

Suppression of Emotion: A Danger to Modern Societies?

by Thomas J. Scheff (January 2011)

This essay proposes that suppression of emotions is a key institution in modern societies, and that it underlies the denial of death and both interpersonal and inter-group violence. The thesis begins with a comparison of traditional and modern societies with respect to their treatment of the social-emotional world. Next a relatively minor instance of suppression is considered: wholehearted belief in an afterlife in heaven. The next step is to review a much more serious process: studies that suggest that war and collective conflict, such as terrorism, may be caused by humiliation and vengeance. Finally, some preliminary steps toward change are discussed.

Individuals and thought vs. relationships and feeling