goffmanian concepts, we argue that what we have in front of us are forms of rational acting with a target (Weber, 1921) as well as dramaturgical social actions (Goffman, 1959).

In the behaviours described by the interviewees and in the social expression of their emotions, a strong rational element in the choice of one's mode of manifestation of the same emotion stands out. Boys employ a specific strategy, which means they choose which social acting to perform. Behind it, there is a concern for what is useful and the final aim, as well as an awareness of the social element of behaviours: the acting subject is not alone and under the bell jar while performing his behaviour, he is, in fact, together with other acting subjects who could probably act like him using an instrumental rationality (therefore pursuing similar goals which could, in theory, cause the subjects to be in conflict with each other). We are also witnessing a 'norm-regulated acting' because the subject, when performing his action, fluctuates between two levels of interpretation of reality: *what is* – the social and emotive rules regulating the context within which one is acting, rules to be respected in order to avoid the penalties mentioned earlier – and *what could be*, the intentions of the subject and the goals he intends to pursue through the expression of a certain emotion rather than another. In a way, young people acknowledge the existence of a double reality: that which appears to be bound by the rules and behavioural norms to perform in society and in the interactions with others; and the reality of goals and individual values, to which one can gain access (or rather, it can be imagined first, and built afterwards) by adapting to the norms of the first reality.

The interviewees perform a social acting that respects the norms of social reality but does so in a way that is strategic to the achievement of their goals, in other words the social construction of a possible reality which goes beyond the one existing at that moment, respecting it at the same time. In order to do this, the most common behaviour emerging from their words is the one involving wearing a mask.

Rather than 'repressing' or 'hiding', we believe that 'masking' is the most suitable verb to describe the interviewees' behaviours. The mask implies neither hiding nor repressing one's emotions (Goffman, 1959). It

consists of a modification of one's face, gestures, behaviour in order to act a social role. The mask allows one to pretend to be feeling something and, consequently, to express it socially in the course of face to face interaction. Exactly what happens to the students interviewed: they carry out a superficial, emotional work which consists of modifying one's face and facial and body muscles in order to adopt a position and expression adequate to make the others believe to be what they expected, to feel the emotions they requested of them, to fulfil their expectations. After all, as highlighted by Goffman, the individual is not only taking care of his own business, but is compelled to maintain an image of himself that is accessible to the others. As the local circumstances will always be reflected on him, and since these circumstances will unexpectedly and constantly vary, one's work on him/herself will always be necessary (Goffman, 1971). Through the mask and the emotive work, the social rules and emotive culture of the group are respected, thus placing importance on society in its interactional appearance. The mask imposes a fiction that, at the same time, allows the subject to act according to a twofold modality: 1) to merge oneself with the others' behaviours and live one's own, authentic emotions; 2) to not unveil one's self or one's authentic emotions in order to protect oneself and the illusions constructed by the others.

Such attitude works especially for shy, insecure, anxious subjects, or those whose will to go against the tide is weak. A mask is worn, a role played, a character constructed. The daily life of the young people interviewed emerges as one devoted to acting in order to have as few difficulties as possible in one's social groups. By using a Goffmanian perspective, we could consider the above mentioned social contexts as *the stage* upon which the mask (or the different masks) is worn, and one's inner world as the *backstage* within which the subject reflects, rationally planning the behaviours he will perform on the stage, towards the audience and the society which is waiting and evaluating his/her actions. By modifying the mask, the role one plays on the stage or backstage is also modified. Through the mask and the social fiction, the students have the possibility to live 'various lives': the ones on the stages they tread on in the course of daily activities in contact with the others; the inner, or backstage, ones, in which one's own self has the chance to emerge and authentic emotions must be dealt with. However, as we have seen, this is by no means easy and the deepening of one's scrutiny of his/her own inner emotions will not necessarily be undertaken. On the one hand, a process of 'repression' of one's scarcely known, impossible to handle emotions, which are also reason for social imbalance, may be underway; on the other, the constant disguising, masking and role-playing could cause the

homologation to the group and the mass' behaviours, resulting in the loss of the inner which is the core of one's feeling. It becomes easier, in these cases, to make do and wear anywhere and anyway the social I, that is to say the way in which the others see you, rather than facing what appears as frightening inner depths.

Notes

Paper presented at the CIRF Conference “Le emozioni in adolescenza. Un mondo di colori, chiaroscuri e ombre.” [Emotions in adolescence. A world of colors, chiaroscuro and shadows.], Padua, November 21th 2015.

¹ Translated by Federica Nardella

² The concept of emotion was intentionally left unclarified. The students used it as a synonym of sentiment, passion, mood. However scientifically inaccurate, we considered such epistemological choice the best one to bring the young students closer to our theme and drive them to talk about themselves, without a heavy terminological load, which often hinders the narration because of the fear to use concepts in the wrong way.

³ Education, University and Research Ministry (Ministero Istruzione, Università e Ricerca).

⁴ The sex, age and city of the interviewee are mentioned between brackets.

⁵ *Not in Education, Employment or Training*, that is to say young people between 15 and 29 years of age who are no longer studying and unemployed.

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