

# From Cognition To Spirituality: A Comparative Study Of James J. Gross And Abdallah's Concept Of Emotion Regulation

Ludfia Sabni<sup>\*</sup>, Fatimah Tuzaroh<sup>\*\*</sup>, Adhimas Alifian Yuwono<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>[ludfialusfiasabnimaljum@gmail.com](mailto:ludfialusfiasabnimaljum@gmail.com), <sup>\*\*</sup>[fatimahtuzaroh4@gmail.com](mailto:fatimahtuzaroh4@gmail.com),

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>[adhimasalifian@gmail.com](mailto:adhimasalifian@gmail.com)

<sup>\*-\*\*</sup> Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, Postgraduate Studies, Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University State, Yogyakarta Indonesia,

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought, Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University State, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

*This research discusses the comparison of the concept of emotion regulation according to James J. Gross from the perspective of cognitive psychology and Abdallah Rothman from the perspective of Islamic psychology based on spirituality. Emotion regulation is an important ability in maintaining mental health and quality of life, which in Western psychology is understood as a cognitive and behavioral process, while in Islamic psychology it is associated with spiritual and religious dimensions. This study uses a comparative qualitative approach with the method of literature study and content analysis of the main works of both figures, namely Handbook of Emotion Regulation and Developing a Model of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy. The results show that Gross emphasizes cognitive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression to adaptively manage emotions, while Rothman places the qalb at the center of emotion regulation and emphasizes spiritual practices such as tawbah, dhikr, and tawakal. Both approaches have similarities in the goal of achieving well-being, but differ in the basic paradigms and strategies used. The integration of these two paradigms offers a more holistic and applicable understanding of emotion management, especially in a multicultural and religious society like Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** Emotion Regulation, James J. Gross, Abdallah Rothman.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Emotion regulation is an important skill that plays a major role in a person's mental health and quality of life. In modern psychology, emotion regulation is understood as the process of recognizing, managing and adjusting emotional responses so that they are not excessive and remain adaptive to the situation at hand. This ability helps one prevent negative emotions from lingering, reduce stress and anxiety, and create a positive mood. In addition, emotion regulation also

contributes to the development of harmonious social relationships, increased focus, and the ability to deal with pressure in the work or school environment (Gross 2015). In the context of Islamic psychology, emotion regulation is not only seen from the psychological aspect, but also spiritual. Emotions are associated with the condition of the qalb (spiritual heart) which is the center of self-control. Through spiritual practices such as tawbah (regret), dhikr (remembering God), and tawakal (surrender), Muslim individuals are taught

to regulate their emotions in order to achieve inner peace and mental well-being (Harmalis 2022). Thus, emotion regulation in Islamic psychology integrates religious aspects that enrich the understanding of emotion management as a whole. The importance of emotion regulation drives the need to understand the various approaches that exist, both from the Western and Islamic psychology domains, in order to be effectively applied in different social and cultural contexts.

James J. Gross is one of the leading figures in Western psychology who developed a cognitive and behavioral process-based theory of emotion regulation. Gross defines emotion regulation as the process by which individuals monitor, evaluate and modify their emotional responses to achieve specific goals. His model emphasizes strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression that can alter the intensity and duration of emotions to make them more adaptive. Gross views emotion as a regulated object, rather than a regulating subject. On the other hand, Abdallah Rothman is an important figure in Islamic psychology who developed a model of emotion regulation from a spiritual and theological perspective. Rothman places the qalb as the center of emotion regulation and emphasizes religious practices such as tawbah, zhikr, and tawakal as key strategies in managing emotions. Rothman's approach highlights the importance of purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) and closeness to God as the main goals of emotion regulation (Anwar, Julia, and Ifanna 2023). These two figures offer different yet complementary paradigms in understanding how humans manage their emotions, namely through cognition and spirituality.

So far, research on emotion regulation developed by James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman has generally been conducted separately within their respective disciplines. Gross's study focuses a lot on aspects of cognitive and behavioral psychology in the Western context, in Indonesia Gross's research is widely used as a conceptual framework for examining

emotion regulation in many contexts, for example research by Reskido et al. (2022) which examines the correlation of emotion regulation with the well-being of Muslim students in Yogyakarta. In line with that, Barus et al. (2024) also used Gross's framework to examine the effect of emotion regulation training on academic stress in students of the psychology study program at Nusa Nipa University. During the pandemic, both Gunawan and Bintari (2021), and Kogoya and Jannah (2021) used Gross's framework to look at students' emotion regulation during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Rothman's research emphasizes more on the Islamic psychology approach that integrates spiritual and religious values. For example, research by Anwar et al. (2023) which compares Rothman's thoughts with Coley, as well as research by Sholikhah (2024) which reveals the integration of Rothman's thoughts with the dimensions of Sufism in Islam. From some of these studies, there is no research that directly compares these two thoughts, so the understanding of emotion regulation from two different traditions is still fragmented. Comparative studies that combine Western and Islamic perspectives will provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of emotion regulation, especially in the context of a pluralistic and culturally and religiously diverse society like Indonesia. This research is expected to complement the existing literature by highlighting the differences and similarities between cognitive and spiritual approaches, as well as opening up opportunities for the integration of both paradigms for the development of more inclusive and applicable emotion regulation theory and practice.

This research is designed to answer the main question: how does the concept of emotion regulation developed by James J. Gross from the perspective of cognition compare with Abdallah Rothman's concept of emotion regulation based on Islamic spirituality? The purpose of the research is to conduct an in-depth comparative study of the two theories, focusing on aspects of the basic paradigm, regulation strategies, the

ultimate goal of emotion regulation, and its practical implications. This research will examine how Gross views emotion regulation as a cognitive-behavioral process oriented towards psychological and social adaptation, while Rothman emphasizes emotion regulation as a spiritual process aimed at achieving inner peace and purification of the soul. By comparing these two approaches, the research aims to identify significant common ground and differences, as well as explore potential integrations that could enrich the understanding and application of emotion regulation in cross-cultural and religious contexts.

Theoretically, this research is important because it offers a new construction that integrates two major paradigms in psychology, namely Western cognitive psychology and Islamic spiritual psychology. This integration not only enriches academic studies on emotion regulation, but also opens space for cross-cultural and religious dialogue that has received less attention so far. Practically, a comprehensive understanding of emotion regulation from both perspectives can provide a strong foundation for the development of more inclusive and contextualized psychological interventions. Especially in a religious society like Indonesia, an approach that combines cognitive strategies with spiritual practices can increase the effectiveness of addressing emotional and mental health problems. As such, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of theories, methods and practices of emotion regulation that are culturally relevant and applicable in the field.

## **B. METHOD**

This research uses a comparative qualitative approach with literature study and content analysis as the main methods. This type of research was chosen because the focus is on comparing the theoretical concepts of emotion regulation developed by two figures from different traditions, namely James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman. The main data sources for this

research come from books and scientific articles that specifically discuss emotion regulation in the works of these two figures. For James J. Gross, the main source used is the 2014 book *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, which is a comprehensive and authoritative work on theories and strategies of emotion regulation from the perspective of cognitive and behavioral psychology. As for Abdallah Rothman, the main source is the book *Developing a Model of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy* in 2021, which describes a model of emotion regulation based on spirituality and Islamic values. The analysis technique used is content analysis which focuses on comparing various important aspects of both thoughts, namely the basic concept of emotion regulation, the strategies used to regulate emotions, the ultimate goal of emotion regulation, and the expected results or impacts of the regulation process.

In this way, the research was able to identify the fundamental similarities and differences between Gross's cognitive-behavioral approach and Rothman's spiritual approach, as well as explore the potential integration of both paradigms in the development of a more holistic and contextualized theory and practice of emotion regulation.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Understanding the Discourse of Emotion Regulation in Psychology**

Before explaining further about emotion regulation, it is necessary to first explain the definition of psychology in general in order to understand its correlation with emotion regulation. Psychology is the study of human behavior and mental functions, and the underlying psychological processes. The word "psychology" comes from the Greek language, namely *psyche* which means soul and *logos*, which means science or learning, so psychology literally means the science of the soul (Saleh 2018). The genealogy of psychology stems from ancient Greek philosophy, where figures such as Plato and Aristotle already discussed the nature of the

soul and human behavior. At that time, psychology did not yet stand as a separate science, but rather a part of philosophy that discussed the metaphysical and existential aspects of humans. It was not until the late 19th century that psychology began to stand as an independent discipline with the establishment of the first psychology laboratory by Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig, Germany (Saleh 2018). Since then, psychology has developed into an empirical science that uses scientific methods to understand behavior and mental processes. Compared to other sciences, psychology places special emphasis on internal aspects of humans, such as thoughts, feelings, and motivations, which are not always directly observable. Psychology also integrates biological, social, and cultural approaches to holistically understand human complexity (Saleh 2018).

Furthermore, emotion regulation is one of the studies in psychology which is understood as a process in which individuals manage and control their emotional experiences and expressions to suit certain contexts and goals. This definition includes the ability to recognize, understand, and modify emotions that arise so that they are not excessive or detrimental to oneself or others (Rusmaladewi et al. 2020). Emotion regulation can be done consciously or unconsciously, and involves various strategies ranging from changing the situation that triggers emotions, diverting attention, to changing the perspective on the situation. This process is important because poorly managed emotions can lead to psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as interpersonal conflict (Rehing, Musawwir, and Zubari 2024). In modern psychology, emotion regulation is a significant focus of study because of its role in mental health and general well-being. Emotion regulation is also an important part of various psychological therapies to help individuals overcome emotional problems and improve their social functioning (Rehing, Musawwir, and Zubari 2024).

The issue of emotion regulation has received increasing attention in

contemporary psychology due to various factors that indicate the urgency of effective emotion management, especially among the younger generation. Many studies show that the inability to manage emotions well can contribute to destructive behaviors such as violence, substance abuse, and mental health disorders. Social pressures, rapid changes in technology and social media, as well as economic and educational challenges exacerbate this condition. Young people often face high stress and lack adequate emotion regulation skills, making them vulnerable to psychological disorders (Oktavia and Fahmawati 2025). Emotion regulation is therefore a highly relevant and widely discussed topic in the psychological literature, with the aim of developing effective strategies to help individuals cope with emotional distress and improve their quality of life.

Seeing these conditions, the discourse on emotion regulation must continue to be constructed and developed so that it can be implemented effectively in various social and cultural contexts. The development of emotion regulation theory and practice needs to adjust to the dynamics of society and the diverse needs of individuals. In addition, the discourse on emotion regulation must involve interdisciplinary approaches, including psychology, education, health, and even spirituality, to provide holistic solutions. By building a deep and comprehensive understanding of emotion regulation, psychological interventions can be designed more targeted and contextualized. This is important so that emotion regulation is not only a theoretical concept, but also a practical skill that can be applied in everyday life, especially in the face of modern pressures and challenges. Therefore, research and discussion on emotion regulation should continue to expand to support people's mental and social well-being.

### **Biographical Sketches of James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman**

James J. Gross is an American psychologist who is widely recognized as one of the leading figures in the field of

emotion regulation. He was born in 1953 and educated at Stanford University, where he later developed his academic career as a professor of psychology. Gross has contributed to the development of emotion regulation theory and research since the late 1990s. He is known as a pioneer in examining how individuals control and alter their emotional responses through cognitive and behavioral processes. Throughout his career, Gross has written many books and scientific articles, including the important *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* which has become the main reference in this field. In addition to being active in academia, Gross also frequently provides training and international seminars to broaden the understanding of emotion regulation. His works are widely applied in psychotherapy, education, and human resource development. Gross emphasizes that emotion regulation is a skill that can be learned and developed to improve individual's psychological well-being.

James J. Gross developed the famous emotion regulation process model with five main strategies that individuals can use to regulate their emotions (Gross 2002). The first strategy is situation selection, which is choosing or avoiding situations that can trigger certain emotions. Second, situation modification, which is changing the situation so that the emotional impact can be controlled. Third, attentional deployment, which is shifting the focus of attention so as not to get caught up in emotions. Fourth, cognitive change, also known as cognitive reappraisal, involves changing the perspective on the situation so that the emotions that arise become more controllable. Fifth, response modulation or response adjustment, which is regulating emotional expressions or reactions after emotions arise, for example, by suppressing emotional expressions. Gross distinguishes emotion regulation strategies into two main categories: antecedent-focused strategies that are carried out before emotions fully emerge, and response-focused strategies that are carried out after emotions arise. This model has been highly influential in modern psychology and forms the basis of

various clinical interventions and emotion management training (AKA 2023).

On the other hand, Abdallah Rothman is a psychologist and academic who is recognized as an important figure in the development of contemporary Islamic psychology. He was born and raised in an environment steeped in Islamic tradition, which greatly influenced his approach to understanding psychology and emotion regulation. Rothman was educated in the fields of psychology and Islamic theology, and later combined these two disciplines in his works. He is an active author of books and articles that address how Islamic spiritual values and practices can be applied in psychotherapy and emotion management. One of his major works is *Developing a Model of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy*, which deals in depth with the concept of emotion regulation within an Islamic framework. Dr. Rothman is also a frequent speaker and trainer at various international seminars on the theme of Islamic psychology. His academic career has focused on integrating modern psychology science with Islamic teachings to provide a psychology approach to understanding and addressing emotional and mental problems.

Abdallah Rothman's thinking on emotion regulation is strongly influenced by Islamic spiritual and theological values. Rothman places the *qalb* or spiritual heart as the center of emotion control, which is different from the Western cognitive-behavioral approach. According to Rothman, emotion regulation is not just a matter of changing thoughts or behaviors, but also purifying the soul through religious practices such as *tawbah* (regret and returning to God), *dhikr* (remembering and mentioning God's name), and *tawakal* (surrendering to God's will) (Rothman 2021). These practices serve as emotion regulation strategies that connect individuals to the spiritual dimension, so that emerging emotions can be regulated in a way that brings inner calm and peace of mind. Rothman also emphasizes the importance of the process of *tazkiyat alnafs* or purification of the soul as the ultimate

goal of emotion regulation in Islamic psychology (Anwar, Julia, and Ifanna 2023). This approach provides a broader and deeper dimension in understanding how humans manage emotions, not only from the psychological side but also from the spiritual and religious side.

Although James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman have different backgrounds and approaches, they share a common focus on emotion regulation as an important process in human life. Gross emphasizes emotion regulation from a cognitive-behavioral perspective that is empirical and applicable in the context of modern Western psychology. In contrast, Rothman emphasizes spiritual and religious aspects as the core of emotion regulation in Islamic psychology. Gross's emphasis is on emotion management strategies through cognitive and behavioral changes, whereas Rothman emphasizes spiritual practices and purification of the soul as a way of regulating emotions. This difference provides a strong basis for conducting a comparative study, as it can explore how two great traditions-Western and Islamic-understand and manage emotion regulation in unique yet complementary ways. This research will highlight these similarities and differences to enrich theoretical understanding and practical application of emotion management across cultures and religions.

### **Comparative Review of James J. Gross and Abdullah Rothman's Emotion Regulation Concepts**

A comparative analysis between the concepts of emotion regulation according to James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman is presented based on several indicators, namely paradigms, main strategies, regulatory focus, ultimate goals, and measurement methods, as follows:

#### **Paradigm**

James J. Gross views emotion regulation from a cognitive-behavioral perspective. He asserts that emotion regulation is the process by which individuals influence what emotions they have, when they have them, and how they

experience and express those emotions (Gross 2014). This paradigm places humans as active agents who are able to manage emotions through cognitive and behavioral interventions. In contrast, Rothman (2021) emphasizes the spiritualtheocentric paradigm. He writes, "The purification of the heart (tazkiyat an-nafs) is central to emotional regulation in the Islamic tradition, where practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God), tawbah (repentance), and tawakkul (reliance on God) are not only spiritual acts but also serve as mechanisms for emotional regulation". Rothman's paradigm places emotion regulation within the framework of man's relationship with God and the purification of the soul.

#### **Key Strategies**

Gross (2014) developed five main strategies in emotion regulation, including situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation. He emphasized that "cognitive reappraisal, which involves changing how one thinks about a potentially emotion-eliciting situation, is generally associated with more positive psychological outcomes than expressive suppression". Rothman (2021), on the other hand, prioritizes strategies based on spiritual practices such as dhikr, tawbah, and tawakkul. He states, "Spiritual practices are not merely ritualistic but function as psychological tools for regulating emotions and achieving inner peace". Thus, Gross's strategies are cognitive and behavioral, whereas Rothman emphasizes spiritual practices as the core of regulation.

#### **Focus of Regulation**

Gross (2014) focuses on emotion regulation in managing the experience and expression of emotions so that individuals can adapt psychologically and socially. In his book, he writes, "Emotion regulation is essential for psychological well-being and effective social functioning". Rothman (2021) on the other hand, places the focus of regulation on purifying the soul (tazkiyat an-nafs) and achieving inner peace through

closeness to God. "The ultimate goal of emotional regulation in the Islamic tradition is the purification of the soul and the attainment of tranquility (sakinah) through spiritual connection".

### **The Ultimate Goal**

Gross's (2014) ultimate goal is psychological well-being and social adaptation. He writes, "Successful emotion regulation leads to greater psychological health and improved relationships". Meanwhile, Rothman emphasizes the spiritual goal, which is the achievement of inner peace and a harmonious relationship with God. "The end goal is not only emotional stability but also spiritual fulfillment and nearness to God" (Rothman, 2021).

### **Measurement Method**

Gross (2014) uses quantitative psychological instruments, such as questionnaires and laboratory experiments, to measure the effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies. He states, "Emotion regulation can be measured through selfreport questionnaires, behavioral observations, and physiological indicators". Rothman (2021) favors qualitative and reflective methods, such as in-depth interviews and spiritual change assessments. "Assessment of emotional regulation in the Islamic context requires qualitative measures that capture spiritual transformation and subjective experiences".

From the above discussion, it is clear that Gross and Rothman offer two different and complementary approaches to understanding and managing emotions. Gross provides a systematic and scientifically measurable framework, while Rothman enriches the understanding of emotion regulation with a deep spiritual dimension. This comparison opens up opportunities for integration of the two approaches to produce a more complete model of emotion regulation, especially in the context of a society that values spiritual and religious values.

### **Integration of the Thought of James J. Gross and Abdullah Rothman**

The integration of James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman's thoughts on emotion regulation can be seen as an effort to unite modern psychological approaches with a rich spiritual dimension, resulting in a more comprehensive and holistic model of emotion regulation. In terms of paradigm, Gross emphasizes emotion regulation as a cognitive and behavioral process that aims to manage the experience and expression of emotions to fit the social and psychological context, while Rothman places emotion regulation within the framework of Islamic spirituality which prioritizes the purification of the qalb (heart) and the relationship with God as the core of emotion management. The integration of these paradigms allows emotion regulation to be understood not only as mechanistic control, but also as a soul transformation process that involves the dimensions of meaning and purpose in life.

The main strategies of emotion regulation, according to Gross, which include situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modification, can be enriched with Rothman's spiritual strategies, such as dhikr, tawbah, and tawakal. For example, in Gross' cognitive reappraisal stage, individuals are invited to change their perspective on situations that trigger emotions so that the negative impact is reduced. Rothman's approach complements this by inviting individuals to place the situation in a spiritual perspective, for example, seeing life's trials as a means of getting closer to God, so that emotion regulation is not only psychological but also spiritual. Thus, emotion regulation strategies become richer and deeper, combining rational and spiritual aspects of dealing with emotions.

The focus of emotion regulation, which according to Gross is the management of the experience and expression of emotions for the sake of psychological well-being and social adaptation, can be expanded with Rothman's focus on purifying the soul and

achieving inner peace (sakinah). This integration makes emotion regulation a process that not only regulates emotions to conform to social norms, but also as a means to achieve deep inner balance and a harmonious relationship with God. The ultimate goal of emotion regulation becomes more holistic, combining psychological and spiritual well-being as a whole.

In terms of measurement methods, the integration of Gross and Rothman's thinking demands a multimodal approach. Gross uses quantitative instruments such as questionnaires and physiological measurements that allow for objective evaluation and scientific replication. Rothman, with his spiritual approach, emphasizes qualitative and reflective methods that capture spiritual changes and the depth of inner experience. The integration of these two methods allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of emotion regulation, not only from behavioral and cognitive aspects, but also from spiritual aspects and the individual's meaning of life. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of psychological therapies and interventions that seek to accommodate the psychological as well as spiritual needs of clients.

Thus, the integration of James J. Gross and Abdallah Rothman's thoughts on emotion regulation opens up space for a model of emotion regulation that is not only effective in managing emotions adaptively but is also able to provide meaning and spiritual depth for individuals. This approach is particularly important in the context of a society that values religious and spiritual values, while requiring a systematic and measurable scientific approach. This integration enriches the practice of psychology and therapy with a holistic dimension that combines cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual aspects synergistically.

#### D. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a comparative study, it was found that emotion regulation according to James J. Gross and Abdallah

Rothman offers two main paradigms that complement each other: cognitive-behavioral and spiritual/religious. Gross views emotion regulation as a cognitive process that aims to improve psychological and social adaptation through structured strategies, while Rothman emphasizes the importance of the spiritual dimension and purification of the soul in emotion management. The similarity between the two lies in the ultimate goal, which is the achievement of individual well-being, but the fundamental differences are in the philosophical foundations, strategies, and orientation of practice. The integration of these two approaches has the potential to enrich the theory and practice of emotion regulation, especially in the context of a culturally and religiously diverse society. As such, this study recommends the development of psychological interventions that incorporate cognitive strategies and spiritual practices to be more inclusive, relevant and effective in improving people's mental health and quality of life.

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