

# Emotion in and through crisis

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## Abstract

To the extent that emotions are noticed in consideration of crisis they are typically thought to be negative, linked to the disruptive consequences of crisis. Based on semi-structured in-depth interviews the article shows that crisis precipitates not only negative but also positive emotions and that the complex of emotional experiences that emerge in the COVID pandemic crisis play a significant role in the transformation of outlook and practice persons undergo during crisis. Situating the study of crisis in an emotions-interaction framework the article identifies the properties of relational emotionality inherent in experience of crisis, revealing the nature of ambivalent emotions and identifying other-directed emotional labour. Crisis is not only a social relational but also a collective phenomenon through which actors are embedded in emotional constellations. A study of crisis in relation to emotion contributes to sociological understanding of not only crisis but also emotion.

## KEYWORDS

alter-emotional labour, ambivalent emotions, collective emotions, COVID-19, relational emotions

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Research on crisis is predominantly conducted in business studies, media and communications, and political science when considering the impact and management of natural disasters, economic disruptions, and political upheavals (Ramli et al., 2023, p. 24; Qi, 2023). Sociological research on crisis is underdeveloped and, as with accounts of crisis in general, tends to bypass examination of emotion (Giustini, 2021). Much of the scholarly literature on economic, environmental, humanitarian, and political crisis, and crisis management constructs its subject in terms of rationality and instrumentality (Ellis, 2022, p. 8). Reasoned responses are identified as key to dealing with natural or human-induced threats, so it is supposed that by such means a crisis can be averted or prevented from turning into a total disaster (Ansell & Bartenberger, 2019).

Research on the COVID-19 pandemic, a health crisis that quickly became an economic crisis, is largely focused on disease management and the economic problems that occupied government policy responses. Emotions-focused sociological research on the pandemic is predominantly concerned with its impact on families or broader publics (Das et al., 2023; Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021; Musolino, 2020). The present study provides an empirical investigation situated between the meso-domain, that includes families, and the macro-domain of subject populations and institutions, namely small businesses situated in both employment and products markets. The present study identifies the characteristics and dynamics of crisis through the engagement of otherwise overlooked emotional experiences in small-businesses. This article shows that emotions not only underlie actors' reactions to crisis but also that emotions are integral elements of crisis, both in their nature and in the dynamics of crisis and recovery.

To the extent that crisis and emotions might be considered together, negative emotions tend to be associated with crisis as a harmful phenomenon. The present article, on the other hand, shows that the emotional feelings persons experience in complex situations, including crisis, are diverse; not only are there negative but also positive emotions as well as mixed or ambivalent emotions. Indeed, emotional ambivalence may materialise as 'constellations of emotions', a mix of non-congruent emotions (Benski, 2011) or as concurrently emerging contrasting emotions (Burkitt, 2018). The present article identifies further dimensions of emotional ambivalence in terms of its evolvment, and transformation at different stages in a crisis.

By highlighting the relational characteristics of emotions through crisis the argument to follow extends the conceptualisation of emotional labour. Emotional labour is focused on an actor's control and regulation of their own emotions in order to elicit desired outcomes congruent with the needs of employing organisations (Hochschild, 2012). During the pandemic small business owners not only managed their own emotions to elicit accommodative practices but also performed emotions-guided actions to direct, moderate, or shape the emotions of their employees and customers, an aspect of emotional labour noted but underdeveloped by Hochschild. This alter-directed emotional labour has different implications for those who perform it directly and those who are subject to it.

In reporting COVID-pandemic experiences of small business interviewees, the paper identifies underexplored aspects of emotions, as indicated above, and reveals multiplex features of crisis as both a social event and an affective configuration. The theoretical contribution of the following discussion includes acknowledgement of temporal considerations regarding emotional ambivalence, the agentic elements of emotional experience, and the prospects of positivity in adverse circumstance.

## 2 | CRISIS AND EMOTIONS

Crisis is predominantly seen as an extreme, unexpected, or unpredictable event that requires an urgent response (Walby, 2015). It is therefore often understood as a threat to the established order and conjures images of rupture and destruction. An historical culture of rationality, control, and a prospect of continuing progress characterise Western thought systems (Patulny et al., 2019; Qi, 2014). A thematic linking of rationality with effective power and

control is continuous with these prospects, through which emotion comes to be regarded as inherently irrational, and those subject to emotional impulse are assumed to be without controlling capacities of their own (Barbalet, 2001, pp. 36–37, 53). A low tolerance of uncertainty among political and intellectual elites tends to foster in response to unanticipated disruption a search for a cause, a culprit, an enemy to be removed so that a situation of control can be re-established (Giddens, 1990). It is not surprising, in such circumstances, that theorisation of crisis in terms of emotions is not an obvious option for researchers, and is largely overlooked.

While standard social science accounts of crisis tend to ignore emotions there is recent acknowledgement that as crisis affects people's lives emotional responses to such events are likely to be forceful and significant. Crisis is not only a mode of historical and temporal experience but also a participating structure of feeling (Toscano, 2014, p. 1024). As an undesirable event crisis has adverse connotation and is consequently associated with negative emotions (von Scheve et al., 2016, p. 646). Anxiety may be felt in response to an impending crisis due to projection of anticipated risk and expected threat (Das et al., 2023). Anxiety was manifest in the pandemic crisis in diverse ways associated with health risks, economic instability including (prospective) job loss, and reinforced by conspiracy theories regarding the nature of COVID-19 and its treatment, as well as concerns regarding political responses to and management of the crisis (Rebughini, 2021).

As with crises in general, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted established norms, routines, and life patterns. The experience of pandemic crisis for individuals included a sense of insufficient time to adjust to and an unpreparedness for sudden changes, simultaneously impacting the distinct arenas of home, work, and public sociality. Unexpected imposed social conditions included isolation and social distancing, impacting face-to-face relations leading to stress, even distress (Musolino, 2020). Compressed home space resulting from a loss of private boundaries due to work-at-home orders and added care responsibilities due to isolation, as well as restrictions and prohibitions in public spaces, all elicited tensions and frustrations which led to a 'pandemic rage' (Kubacka et al., 2023).

### 3 | EMOTIONS: AMBIVALENT, RELATIONAL, AND COLLECTIVE

Emotions are not only a constitutive part of individuals' responses to crises but also shape and guide the perceptions and behaviour of persons who experience crisis. The emotional dimensions of a thing determine its social significance and course (Barbalet, 2002, p. 6). Emotions may directly influence perceptions of risk and uncertainty and thereby impact actions and decisions (von Scheve et al., 2016, p. 647). Emotions energise and facilitate responses, and provide direction, intensity, and persistence to subsequent actions (Reed, 2023). Not only negative emotions but also positive emotions may arise in experiences of adversity. Indeed, positive and negative emotions occur together in emotional ambivalence in which simultaneous conflicting feelings are experienced contemporaneously; emotional ambivalence is likely in complex situations, including crisis. Burkitt's (2018) reference to the concept of ambivalent emotions is focused on the emergence of concurrent contrasting feelings, as when a person is extremely annoyed by someone they deeply love, as a moment in a longer history of a relationship. The concept of constellations of emotions similarly captures complexity in emotions. Constellations of emotions include a mix of contradictory or non-congruent emotions which lead in different directions, such as when fear and anger are experienced together (Benski, 2011).

Ambivalent emotions result from the fact that persons simultaneously have many relationships, with other people, entities such as organisations, and occurrences or events. Indeed, relationality is the source of emotion. Emotion may be thought of as a named psychological state, such as anger or fear; but these states arise in and derive their meaning and significance from social relationships. As Burkitt (2014, p. 6) says: 'emotions only arise in patterns of relationship' (see also Kemper, 2002, p. 54). Emotions are not only configured in social relationships but guide persons in relating to others, as when a decline in relational power leads a person to experience fear (Kemper, 2011, p. 33). Understanding an emotion means understanding the situation and social relations that

produce it (Bericat, 2016, p. 495). A myriad of feelings emerges in crisis, experienced by individuals in their multiple social interactions and relationships. An underappreciated element of this is in emotional labour, requiring workers to 'induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' Hochschild (2012: 7). This is mentioned here because, as we shall see, the uncertainty arising from the COVID-19 pandemic brought an intensity to emotional labour which revealed both the ambivalence and relationality of emotions.

Collective emotions are important in crises (Hales & Tyler, 2022), and they are also relational. Different bases of collective emotion have been identified. Face-to-face interaction may produce emotional contagion through which mimicry leads to common group emotions (Hatfield et al., 1994). It is reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic anxiety, fear and sadness were experienced collectively through emotional contagion within social networks (Musolino, 2020). Alternatively, embeddedness in social relationships and networks engender common affective appraisals generative of collective emotion (Bruder et al., 2014). Without postulating a group mind, then, collective emotions in interpersonal interactions may occur due to cultural expectations, social hierarchies, organisational commands, and formal and informal rituals. Individuals tend to have emotions that are socially appropriate and predictable and therefore most members of a group may feel or display the same emotions at the same time (Jasper, 2014b). We shall return to these concerns in the discussion below.

## 4 | RESEARCH METHODS

The research reported here draws from a larger project conducted in Australia on crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Melbourne, Australia's most populated urban precinct, experienced the longest and most severe COVID-19 lockdowns in the country. During 2020 there were two lockdowns, one lasting 43 days (31 March to 12th May) and the other 111 days (9 July to 27th October). During the second lockdown, from 2 August, an 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew was imposed across Melbourne together with a 5 km radius restriction of movement applied to the whole of metropolitan Melbourne. A permit system was introduced for residents who needed to travel to work outside their 5 km radius. Lockdowns in 2021 included 5 days from 13 to 17 February, 14 days from 28 May to 10 June, 12 days from 16 to 27 July, and 77 days from 5 August to 21 October. The restrictions inherent in these lockdowns and curfews caused major disruptions to business, affecting employment, consumer spending, and commodity supply chains. Melbourne is therefore a highly appropriate research site for examination of experience in crisis during this period of pandemic disruption.

International data shows that retail, hospitality, and service sectors were among the most impacted small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic (Thukral, 2021). Small business proprietors experienced the pandemic as a multifaceted crisis affecting not only their personal wellbeing but also their economic welfare and that of their employees as well as their customers and clients. While quantitative data may map the patterns of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on whole business sectors, qualitative methods have the advantage of revealing the personal experiences, dynamics, and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, including the possibility of exploring the relationship between emotions and crisis. A total of 41 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 owners and 1 top manager of small private enterprises in retail, hospitality, and service sectors in Melbourne, including 18 male and 23 female businesspersons aged from 24 to 74 years. Respondent's names reported here are pseudonyms. The businesses of interviewees are diverse, including cafés, restaurants, bookstores, clothing/fashion businesses, pottery retail, homeware, jewellery retail, laundry, hair salon, wine retail, and personal products shops.

Interviews lasted for approximately one and a half hours, with the longest lasting more than 3 hours. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The in-depth and flexible nature of semi-structured interviews permits capture of rich evidence of emotions (Giustini, 2021, p. 1084). In-depth semi-structured interviews provide clear empirical evidence of the emotional experiences which orient a person's actions, including during crisis. The nature of semi-structured interviews has the advantage of adapting to and navigating specific situations (Andersen

et al., 2022, p. 44). Employment of qualitative methods therefore permits nuanced examination of individual orientations and behaviour, and especially encourages understanding of the complexities of crisis and emotional responses to them.

Interview data were initially coded with emerging themes and then dimensions of themes were refined through an iterative process. Conceptual analysis, based on Charmaz's (2021) constructivist grounded theory, was followed in order to identify evidence that related to conceptual and theoretical issues in the literature, including crisis and emotion, among other themes, and to move back and forth between data and theory iteratively. In this way a new approach of conceptualising crisis and emotion is developed. Such methods provide opportunities to refine existing theoretical perspectives and prepare the ground for an empirically-based and theoretically-informed examination of emotional experiences of persons directly impacted by crisis.

#### 4.1 | Crisis and ambivalent emotions

Studies of crisis are predominantly focused on its detrimental aspects (Boin et al., 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, that negative emotions tend to be linked with crisis (Berezin, 2009; von Scheve et al., 2016, p. 646). Indeed, pervasive risk of contracting COVID-19 led to widespread anxiety and fear, emotions experienced at extreme levels during the pandemic (Das et al., 2023). In this situation generalised emotional stress and depression were also at unusually high levels in affected communities. Inadequacies in health care facilities were inevitably revealed during the pandemic and daily bulletins reporting the numbers of loss of life contributed to widespread feelings of sadness, disgust, and anger (Das et al., 2023).

The fieldwork conducted for this research reveals that not only negative emotions but also positive emotions emerge in crisis. Experience of strong emotions do not necessarily impede decision-making nor necessarily lead to unwelcome behaviour or negative consequences, but rather may guide and shape decision-making and action in purposeful and positive directions. Helen and her husband owned a business in which they designed, produced, and sold clothes in their own shop. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020 in Australia they decided to close their business. Helen said:

We were pretty quick to understand what was happening. Something really big was going to happen. This is not feeling good, we thought. This is not normal. And we knew, we also understood how the economy was moving. I've got instinct. That was our instinct to go. You know what? Maybe it's just time. Maybe this is a sign. Maybe we should be winding this up. My husband is older now as well. He's tired. The retail environment isn't great. The first signs that we saw of this virus with people in China dropping dead.

Not 'feeling good' about the emergence of coronavirus helped Helen and her husband make sense of and assess impending economic problems. As Hochschild (2012) argues, emotions function as messengers and carry a signal function.

Contrary to received wisdom, emotions are not necessarily irrational or even non-rational and do not necessarily interfere with but may support reason (Barbalet, 2001: chap 2). Emotions are evaluative responses to critical situations (Helm, 2009; Müller, 2022). Indeed, for interviewees including Helen and her husband emotions played an important role in their deliberations by guiding their reflexive practices, an aspect of emotion, aptly treated as 'emotional reflexivity' (Holmes, 2010, p. 149). In response to a changing environment people like Helen and her husband drew on emotional reflexivity to reorient themselves toward the future. Anxiety can contribute to a motivational force for change when it is linked to its counterpart of hope (Neckel et al., 2021). Indeed, through a projective sense of a future constructed to avoid a present fear and to realise an emergent hope, actors animate

their agency, configuring and reconfiguring their thoughts and feelings in determined actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Helen continued:

We felt lucky we acted quickly. Otherwise we would have gone broke. It took us two years to clear our stocks, machines, etc at much reduced prices. So glad we got rid of nearly everything but it was disheartening. The business is my identity. My husband's too, because it was his baby. Huge, huge loss, especially clearing the business. It's been very hard. It's like, like clearing as if one of your parents passes away and you have to clear your home that you grew up in and all the memories and you go through all those boxes that you haven't looked at for a long time and see all this stuff from your past and it brings back all the memories. This has been a big process for my husband too. And he's gone emotional. But this is hard. It's really hard. He's had to start seeing a psychologist as well. A lot of stuff came up 2020 and 2021 ... I've been on a rollercoaster absolutely. Even though at the end that's gonna be good. It'll be freeing and he can start something new.

The feelings which Helen and her husband experienced were clearly not singular or unitary but many and diverse—feelings of being fortunate to avoid business catastrophe, of removing burdens, but also upset at financial loss, sorrow of identity loss, concerns about health issues, as well as hope for a new beginning. Indeed, persons do not experience isolated emotions, one at a time, nor do emotions constitute static feeling-states at any given time (Williamson, 2011). Ambivalent emotions are not necessarily emergent all at once, as Burkitt (2018) suggests, but frequently arise, evolve, and transform in stages, with varying constituent elements and changing dominant feelings. Emotions tend to appear as complex structures and therefore it is not only useful to explore the flow of ambivalent feelings in crisis but also reflect on the different orientations and consequences of the same complex feeling.

Constellations of emotions may work in different directions (Benski, 2011). Clearing out clothes and machines elicited feelings of relief from burden for Helen and her husband, but simultaneously evoked feelings of loss and sadness. Closing a business is not merely a matter of resolving financial problems but also a signification of identity change if not loss of purpose. Indeed, emotional considerations help us better understand ourselves, including our self-identity (Reger et al., 2008). As Gould (2009, p. 17) put it, emotions are a 'crucial means by which human beings come to know and understand themselves and their contexts, their interests and commitments, their needs and their options in securing those needs'. An aspect of crisis at the individual level is precisely the working through of ambivalent emotions, reflecting on the mix of symbolic meanings internal to them and considering the consequences of different possible futures provoked by the mix internal to ambivalent emotions, including who one really is and what one really wants, questions seldom arising in such compelling ways under normal circumstances.

Exploring the nature of emotions in the context of crisis draws attention not only to their symbolic signification but also to the characteristic relationality of emotion, the way in which emotions necessarily connect the emoting person to someone or something else. Matthew (a café co-owner) said in a tone of anger:

So many lock downs for two years! What did we learn from it? People lost their businesses! How many of my friends were bankrupt? I know so many of my friends out there eventually were able to open a small business but then ended up closing down, some just after one year! You can imagine I didn't vote for Andrews' government!

Persons like Matthew were angry about the lockdowns. An angry response, as such, is a response to 'a perceived injustice' (Holmes, 2004, p. 127). The vulnerability of entrepreneurs and their loss of material standing and status are understood by some of them as a consequence of the government's imposition of lockdowns. Anger emerges when an individual loses power or status when such a loss is considered remediable and another actor is

considered responsible (Jasper, 2014a; Rothschild & Keefer, 2022). It is of interest that in standard accounts anger is characterised in terms of one's own loss of power or status, while Matthew's anger is precipitated not by his own loss of power or status but by that of his friends. This is a further dimension of anger, in which the emotion is experienced when a related person suffers a relevant loss.

In fact, Matthew's anger was not directed at lockdowns themselves but at the state government which was responsible for the lockdown measures. The question of responsibility is not only critical for understanding how individuals and collectives react to a crisis but also for a sociological understanding of crises (von Scheve et al., 2016, p. 636). Indeed, the more that responsibility is attributed to named human subjects or collective actors the stronger the ascribed culpability and therefore the intentionality of action, the more likely audiences will respond with negative emotion, including anger and outrage, directed at the responsible entity (von Scheve et al., 2016, p. 648). Such anger underlies individual engagement in protest and possibly political violence which did in fact occur against the COVID-19 lockdowns in various jurisdictions. Anger may not necessarily be expressed in contentious actions but in other forms, including voting. Consideration of a person's emotions help us understand their motivation (Barbalet, 2001, 2002), including in crisis.

While angry on behalf of his friends Matthew, felt fortunate that the business he co-owned survived the pandemic. He remarked:

This business had been in the red, losing money for the last two years. Well, we're just lucky. One business partner who was a foreign investor literally dug deep into his own pockets to keep the business open for the last two years. I'm grateful we're still here. We focused on how to get through every day and tomorrow, let's see what we can do to change things, to try, and be hopeful. But you know, we have responsibility for our staff and our families. We have to do what is necessary to keep the business going.

Something of the complexity of crisis is reflected in the development and relationality of ambivalent emotions. Feelings of gratitude in being supported and of hope for a 'better tomorrow' provided Matthew with energy and purpose in dealing with the concrete problems his business faced, including staff shortages. While holding others responsible for self's misfortune may lead to anger and outrage, self-responsibility, including a responsibility to care for others, may become a driving force through which arduous circumstances are endured in working through a crisis. Anxiety regarding business uncertainty concerning loss of earnings and a fear of closure of business predominate in the early stages of crisis; feelings of gratitude for support and pride in one's survival emerge in later stages. An exploration of ambivalent emotions in the context of crisis thus illuminates core neglected qualities of ambivalent emotions, including their propensity for internal transformation as well as the nature of their relationality.

## 4.2 | Crisis and alter-emotional labour

As indicated earlier, ambivalent emotions that emerge in crisis play a crucial role in shaping the behaviour of individuals and their actions. Emotions are relational and have meanings in the context of persons' social relations (Bericat, 2016, p. 495). A majority of interviewees indicated that they needed to provide extra support to customers and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, especially regarding safety and health issues. Bob (owner of a budget restaurant) provided remarks in an interview that are representative of entrepreneur interviewees in general:

Just making sure that the customers and my staff knew that I had their backs, all of the safety stuff that they could possibly have I provided. I made sure that we had boxes of disposable masks at the

front, under the till in the staff room, and sanitizer everywhere, making sure that anything that could be done made them feel safer and better.

Emotional labour is focused on the regulation and display of employees' desirable emotions in interaction with clients to satisfy organisational display rules (Hochschild, 2012, p. 7). During the COVID-19 pandemic perceived risk, fear, and anxiety created emotional dissonance in frontline service providers while interacting with customers (Das et al., 2023, p. 568). In this sense, these entrepreneurs engaged in an extension of Hochschildian emotional labour. During the COVID-19 pandemic, front-line business operatives were forced to take on roles they do not have under normal circumstances, namely working more intensely on ego-emotional labour due to out-of-routine responsibilities and sudden change in social norms as well as feeling compelled to engage in alter-emotional labour through managing and shaping the emotions of their customers and staff in creating a protective environment.

Many interviewees reported their experience of engaging in alter-emotional labour during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pauline (owner of a fashion shop) recollected:

Due to lockdowns, we had to push everything to go digital and online. So basically for the first three months of lockdowns that's what we did. One staff was a very good saleswoman but couldn't work on the computer. She had a lot of stress, found COVID very stressful. She went into depression. I talked to her saying that it doesn't matter if she doesn't work. She continued to receive job-keeper support.

The need to 'go digital', virtually overnight, was a serious challenge to unprepared staff with a consequence that many employees suffered stress. In such circumstances employers needed to manage the impact of a sudden shock of skills shift and competence strain, with added health concerns, which many employees experienced. Existing research on entrepreneurship and management in a crisis tends to focus on the more stereotypical 'masculine' traits that are seen as important at such times, such as charismatic leadership and risk tolerance (Wu et al., 2017). While the concept of emotional labour has received significant attention in sociology, the study of crisis introduces alter-emotional labour as an important small-employer responsibility.

Linda (owner of wine shop and bar) said:

I want my staff always to know that they have my full support in any kind of situation. During the time when strict restrictions were imposed, we would say to customers 'You cannot use these tables [outside] unless you are having a drink with us, unless you've checked in and unless I've seen your vaccination certificate'. And almost every day there were people who got upset about that and we would just have to be really firm and say 'I'm sorry, this is the law, you cannot sit here if you are not drinking here'. Some people could get angry and very rude, and yell at my staff. The staff, luckily tend to leave those really hectic ones to me because I'm more than willing to yell back at rude customers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the engagement of alter-emotional labour was reported by respondents to be frequent, intense, and varied. Business personnel, including small business owners, were frequently obliged to manage unreasonable behaviour from customers and their emotional outbursts. The alter-emotional labour undertaken by employers like Linda was directed to helping employees navigate the economic and health uncertainty of the crisis and directed to elicit feelings of security and stability as well as providing assurance and support in conflict situations.

While employers may take the initiative to engage in alter-emotional labour, some found themselves 'forced' to be involved in emotion work. Allen (owner of a hair salon) remarked:

Cutting somebody's hair, that's like a personal thing. You're in their space, but you also have to chat ... COVID destroyed a lot of people's confidence and I saw that at first hand; a lot of clients, they're just



not the same people ... There was so much uncertainty and the goalposts kept moving. That was really hard. A lot of people became distrustful towards the media or government, or other people, or society in general. I think everyone felt the second lockdown really hard in 2021 ... There was a lot of bad, nasty, ugly things from society through COVID ... Yeah there was a lot of resentment. People were against each other regarding mask-wearing, vaccination, lockdowns, etc ... And I'm just in the middle of them, kind of listening to it, like regardless of what my opinion is. Trying to listen to everyone's strong opinion.

Frontline workers like Allen were involved in complex interpersonal, emotional, and physical encounters with clients and members of the public without acknowledgement or consideration from government COVID management policy even though they added social value to implementation of that policy (Hales & Tyler, 2022; Williams, 2021). While alter-emotional labour may lead to positive effects for clients it may negatively impact the person who delivers it (McCann, 2024, p. 446). The pandemic crisis not only highlights alter-emotion labour as a discrete practice but also reveals its implications for those who engage in such work directly on their own emotions and indirectly in the limitations of crisis management policy.

### 4.3 | Crisis and collective emotions

The COVID-19 crisis has been described as 'the greatest mass emotional event since the Second World War, generating a global epidemic of anxiety' (Rebughini, 2021, p. 562). Without exception interviewees reported feelings of uncertainty in relation to information and misinformation, government rules regarding restrictions, and practically all aspects of business operations, including cash flow, staffing, supply chains, and sales. We are reminded of Durkheim's (1982, p. 131) statement that 'Collective representations, emotions and tendencies have not as their causes certain states of consciousness in individuals, but the conditions under which the body social as a whole exists'.

Many respondents expressed their feelings of frustration about government regulations regarding lockdowns, social distancing, and curfews. For instance, Joe (owner of a homeware shop) said in a tone of dissatisfaction:

There was a new shop, which is like a \$2 shop down the road. And they were allowed to have people in their store—but I wasn't. Apparently, they had lollies and soft drink installed so they were allowed to have people in the shop.

During lockdowns retail businesses considered to be providing essential goods were allowed to remain open. The new budget homeware shop took advantage of this by acquiring a food vending licence, thus permitting it to continue trading and deal directly with customers. Rose (owner of a pottery shop) was similarly furious:

We had another lockdown and everybody was going into lockdown mode except businesses deemed as essential. Places like bottle shops were allowed to stay open. How could the government justify that! They are expected to help retail but ... I felt so frustrated about things like this. I sent an e-mail to Daniel Andrews [Premier of the state of Victoria] at some stage to protest.

Entrepreneurs such as Joe and Rose did not know each other but shared similar emotions of frustration with the government's rules. Rather than emotional contagion, mentioned earlier, or network supported common appraisals (Bruder et al., 2014), the case here suggests a different source of collective emotions. Without direct relations with each other, persons who share similar experiences may have common emotions. Such experiences

empirically confirm a theorisation of collective emotions which acknowledges the role of structural factors in the precipitation of emotional experience (Kemper, 2002).

In response to a question, asking how they have pulled through the COVID-19 pandemic, most respondents indicated that the government's business support and Job-Keeper payment schemes played an important role. The views of Vivian (owner of a toy shop) were shared by a majority of respondents:

It helped me survive, so it was helpful. Oh. Yes, yes, absolutely. Yeah, it saved me and I think it was also really good because we pay a lot of taxes. It was good for the government to support us. And feel that we have a place. We'll make it work together to work this out. If we were just left on our own a lot of businesses would have to close down. Yeah yeah, a lot of shocks on this street. A number of shops closed down. It wasn't good for the street, empty shops!

The disruption of crisis translates directly into an urgent need of support for affected persons and businesses. The provision of financial support to business created specific emotional climates which conditioned the general sentiments of entrepreneurs (see de Rivera & Páez, 2007; Smith-Lovin & Thoits, 2014). Some respondents indicated that the government's financial support was not enough. An emotional climate does not require that every person subject to it experience the same emotion. As emotional climates are group phenomenon and as different people occupy different positions within groups, perform different roles and have different capacities, it is indeed likely that individuals will differ from each other in their particular emotional experiences. Yet in their relationships they will each contribute to the feelings of the group as a whole, to its emotional formation or climate (Barbalet, 2002, p. 5).

Collective emotions are not only generated through and during crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic, but energise and motivate persons to endure such difficult and uncertain circumstances. Many respondents expressed their gratitude for the support from loyal customers, which kept them going. Owners of restaurants and cafes indicated that they were grateful for the support they received from local customers through their purchasing 'take-away' food and drinks. Similarly, owners of fashion shops indicated gratitude to local customers who supported their business by buying clothes during lockdowns through 'click and collect' sales procedures.

Local residents' support for small businesses was demonstrated not only by their purchases but also through emotional support. For instance, Ken (owner of a jewellery shop) had been unwell and hospitalised during the pandemic. Ken was deeply moved when he said, 'The customers supported me throughout my illness'. Mary (owner of a florist) said:

This area, around here, has a lot of locals who enjoy buying flowers. Very supportive, in particular, during the COVID. They love the fact that I've renovated and uplifted the building and made it better. I was getting a lot of thank yous. This helped me through the pandemic. Someone wrote a nice comment on Google 'thank you for making me a night of shining armour'. Yeah, great. A woman came in here said you are the highlight of Duke's Parade, you know, and I'm like, are they also sweetie?

While only individuals directly experience emotions, aggregations of individuals may feel what can be described as a group emotion (Kemper, 2002, p. 63). The basic structure and processes of social relations create specific emotional climates or emotional cultures which condition the general sentiments of the community (de Rivera & Páez, 2007; Smith-Lovin & Thoits, 2014). The context in which social bonds and associated social behaviour emerge (Barbalet, 2001; Tudor, 2003, p. 244), including in crisis situations, generate collective emotions in this sense, arguably expressing not only social relations but also the social roles of both emotion 'givers' and 'receivers'.

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An obvious conclusion of the above discussion is that emotion is core to an understanding of crisis. An obvious question, then, is why emotion is typically absent from consideration of crisis. One possible reason is that much of the scholarly literature on economic, environmental, humanitarian, and political crisis, and crisis management is underpinned by the role of calculative rationality in dealing with crisis (Ellis, 2022, p. 8). Emphasis of reliance on scientific method, science-based empirical knowledge, and expert systems indeed characterises the rationality of Western modernity (Giddens, 1990).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, central and local governments in the West, including Australia, endeavoured to demonstrate that their decision-making and control measures were based on scientific knowledge and health-science expertise (Anleu & Sarantoulías, 2023; Hier, 2023, p. 1089). Daily public health briefings routinely featured statistical summaries including case numbers, infection and death rates, and transmission patterns. On the one hand the use of statistical data and the language of scientific technology and economic policy played a central role in rationalising and justifying government responses to and management of the crisis (Matthews, 2020). On the other hand, statistical estimates and modelling projections were utilised to obtain commitment and compliance from the population for preventative measures including social distancing, mask-wearing, working remotely, and municipal curfews restricting levels of social interaction. As individuals are held to live in knowledge-based societies (Beck, 2009), it became the responsibility of individuals and collectives to flatten the epidemic curve of the disease in the control of this crisis. The currency and utilisation of instrumental responses during the COVID-19 pandemic based on scientific evidence and the authority of expertise reflected and reinforced the conjunctural norms associated with neoliberal governmentality and individualised modernity (Hier, 2023, p. 1083).

Sociological research has also tended to overlook the important role of emotions in crisis, even though the sociology of emotions has gained significant recognition in sociology. To the extent that emotions are noticed in consideration of crisis they are typically thought to be negative, linked with negative consequences of crisis. The contribution of the present article is to demonstrate that crisis precipitates not only negative but also positive emotions and that the complex of emotional experiences that emerge in crisis play a significant role in the transformation persons undergo during crisis, including their coping strategies which ameliorate the negative impact of crisis.

Crisis is imbued with emotions which signify symbolic meanings and have significance for individuals' understanding of themselves in times of consequential disruption, including their self-identity. Consideration of emotions helps us understand the motivation of persons in crisis. While other-blaming responsibility leads to anger and outrage, self-responsibility, including for others, may become a driving force in the endurance of arduous circumstances and instrumental in working through crisis. Crisis as a social event is emotionally embodied and constitutive of quite different emotions. It is not only useful to explore ambivalent feelings in understanding crisis, but to also consider the different orientations and possible consequences of such emotions complexes. An exploration of emotions through crisis illuminates how ambivalent emotions do not necessarily emerge concurrently but may develop and change in stages.

Emotion is a necessary link between crisis and action. Emotions do not necessarily undermine reason and rational responses to crisis but play an important role for subjects of crisis appreciating their options and encouraging reflexive practices. Emotion is provoked by crisis and is experienced as transformation of dispositions to act. While sections of the literature are focused on emotions as individual subjective states it has been shown here that emotions are relational, that consequential action regarding a person's loss of power or status in relation with others are guided by their emotions. A further dimension of emotional relationality shown here is that not only one's own loss of power or status are generative of a person's emotions, but also the loss of power or status of those with whom a person is associated provoke emotional experiences in them also. Emotion is implicated in the actors' transformation of their circumstances, as well as the circumstances' transformation of those to whom they are related.

A persons' actions are not only guided by their own emotions but also affected by their managing the emotions of others. Situating the study of crisis in an emotion interaction framework identifies the properties of relational emotionality inherent in experience of crisis. Persons may engage in alter-emotional labour in navigating crisis and such practices may have implications for themselves and also for those who are subject to extended emotional management. While alter-emotional labour may lead to a positive effect in others it may have a different impact on those who engage directly in such work. The pandemic crisis not only highlights the relational nature of emotion labour but also reveals its implications for those who engage in it. Crisis generates emotions which transform people's relations and the way they perceive the world and paradoxically they impact on how persons feel about themselves, their relations with others and also with the world at large.

Crisis is not only a social relational but also a collective phenomenon through which actors are embedded in emotions. Indeed, persons who are not directly connected but share similar crisis experiences might experience common emotions without contagion. As emotional climates are group phenomenon and as different people experience different difficulties in crisis, it is likely that individuals may differ from each other in their emotional experiences. Yet in their relationships they will each contribute to the feelings of the group itself, to its emotional formation or climate.

The principal limitation of the present research is its empirical focus on Melbourne, Australia as a case-study. The author is currently addressing this with ongoing research on the experiences of small business owners during the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, each jurisdiction with a different administrative response to the crisis. In this way cross-national and cross-cultural differences regarding emotions in crisis will expand the grasp of the possible mix of ambivalent emotions in crisis and how they relate to both the experience of debilitating consequences of crisis, how respondents cope with them, and how emotionally-led perceptions of opportunities might arise from significant disruption. More generally, the present discussion contributes a perspective on both emotions and crisis that encourages further explorations of the consequences of concurrent relationships that give rise to ambivalent emotions, including alter-emotional labour. Research on emotions tends to treat emotions as separate entities; the contribution here demonstrates that relationality produces experiences of emotional ambivalence, especially in time of crisis.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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