

Article

Individual Emotions Describing Continuity and Engagement in Religion: Charismatic Communality in the Light of Interaction Ritual Theory

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Abstract: The emotionality of modern times is evident in the ways in which people are religious. Among the Christian denominations, the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement, in all its diversity, is the most successful in spreading globally. It has been argued that charismatic communities are successful venues of interaction and are powerful in offering emotional experiences. However, in order for such religious experiences to lead to a continuity of religious interaction, a long-term tone of emotional energy and the presence of a stable social bond between participants is needed. The aim of this article is to analyze emotional energy as an outcome of successful interaction rituals in charismatic communities. Emotional energy is a concept that Randal Collins has formed, building on Durkheim, to analyze emotions in interaction by viewing them as “the main motivating force in social life”. This was studied by interviewing individuals on their emotions about their charismatic communities and daily life. When utilizing a self-report focus on subjective feelings, individuals may report information using different wordings relevant to any component of emotion. Special importance is placed on the cognitive processing of emotional episodes, which allows individuals to detect the relevance of each emotion, understand its causes and consequences, and communicate the emotional knowledge to others, including the researcher. The results show that, most of all, the emotions that cause some sort of pleasure, e.g., happiness and surprise, are the leading lights in narrating engagement in charismatic communities and faith. Faith also has a fear-regulating effect. Happiness as a mood is built both on experiences of God’s help and even more on one’s responsible way of life and the feeling of abandoning moral hesitation in favor of doing what is ethically right in life, which also regulates negative emotions. Collins’ theory focuses on emotional energy that is positive, but emotional experiences can also be negative, which do not contribute to the solidarity of a group.

Keywords: Pentecostal movement; emotions; emotional energy



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1. Introduction

The emotionality of modern times (e.g., [Patulny et al. 2019b](#)) is evident in the ways in which people are religious. Research has found that emotional religions and forms of religion that speak to the ‘heart’ attract the most converts ([Riis and Woodhead 2010](#)). Among the Christian denominations, the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement, in all its diversity, is the most successful in spreading globally ([Anderson 2010](#)). The global charismatic movement emphasizes being filled with the Holy Spirit, which is manifested as speaking in tongues or other spiritual gifts and wonders. It has been argued that charismatic communities are successful venues of interaction and are powerful in offering emotional experiences ([Wellman et al. 2014](#)). The emphasis on ecstatic experiences that are available to all believers is seen to analytically unify various waves of this multifaceted global movement, which has its roots in the Azusa Street Pentecostal Revival in 1906 ([Robbins 2004](#), p. 122; [James 2015](#)).

However, in order for such religious experiences to lead to a continuity of religious interaction, a long-term tone of emotional energy and the presence of a stable social bond between participants is needed. Thus, while many previous studies have focused on religious emotions from individual and psychological perspectives (e.g., Vishkin et al. 2019), the aim of this article is to analyze such emotions in interaction from a social and macro-sociological perspective. Emotional energy is a concept that Randal Collins (2004) has formed, building on Durkheim to analyze emotions in interaction by viewing them as ‘the main motivating force in social life’. Durkheim (1912) theorized that collective religious rituals produce strong, shared emotional experiences, “collective effervescence,” through which commitment to religious groups is achieved. The focus of the article is on the believers’ emotional tone that is evident in one’s continued membership in a community.

The believers and their communities that were analyzed in this article were in Russia in the first decade of the 2000s. The communities were mostly founded at the beginning of the 1990s after the law on freedom of conscience and religious associations went into effect in the final years of the Soviet Union (e.g., Shterin 2003). The classical Pentecostalism that had begun in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century survived the seventy years of the communist period only as an oppressed and underground phenomenon (Löfstedt 2012). After the collapse of communism, many Pentecostal/charismatic churches, especially in the United States, Western Europe, and South Korea, capitalized on the opportunities that the new freedom offered in a formerly officially atheist society. They saw this as a new mission field (see also Penttilä 2014; Pelkmans 2009). Because of the subdued nature of the classical Russian Pentecostals, the ‘neo’ brands, thriving on their global momentum, became dominant in the Russian Charismatic/Pentecostal field after the collapse of communism (Agadjanian 2012, p. 5). The studied communities belong to this new branch of the Pentecostal movement in Russia. They represent a clear religious minority in Russia, where Eastern Orthodoxy is the prevailing religion.

2. Emotions and Emotional Energy in Religion from a Sociological Point of View

Sociological research on emotions has increased during the last decades (e.g., Patulny et al. 2019a; Turner and Stets 2005), but emotions in the sociology of religion are still understudied compared to religious beliefs and practices (Riis and Woodhead 2010; Wellman et al. 2014). Emotions in religion have easily been viewed as essentially resistant to scholarly analysis, as irrational, unattainable, and indeed as a *mystery* (Corrigan 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, emotions are a central component of human mental operations together with cognition and motivation (e.g., Mayer et al. 2004), and emotions are part of religion *per se* (see, e.g., Emmons 2005).

There is no consensus on the definition of emotion within affective science. Scientists generally agree that emotions are episodes (Shuman and Scherer 2014). Most scientists also agree that emotions consist of components: a subjective feeling component, a motor component, a physiological component, and an action tendency component. Later, a cognitive appraisal component has also been recognized by most scientists as an additional component of the emotional experience (Shuman and Scherer 2014; Moors 2009). Nevertheless, major emotion theories still disagree on how the different components fundamentally form an emotion (for more, see, e.g., Shuman and Scherer 2014, pp. 19–23). Based on various theories and definitions of emotion, this study defines emotion as a conscious situational experience characterized by intense but rather short-lived (unlike mood or attitude) mental activity with a certain degree of pleasure or displeasure. The article utilizes the idea of basic emotions (Ekman 1992) but regards the experience of emotions as bound up with appraisals. According to appraisal theories, the appraisal of a situation, the cognitive component, initiates an emotion. Appraisals drive changes in other components that together build an emotion. Although basic emotion theories emphasize the evolutionary roots of emotions, they are also compatible with cultural learning perspectives on emotion (Shuman and Scherer 2014, p. 21). Scientists generally agree that emotions are shaped by evolutionary and social contexts (Ekman 1992; Shuman and Scherer 2014).

In addition to the individual-centric definition of emotion (bodily feelings, expressions, physiological changes, and motivations to act), sociological definitions of emotions claim that they result from sociocultural contexts that differ between social groups, such as families, peer groups, nations, and generations (Shuman and Scherer 2014; Patulny and Olson 2019). These include situational cues, social labels (such as envy and jealousy), rules about which emotions should be felt and in which social/relational situation, and cultural expectations regarding which emotions should be regulated (Patulny and Olson 2019). Thus, the starting point of the article is to observe social sentient agents in their social environment. Emotions are universal internal and physical processes, but they are also relational, social, and cultural, depending on the appraisals in each given context (Riis and Woodhead 2010; DeGuir-Gunby and Williams-Johnson 2014).

While emotions are mostly defined as individual-centric, emotional energy is an individual-collective experience of an emotion that is the outcome of successful social interaction (Davis and Bellocchi 2019). According to Randal Collins (2004), emotional energy is produced in ritualized social interaction. Collins' (2004, p. 7) interaction ritual (IR) theory describes ritual as 'a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention, producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership.' IR theory is a theory of situations. The starting point is not individuals but momentary encounters and the dynamics of situations (Collins 2004, p. 3). Thus, it forms a sociological theory of emotions, and the term ritual is understood broadly as a set of performed symbolic actions that creates a new reality between those who are parties to the situation. Interaction ritual can be anything in which the four ingredients to successful ritual conditions are concurrent: physical co-presence, a barrier to outsiders, the mutual focus of attention, and a shared mood or emotional experience. These ingredients reinforce each other. Especially the mutual focus of attention and shared mood feed each other (Collins 2004, p. 48).

Successful ritual interaction is evident in the re-grouping of participants and high levels of engagement. According to Collins (2004, p. 48), the cultivation of emotional energy signifies the presence of a stable social bond between participants in an interaction.

According to Boyns and Luery (2015), the modest expansion in scholarly uses of the concept of emotional energy is reflected in the underdevelopment of the concept itself. They argue that it remains unclear how emotional energy is linked to the concept of emotion. This is true, but in contrast to many definitions of emotion, it is clear in Collins' IR theory that emotional energy is not a short-lived emotion but closer to another affective phenomenon, mood, which instead is evident in the continuity of interaction, commitment, and group solidarity. Furthermore, unlike emotions, which most affective scientists see as including a cognitive appraisal component, emotional energy in IR theory is undramatic, and people are not aware of it, but it attracts them to certain social interactions (Collins 2004, p. 106; Davis and Bellocchi 2019). Thus, emotional energy is not 'emotion' in the sense of short, individual physiological experiences, but Collins talks about 'long-term emotional tones' (Collins 2004, p. 106). He writes (Collins 2004, p. xii) that chains of interaction rituals are set up through short-term situational emotions that carry across situations in the form of emotional energy with its hidden meaning of group membership.

Thus, the main starting point of the article is that interaction rituals produce emotional energy, and emotional energy differs from emotions in such a way that its duration is longer and its intensity is probably smaller. But emotional energy is also more stable and continuous than situational emotions that are only brief. Nevertheless, the valence and significance of long-lasting emotional energy are of the greatest importance even though it is 'so calm and smooth' that it is not even noticed. Conscious, discrete emotions are also important in group membership since they are both building material for the long-term mood of emotional energy. They are also easily attained in situations in which the emotional energy of individuals has increased. Discrete emotions are 'best explained against the backdrop of long-term emotions' (Collins 2004, p. 106). Emotional energy

is not as intense as discrete emotions, but its significance is seen in the continuity of group membership.

Wellman et al. (2014), who used the concept of emotional energy in a broad empirical study on megachurches, modified the original IR theory. They do not find the ‘barrier to outsiders’—ingredient in their study of megachurches. Boundaries to outsiders can be both physical barriers and symbolic barriers, but a core barrier is often a ‘cultural membership capital’ that is evident in the knowledge of group symbols and language (Wellman et al. 2014; Collins and Hanneman 1998). Wellman et al. (2014) concluded that megachurches usually lack barriers that exclude outsiders from participating in rituals. Traditional churches have more requirements of knowledge of cultural capital, which megachurches have diminished by eliminating liturgies and traditions and removing cultural membership capital barriers that prevent outsiders from participating. Unlike Collins’ original theory, they hold this to be behind successful ritual participation (Wellman et al. 2014, p. 654).

Successful interaction generates four outcomes that participants can experience: (1) group solidarity/feelings of membership; (2) emotional energy in the individual (positive feelings and initiative in taking action); (3) symbols that represent the group (emblems or other representations—Durkheimian ‘sacred objects’); and (4) feelings of morality and the sense of righteousness toward the group (Collins 2004, p. 49). When the IR theory is applied to religious rituals, Wellman et al. (2014) suggest that there is a fifth outcome in religious interaction: heightened spirituality, that is, ‘an affective experience of the ultimate.’ This article mostly concentrates on the emotional energy of individuals through sensory expressions and only slightly refers to other outcomes.

3. Focus of the Article and Methodology

The aim of this article is to analyze emotional energy as an outcome of successful interaction rituals in charismatic communities. This was studied through individual expressions of emotions in encounters within charismatic communities and daily life. The specific research questions answer the research task:

1. How do individuals in charismatic communities describe discrete emotions? Which emotions are appreciated, and which ones are never mentioned?
2. How and through which of IR theory’s ingredients do these emotions build emotional energy that is seen as a high level of engagement in individuals, i.e., the continuation of interaction in a religious community?

To answer these questions, I analyzed interviews (N = 16) from St. Petersburg that were conducted during fieldwork between 2006 and 2009 in communities that may be defined as charismatic. Based on these interviews and other ethnographic data from four worship communities, several other articles have been written (e.g., Turunen 2010; Penttilä 2014; Penttilä 2016). The interviewees ranged in age between 17 and 65. Nine were women, and seven were men. Their income levels and professional backgrounds varied. They were selected based on their own voluntariness and also because they represented active actors in their communities. The interviewees were pastors, voluntary workers, and active churchgoers in their communities. Thus, they were all committed to their communities and were good examples of the continuity of membership. The themes of these in-depth interviews were as follows: my community; me and surrounding society; me and other denominations; me and the state; my faith; and my future. The themes were operationalized from several theoretical concepts, such as social capital and cohesion, solidarity, and conflict, as well as religiosity and religious identity. This article uses data that is outdated for describing the present situation in these communities. Nevertheless, the data is used in order to attain empirical insights into emotions and emotional energy in charismatic communities, which is a topic that can be studied in the past as well as the present. The affective responses of individuals are quite stable and were found to be consistent across different situations (e.g., Diener and Larsen 1984).

I limit my analysis to the emotions that the interviewees articulated in the interviews. Therefore, special importance is placed on the cognitive processing of emotional episodes,

which allows individuals to detect the relevance of each emotion, understand its causes and consequences, and communicate the emotional knowledge to others, including the researcher. This interindividual level, which is achieved through the appraisal component of emotion, is highly important in studying emotional energy. By utilizing this level, I aim to collect both individual and social meanings and interpretations of emotions. Although emotions may be studied with various measurements, e.g., examining brain activity or physical responses, according to [Shuman and Scherer \(2014, p. 17\)](#), self-report persists as one of the main tools to study emotions because of the inherent subjectivity of feelings, easiness of the measurement and the richness of data gathered through personal discussions. Scientists' definitions of emotions are influenced by how individuals describe conscious experiences of subjective emotions ([Shuman and Scherer 2014](#)). The limitation of this approach is that emotional displays or narratives are only surface manifestations of complicated and covert emotional dynamics, which operate through the neurology of the brain. However, besides neurological or psychological phenomena, it is also valuable to study emotions from a sociological perspective based on the effects of situational emotions. Physical expressions of emotions have been shown to have intercultural similarities, but interpretations of experienced emotions are gained from social interaction and from the process of behavioral learning ([DeGuir-Gunby and Williams-Johnson 2014, p. 546](#)). Because of this, individual narratives are descriptive of a larger community.

Another challenge presented by the data, one may argue, is that the data did not specifically concentrate on emotions in the interviews, although I asked about emotions and experiences as one dimension of religiosity (e.g., [Stark and Glock 1970](#)). Nevertheless, the analysis concentrates broadly on the expressions of the interviewees when they explain emotional phenomena in the interview. When utilizing a self-report focus on subjective feelings, individuals may report information using different wordings relevant to any component of emotion. For example, 'I was afraid' describes the subjective feeling of fear, and 'I felt excited' refers to the physical component of emotion. 'I did not want to go any other place anymore' refers to action tendency, which may or may not be carried out, and 'I realized that I became a boozier again' includes several appraisals of situations (recognition, disappointment). The appraisal component is associated with meaning-making ([Shuman and Scherer 2014](#)).

Physical responses to emotional situations, such as facial expressions, body postures, or changes in the voice, are excluded from this analysis, although they were present in very emotional situations. Such responses were, for example, bodily reactions to experiences of a higher power or even exorcism and happiness in facial expressions after receiving communion. Emotions in the context of fieldwork may also have been my own since the interpretation of emotion is culturally defined ([DeGuir-Gunby and Williams-Johnson 2014, p. 546](#)). My Scandinavian Lutheran background, which religiously supports emotions to a lesser degree, had little to prepare me emotionally for these situations, although I visited charismatic events for a short period in my youth. The phenomenon was, therefore, not totally new for me, but with my background and without a long-term emotional tone with the groups, I likely appraised my situational emotions in a different way than the participants.

The interviews were analyzed with the help of theory-based content analysis (see, e.g., [Miles and Huberman 1994](#)). I first analyzed the subjective sensory terms in charismatic self-reports. I coded them by identifying Paul [Ekman's \(1992\)](#) six universal emotions in the data: happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust, and anger. By recognizing and coding sensory terms, I have attempted to determine which emotions charismatic believers appreciate and which are never—or seldom—mentioned. Second, I concentrated on the formation of emotional energy (interaction ritual theory): what roles do specific emotions have in social membership, and what causes social membership? Third, I utilized the emotion regulation frame of reference. In doing so, I have attempted to understand what kind of cultural expectations the communities had regarding desired emotions and emotions that should be regulated or that have or do not have emotional energy as their outcome.

These theoretical categories formed the prongs of the analysis rake: (1) basic emotions (Ekman 1992), including the above-mentioned understanding of emotion as components, (2) emotional energy with its ingredients: physical co-presence, barriers to outsiders, the mutual focus of attention, a shared mood (Collins 2004), and (3) emotion regulation (e.g., Shuman and Scherer 2014). The results of the theory-based content analysis are summarized in the Table 1 and explained in the next section:

Table 1. Emotions within charismatic community building group commitment and emotion regulation.

Subjective Feeling	Appraisal	Ingredients	Religion's Regulatory Capacity
Happiness	Personal relationship with God, "new life," responsibility, moral virtue, creativity	Common mood, barriers to outsiders, the mutual focus of attention	Successful in regulating moral hesitation
Surprise	Blessings from miraculous God	Common mood, physical co-presence	
Fear	Emotion of past life, faith's fear regulative effect, fear of God	An individual emotion, not largely shared	Successful in regulating emotion of fear
Sadness	Emotion of past life, being an outsider, a stamp of wisdom	Barrier to outsiders	
Disgust and anger	Negative side of emotional energy: feelings of being an outsider in one's community, a wish to avoid a group	Not a shared emotion, individual emotion to some characteristics in one's community	Regulating sub-culture and border-making ingredients

4. The Sensory Terms and Long-Term Mood of Emotional Energy behind Group Membership

4.1. Happiness from a 'New Life,' a Personal Relationship with GOD, Moral Virtue and Creativity—A Common Mood, a Barrier to Outsiders

Of the basic emotions, it is obvious that certain emotions are mentioned more often than others. The analysis shows the same thing that my colleague intuitively mentioned to me when I pondered the contentment of my interviewees with their everyday life: 'Charismatics are optimists. They have always been.' It is also evident from the self-report of the believers that they feel good about their group and faith and, therefore, they become energy leaders. By recounting their positive outcomes in the form of emotional energy, they are able to stir up the feelings of others (Collins 2004, p. 108).

Happiness is a commonly mentioned emotion in charismatic talk when believers explain their feelings and the effects of their faith. Happiness was not described as a short-term nor passing emotion but as a result of conversion and narrated as a stable condition in a changed life that followed conversion. Thus, it is not just a momentary expression of joy, but it is carried over as a long-term mood of emotional energy (Collins 2004, p. 107).

First of all, [when I became a believer] there were internal changes, my world view [changed]. I started to realize that I felt happy, regardless of anything. Whether it was difficult for me financially, physically, or if someone offended me, if I turned to God, He showed me—I can't explain it in words, but I guess—in his glory, how he is magnificent, and how meaningless my problems are. I just felt happy and wanted to laugh. (Marat)

As IR theory suggests, emotional energy is carried across contexts by symbols that have been charged by emotional situations (Collins 2004, p. 107); as in the above example, the experience of God's reflection is unattainable by words. The experience of joy in a certain situation affects the long-term mood of happiness. Emotional energy is a long-term outcome, a continuum from enthusiasm, a high level of self-confidence, and good self-

feeling. It is a specifically social version of the psychological concept of ‘drive’ (Collins 2004, p. 108).

Situational emotions were often connected to the feeling that God answers prayers, which resulted in continuity and stronger engagement; permanent stability grounded in the belief that all is for good.

I think so [God answers prayers]. Otherwise, it would be very sad. I feel like he loves me and helps me and that all is best for me; I have a chance. And there is a bigger idea for all this. I believe that everything will be better. I am optimistic. (Leonard)

A life change, faith that God is near and that it is easy to find him, is of course, a mental and individual belief. However, interaction with other believers is built in this feeling, resulting in emotional energy.

I really appreciated in my church that the church openly preaches the supernatural touch of God. It was very important for me. On the one hand, God is alive; he is not far away, and it is very easy to find him. And the second is a rational understanding of how to change your life. (Valentina)

Apart from faith bringing happiness through answered prayers and the supernatural touch of God, happiness after conversion was also often explained by ethical virtues. These offered a clear second step toward being happy: responsibility, which effects more pleasant emotions. This new morality and ‘clear values’ supported a peaceful and happy mind.

My life changed in such a way that I left hesitation for the sake of morality. You may just live in total peace, and you know what is allowed and what is not, and you don’t have to waste your strength on wavering, choosing, thinking, comparing. [. . .] It is a pleasant, spiritual, pleasant state of affairs. (Vadim)

According to Collins (2004, p. 109), emotional energy also includes what Durkheim called ‘moral sentiment,’ the feeling of what is moral and immoral, i.e., the feeling of righteousness about what one is doing. In such a way, charismatic communality strengthens the emotional energy of believers. Peace of mind and happiness result from living correctly. Interviews show that responsibility brings about happiness. Earlier research has shown that one’s feelings of responsibility create positive emotions in themselves (Asikainen et al. 2018).

Thus, change in behavior after conversion can regulate emotions: cognitive change in behavior and values (assessment of situation, values, motivation to act) also pushes toward a positive emotional response. Therefore, the teaching of the community to leave deliberation behind in favor of a clear and simple moral life supports individual agency: ‘With prohibitions, you do not get any results. A person has to understand himself, accept them, and live according to them. Then it will be easy and simple for him’ (Tatiana).

Living in a certain moral way also creates a barrier to outsiders—the second ingredient of IR theory—inviting everyone inside but making a barrier between believers and non-believers, who are different from each other: ‘If you are not a Christian, you start to think, should I steal or not, take bribes or not, lie or not? Wavering begins’ (Vadim). A common goal in the community is to achieve moral virtue, and this even became a self-cultivation project for many (for more, see Penttilä 2014).

[In the church], I understood that God, he gives these strengths, and the people, particularly in Christianity, devoted their lives to change because God wants to transform us into his own image. (Valentina)

Thus, coming to faith does not only consist of the first encounter with a church that allows easy access. When Wellman et al. (2014) argued that megachurches have low levels of barriers that exclude outsiders, they mostly concentrated only on the first step of conversion, which many churches have tried to make easy in order to attract new members. These churches do not require a high level of congregational knowledge or cultural capital, for example, knowledge of liturgy or what is expected during the divine

service. Neither do they have demands for special clothing. Usually, these churches do everything in a very welcoming manner (Wellman et al. 201, pp. 657–59). This was also the case in St Petersburg: the churches were truly open to outsiders, which was part of their missionary vision. They did not have a special place for rituals or sacred symbols, and the venue was casual, e.g., meetings were held in a hotel auditorium or in a school classroom. Nevertheless, it is necessary to look deeper into the cultural membership capital of emotional energy than simply into the knowledge of ritual participation or liturgical language. In the small charismatic churches in St Petersburg, cultural membership capital is something the believers learn after their repentance, and part of this is the ‘moral sentiment’ that forms the base of this cultural membership capital. This is what matters with regard to maintaining their engagement with the church and continuing participation. For those who stayed in the churches, it meant a change in their life, and this was both personal self-cultivation and a shared cultural capital of the communities: ‘Church is not just [a] gathering for secular interests, mental. It is people who grow spiritually’ (*Valentina*). The feeling of solidarity is not tested with respect to special outward ‘sacred symbols’ such as sacred objects, books, or cross pendants but in one’s behavior and values. Failure to respect certain moral values is a ‘quick test of nonmembership’ (Collins 2004, p. 108).

I have a very dear friend. She is 72 years. She is a theater director, very clever, an [Orthodox] believer. When we start arguing, and the argument that convinces her is that the Orthodox Church does not change a person widely. She can personally drink and they quarrel with her husband on this basis, and when I say that the devil is in charge of your fate, she agrees with me but does not regard it as possible to come to this church. (*Vera*)

Many interviewees affirmed this interpretation of the difference between the ease of the first step into the church and the expectations one should fulfill to live in faith. Their acquaintances became believers but only took that first step of repentance.

Everyone, in fact, all my friends repented. [. . .] Well, I see few of those who did not repent in the front of God, receive Him, very few. But growing and learning to know God is not for all [. . .] Almost no one stayed. (*Alla*)

4.2. *Surprises and Blessings from a Miraculous God—A Common Mood in Physical Co-Presence*

Surprise as an emotional episode was mentioned at least in two meanings. First, God was described as surprising and giving something new to amaze daily: ‘How miraculous God is, and even angels, who are around God, all the time are really surprised’ (*Anna*). Surprising miracles and astonishing experiences were recounted in the interviews. Religious experiences included universal emotions of happiness and surprise.

And all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit actually came down. This is what I’m saying now, that the spirit came down, and then I was surprised [by] what it was: joy. (. . .) The joy came out of me, and I didn’t want to sunbathe anymore, but I wanted to share [the word], thank the Lord, and the speaking in tongues just came on its own. So joyful, I jumped up and mmm... That’s such a good experience. (*Sergei*)

Although, to some extent, surprise was a private emotion; it was also communal and very often described as a feeling that arose in the church around other people. Individual emotions felt in the church meetings were especially strong. Emotional experiences in the church were defined as miraculous, surprising, or awesome, and a lot of other sensory expressions were also used. These miraculous feelings would vary in situation from one side to another.

They [mystical feelings] definitely are such experiences that a person feels in the church. On the one hand, you experience sharp, unbearable feeling of being unworthy to be in the love of God. You feel like a burning bush, that this love burns [. . .] and although you know you are not worthy of it, you want to be there, and when you feel its pouring out, you understand that it is an incredible

gift and happiness. Such experiences were very sharp in the church. After which you feel [like you are] soaring, so light and weightless, and you know how easily godly life flows through you. (*Valentina*)

Spontaneity and confidence are, according to [Collins \(2004\)](#), elements that reflect a high degree of emotional energy.

When I ask for prayer in church, then [God answers] practically every prayer. Especially when help is needed or one has some kind of difficulty. [. . .] If we ask for the benefit, he answers, of course. (*Alla*)

In many sociological studies, praying is defined as private religiosity (beginning from [Stark and Glock 1970](#)) and as individual interaction with the ultimate ([Giordan and Woodhead 2015](#)), but praying in charismatic meetings is also interaction with other prayers: 'We prayed together and strengthened each other' (*Alla*). Besides being in the same room, ambiance, and mood, praying was communication with the community of the studied churches, for example, through prophecy or their attempts to 'listen to God,' which strongly includes a delivery function. Thus, charismatic rituals in the form of religious rituals (e.g., praying, prophesying) are, at the same time, interaction rituals that generate emotional energy in individuals as part of the church community. One of the ingredients that interaction ritual theory assumes for a successful ritual is bodily assembly, i.e., physical co-presence ([Collins 2004](#), p. 82). It has been found that the presence of other believers and the fact that one sees the emotions of the others when they join in the same ritual creates a 'sense of social atmosphere' and the feeling of being 'where the action is' ([Wellman et al. 2014](#), p. 657). The significance of bodily assembly and of seeing other people's praise was also evident in my data: 'When brothers and sisters from other churches come, they say, "It's amazing, such mature people, and such charismatic glorification"' (*Tatiana*).

Surprises were also verified through embodied experiences. Praying for other people is a communal act that creates emotional energy: 'When I requested, I was prayed for. And His circle touched me so strongly and tears ran down [. . .] and everyone prayed for my situation [. . .] That's the way I stayed in the church' (*Alla*).

Although bodily assembly is the building of emotional bonds through a variety of emotions, surprise, including the idea of supernatural miracles, is one of the main emotions that have a communal tone. Unlike the megachurches that [Wellman et al. \(2014\)](#) studied, the churches studied in St. Petersburg were small, ranging from some ten persons to less than one hundred participants. It was not the gatherings of large crowds that facilitated the effervescent effects but the feelings that individuals had felt precisely with certain people, most of whom were friends and even relatives and most of them in the same mood of a personal wish to cultivate spiritually and morally. Shared emotional experiences generated long-term emotional energy, which was a central binding factor of membership, a continuum of short-term, intense situational emotions. Thus, it could be said that the charismatic experience strongly changed the emotional energy between participants, and it is not only an interaction between an individual and God but a successful shared experience that ties individuals closer to the collectivity: 'Friendship ties chain me to this church. It is very dear to me. It was precisely in this church [. . .] where I experienced God's touch.' (*Valentina*)

Emotional experiences can also be seen as a result of socialization. The worship communities are often led by married couples, and people have family ties with each other. Situational experiences and supernatural ways of praying also may be said to be learned in the communities: 'I grew up in this atmosphere, and I started to speak [in tongues] when I was about four years old' (*Marija*). In a way, emotional energy in the form of solidarity people have toward each other also creates situational emotional experiences.

Besides situational miracles, these emotions were also felt to be permanent in life: 'He revealed to me that he really loves me. I can hear him and know that he talks to me. It is just amazing' (*Sergei*). God's work around and through believers evoked surprise. Seeing other people's lives change and being helped also supported individuals' hopes and membership.

In our church [. . .] there are former drug addicts. They don't hide it; they talk about the depth of the problems they went through, and it touches me very much, and gives me hope, for my son. (*Vera*)

These surprises and miracles also resulted in long-term mood changes and permanent emotional energy articulated as blessings.

God is a Spirit, he is not visible. [. . .] I feel him, and I trust in him [. . .] I feel a very large number of blessings, which I didn't have earlier. (*Vadim*)

4.3. Emotional Energy as an Outcome of the Fear-Regulating Effect of Faith

In the evaluation of one's emotions, fear was an emotion of the past life. The believers assured me that they began to feel less fear, which means that becoming a believer clearly has an emotion-regulating effect. Emotion regulation through personal belief was effective. Fear had been restricting their lives: 'Earlier, I had a lot of fear of death, but now it is almost absent' (*Jelena*). Fear was also a feeling one felt when entering an Orthodox Church: 'Mum and I went to the church to light a candle. [. . .] We also received some sacraments, with fear and trembling we visited the church' (*Anna*). Now, freedom was often mentioned to be felt instead of fear.

Commonly, the lack of fear supports the individual in reaching his/her full potential—a teaching that is at the heart of the Russian charismatic movement: God has created people and wants them to evolve according to this perfect creation and to fulfill his/her talents to the best that they can. Earlier in life, the fear of failure was an impediment to achieving this. Now, freedom and creativity were felt in the place of fear.

God called forth in me a creative potential [. . .] When I studied in the art school [. . .] I was often afraid of composing compositions. I was afraid of condemnations [. . .] In every other subject I had 'fives' but not in compositions, which is the freest and most creative part [. . .] I wanted that also my compositions were good. On the one hand, I could have used time to study other masters, study art history, step by step try to draw some works, but God said to me: 'Learn to know me better!' And I gave more time to prayer in the time I could have done sketches. I gave time to study the Bible, served the church. And then exactly four days later, I did a composition which, first, was valued as excellent, second, which I liked myself, and third, it was even stolen because some student liked it so much. (*Valentina*)

On the other hand, the fear of God was a positive and sought-after emotion. It was something that was prayed for and requested for the Russian nation and the president and parliament: 'Everyone should understand [to have the] fear of the Lord and skill to live' (*Mariya*). On the other hand, some believers were also sometimes afraid of fanaticism over the unquestionable teaching in many of the churches. There were also negotiations regarding extreme wordings and a wish to reduce the barrier between believers and non-believers.

Well, a person is weak, but what I'm afraid of is that the line of fanaticism is very fragile. You've become right, and then you're a fanatic already. Yesterday, I was a sinner, but what am I today? [A] Saint? We must all be clear that we are not saints. But in Protestantism, many people sin saying that we are saints. (*Leonard*)

4.4. Sadness over Being an Outsider—But Also a Stamp of Wisdom

Sadness was seldom mentioned. When it was mentioned, it was felt for those friends and family members who had not been converted or for what life would be without faith.

In his life, there is certain emptiness and not enough warmth, which God, church, contact with people, who also hope for cleanness, goodness, love, and give it to others, can give to you. Therefore, of course, there is a vacuum in society of those values that Christianity carries in itself. (*Valentina*)

Sadness was also felt due to the moral condition of the country.

On the other hand, being in faith included some feelings of suffering. Jesus was believed to set one free from most suffering, but a certain type of suffering was mentioned especially related to feelings of being an outsider or different from non-believers.

Jesus has taken on the suffering, and you are free now. But a believer also suffers in his life [. . .] for example, I go to my friend, he is an unbeliever, and I'm a believer. And he won't even talk to me because I'm a believer and I love Jesus. And this is suffering. (*Sergei*)

The feeling that faith made the believers outsiders among other people was not very openly expressed, but it did become evident in the way interviewees did not always want to tell other people that they were believers and not Orthodox. Being part of a minority church in a context in which Orthodoxy is, in many ways, the leading faith identity quite often caused some shared emotions of being an outsider and retreating in fear.

However, sadness was also argued to be a Russian value and a stamp of wisdom that made Russians different from Americans, and that explains why the American gospel of health and wealth had not found its place in the Russian charismatic field (for more, see [Penttilä 2016](#)).

There is one characteristic of a Russian person. He is generally a pessimist. It is even regarded as a stamp of wisdom [. . .] I just saw the results of some research on the happiest countries in the world [. . .] In the first place, there were, of course, Americans [. . .] "How are you" although everything is breaking up in life [. . .] Russians were the saddest. But a Russian is "unhappy" particularly because he cannot say that everything is good. If all is well, that is definitely not a good thing. (*Ivan*)

Here as well, sadness was not viewed as a short-term mental activity with a certain amount of displeasure but as a permanent trait of character. In such a way, sadness was a part of the Russian neo-charismatic narrative.

4.5. *The Negative Side of Emotional Energy—Being an Outsider and Wishing to Avoid the Group; Disgust and Anger*

Disgust and anger were almost absent in the talk of neo-charismatics. They are not emotions that are shared or that support the common mood. They do not build emotional energy. Another reason for the lack of displeasure in emotions was that the interviewees were all among those who were in the communities' common mood. These experiences could also be seen as a 'quick test of membership.' There were some negative feelings toward people who did not live according to the community's moral codes. This is the opposite side of feeling happy from one's own moral cultivation, i.e., the barrier to outsiders who have different views, for example, on homosexual affairs.

There were some negative emotions also within the believers' own communities. Changes in one's church could cause negative emotions, e.g., when the pastor of the church changed. One interviewee mentioned that one gets used to the style of one's own community very quickly, and in other 'sister churches,' very small things that are done differently may feel disturbing, such as a pastor who speaks in a tone that is too emotional or, by contrast, in a tone that is not emotional enough; or the music might be too loud or too peaceful. Cultural capital may actually be built on very small things. The believers in various churches that are close to each other in their teaching may have differences in their cultural capital, which creates a barrier to outsiders and, thus, may strengthen the emotional energy of the community. A mutual focus of attention and a shared mood is also obvious in worship—there were many churches, and one had the possibility of choosing the church that was closest to his or her preference (for more, see [Turunen 2010](#)). The churches were not always ideal, but feelings of membership kept people in specific churches. This is how one interviewee explained how he chose his church:

I started to choose. I listened to someone else and someone else, and little by little, the choice was made in favor of this church that I go to [...] I have a lot of

criticisms about my church, a lot [...] I would love to go to the Orthodox church of [Alexander] Men, who was killed. But where is this Men? [...] My spiritual fathers, Bulgakov Sergiy, Trubetskoy, Solovyov are clever. But where are they in the Orthodox Church? And where are they in [the] Lutheran? You can't see them there either. There are no intellectual church leaders, sadly. Catholics are more cultured, but maybe they have less immediacy. I don't have an answer. But my criterion is that I come here and my soul rests. I know these people. And the pastor, I have a critical eye for him, I have a problem with that. But [the] people are my people, and why should I change this society. A small church. (*Leonard*)

According to the IR theory, a common mood is one of the ingredients of emotional energy. The feeling may be anything, but it should be shared (*Collins 2004*). Although charismatic communities share a common mood in many ways, it is not always for everyone. Interviewees also openly explained that the churches had become smaller and that many of them had shut down altogether. This indicates that not everyone is attracted to such groups and that some want to avoid them. It also denotes low emotional energy as a lack of solidarity in the group membership. This barrier to outsiders in the form of cultural capital was also articulated through the voices of the interviewees' acquaintances. Some interviewees admitted that their church is special and peculiar and that it is not for everyone's taste: 'And I say, my church is not for them [my family]. In our church, everything is quite specific. It does not resemble any other' (*Leonard*). The churches form their own groups, which have their own specific cultural membership capital, which newcomers who are not 'in' might find strange. For example, despite easy access and the lack of liturgical knowledge, first-time attendees may experience unpleasant feelings. This common mood in a charismatic session may also be seen as a barrier to outsiders and may result in their wish to avoid the group, as one interviewee explained regarding his first visit to the meeting.

[In the meeting] they said, "Let's listen to God" [...] They began to share out. I thought, what is this? I had experienced everything in my life: alcohol, narcotics, but here we gathered, drank one cup of tea with a pie, and what was happening with them? They were so bright: "I see now this kind of thing," and another started to share: "Oh, I heard this kind of thing!" [...] I politely sat the whole evening. When we left my sister asked: "Wasn't it great? Let's start to go there!" I said to her: "No, I'll never set foot in that place again", but in a month I asked her: "Do you still go there?" (*Sergei*)

Thus, although knowledge is not required to join the meetings, a common mood or a wish to achieve such a mood is necessary for the interaction ritual to be successful.

This was also recognized by one interviewee who wanted to do things differently and was one of the sources of energy in her community:

I try to make sure that not all my friends are believers because I hate[d] the subculture from the beginning. I hate it. Even God always has many faces, he always creates. And a person, through his activity, must capture and infect [...] It is a manifestation of human nature, creating beautiful things, creating beautiful poetry, good books. (*Anna*)

Anger was mentioned as a feeling that is experienced against Christians who build their own Christian sub-culture. God was seen as a creator and characterized by diversity, also as the Creator of the culture outside one's own group.

On the other hand, the lack of emotions and experiences may cause anxiety in a family-like community. Collins' theory focuses on emotional energy that is positive, but emotional experiences can also be negative, which do not contribute to the solidarity of a group. For example, speaking in tongues is very much valued, but not everyone can join in it. Moreover, living a morally committed life as a believer is not always successful. Disappointments in these endeavors can bring shame and guilt. Such stories may have been more numerous among those who were not members anymore. In the interviews

of the members, negative emotional energy or the dark side of emotions was turned into narratives of Christian growth.

At one time, I did not even notice that I, a believer [. . .] became a boozier again. I had not realized [it], but every day I drank at least a glass of some wine or a good liqueur, and that was every day [. . .] but once it happened to me that once on [a] sunny morning, I went to a cafe, had a nice drink, I walked down the street. And suddenly, it broke through: [I am] an alcoholic! And shame and fear, not in front of myself, not in the face of other people, but in front of [the] living God, the Lord, I am an alcoholic. And everything happened quickly [. . .] and I realized how such a wave came, and joy, freedom reappeared, liberation came. (*Sergei*)

5. Conclusions

Most of all, the emotions that cause some sort of pleasure, e.g., happiness and surprise, are the leading lights in narrating engagement in charismatic communities and faith. Faith also has a fear-regulating effect. Happiness as a mood is built both on experiences of God's help and even more on one's responsible way of life and the feeling of abandoning moral hesitation in favor of doing what is ethically right in life, which also regulates negative emotions. In short, living in accordance with one's conscience strengthens positive emotions.

The emotional energy described by my interviewees was not only passing feelings but a mood and an attitude, a broader life change with positive effects on stability and well-being. Through this positive change, private and personal emotions produced well-being not only for individuals but their family life, work, and health also experienced positive changes. A positive relationship between emotional stability and charismatic experience has also been reported in earlier studies (see, e.g., [Francis and Jones 1997](#)). Earlier studies have also reported positive life changes and transformations among those who have experienced a conversion in Protestant churches. These changes include strengthened self-confidence and a feeling of security as well as fewer feelings of anxiety ([Hannikainen 2021](#), p. 142; [Hood et al. 2018](#)). Earlier research has also found that many people who experienced a quick conversion had a weak attachment in early childhood and may have experienced brokenness in life. Conversion may have a reconstructive element in such cases ([Hannikainen 2021](#)).

According to Collins, feelings of solidarity concern one's own group and generate altruism, love, and a wish to defend one's own group. In a Christian context, 'one's own group' is often the universal Christian church, those who are saved. A large amount of emotional energy in charismatic churches is also grounded in the fact that this emotional energy and solidarity have led these individuals to share their emotional energy with others. The communities intended to attract outsiders and also mentioned that they hated the "subculture" of believers. They did have symbolic cultural capital knowledge, but there was a conscious attempt not to exclude outsiders. The role of emotional energy (as a long-term tone of situational emotions) was a binding force for group membership and a bridging force to other people through solidarity.

Interaction ritual theory is a sociological theory of emotions, and the term ritual is understood broadly. In this study, it is difficult to distinguish interaction ritual from religious rituals because they go together. The community is meant, first of all, for religious rituals, including the believers' interaction with each other. Community meetings are not secular gatherings nor just interactions without a religious aspect, although the congregants may have many family and friendship ties outside religious purposes. The fact that fellow believers share a common mood and ethics is central also for secular interaction, in which God was also considered to be present—as in the life of charismatic believers altogether. This further stabilizes social bonds. However, there might also be conflict within these bonds, as was in Leonard's case, when he held the religious bonds and rituals to be central but felt that his social interaction with the pastor, for example, was not successful. Religious rituals may therefore produce stronger emotional energy than social ritual interaction.

The viewpoint of emotion regulation has been used in educational sciences to develop self-regulation strategies in learning (see, e.g., [Shuman and Scherer 2014](#)). I slightly applied this approach in this article in order to see what its benefits might be for religious communities. The cultural expectations in charismatic communities, i.e., which emotions should be felt and how emotions affect and influence individual lives, do have a regulatory capacity. Interindividual appraisal of these emotions supports the regulation of emotions that are not advocated by the community. Regulatory efforts are employed to reduce the feeling of fear, i.e., feeling less fear indicates that the regulation was successful. Other cultural expectations for advocated feelings were the resting of one's soul, balance, and the initiation of a happy life as positive effects of conversion or even effects 'without any specific reason.' Although Charismatic faith reduces some sadness, it is also regarded as an important emotion. Unlike hate and disgust, which are disturbing, sadness is a mark of wisdom. Nevertheless, further study on the capacity of religious emotions to regulate emotions is necessary, including the determination and offering of practical advice for religious communities on what kind of emotion regulation would be constructive in order to build a healthy communality.

Although I have analyzed emotions and emotional energy without a specific societal context, we may also consider them in the context of the interviews that were gathered. The data was gathered in Russia between the years 2006 and 2009, at which time many minority believers had to again battle more difficulties related to their faith in comparison to the relatively free 1990s, which was the decade when the Soviet Union collapsed and when the majority of my interviewees became believers. Despite difficulties, emotions were mainly positive. Thus, I would say that a study of emotions in religion in the Charismatic communities of other countries would likely produce similar results as well. Charismatics are optimistic.

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