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Emotion Regulation: Now You See It, Now You Don't

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The very nature of emotions—their quality, form, function, and possible universality—has been a matter of much theoretical debate and empirical investigation with psychology and related disciplines. In this volume, Holodynski and Friedlmeier (2006) go beyond the standard debates to elucidate their own internalization model of emotions. More than just explicating their model, they (a) point out, very wisely, that one must take a developmental perspective to truly understand emotions, and (b) examine the model's posited components as they either form a continuous backdrop for experience, or blossom and change, across childhood and into adulthood. In this review, I will not exhaustively comment on each chapter. Rather, my intention is to comment on the innovative model that forms the bedrock of the volume, to discuss what I consider its central themes and evidence put forward by the authors, and to indicate what I consider to be their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to speculate on the possible research and theoretical offshoots that the very creative material presented in this volume stimulates.

In Chapter 2, as a foundation for their model, Holodynski and Friedlmeier review structuralist, functionalist, dynamic systems, and sociocultural theories of emotion. Although each has important qualities, as well as empirical foundations, which need to be retained in any more refined theory, the authors are also clear in targeting their weaknesses. These summations of theory lead to Holodynski's and Friedlmeier's feedback-internalization model of emotion, in which several components work, not in parallel, but in a sophisticated feedback framework. These include: appraisals, expressions and body reactions as a function of appraisal, feeling as sensation (interceptive and proprioceptive), and feeling as conscious emotion work. Within this framework several propositions are primary: (a) the internalization of emotional expression and experience; (b) the creation of expression signs and symbols—the very movement to intrapersonal regulation of emotion—via socialization of emotion and cultural processes, or interpersonal regulation; and (c) the

useful categorization of types of emotion-related regulation. I will consider each in turn.

First, the interoceptive and proprioceptive sensations based on bodily reactions and expressions, and triggered by an appraisal that a specific person–environment event is of unique concern to the individual, can be stored in memory. The appraisal bypasses body reactions and expressions and feeds directly to a stored feeling sensation. For example, an 8-year-old hears his mother say how terrible his homework looks; he has heard this many times before and felt the literal sting of the words on his skin, their meaning sinking into his stomach, his posture collapsing under the weight of their rejection. Now, however, he need not experience the actual stinging sensation and shrinking in order to feel shame; the whole scenario is stored mentally, and as the appraisal occurs, shame is felt.

In this way, expressive signs (both to self and other) can become *mental emotion signs*. Such a possibility allows for the desomatization of emotion, for “as-if” feelings (Damasio, 1994; Malatesta & Haviland, 1985) and, importantly, for the miniaturization and internalization of emotional experience as development proceeds. Holodynski and Friedlmeier also present fascinating empirical studies of the internalization of emotion—feelings persist but expression goes inward, especially when individuals are alone. Overt expression of “authentic” emotions occurs more rarely across the lifespan (except perhaps in older adulthood, as the authors note; e.g., Carstensen & Charles, 1998).

I have pondered this first central focus of the internalization model strenuously while reading this volume, and I accept that this ontogenetic process no doubt occurs, and is very important. I am also impressed by its parallels with cognitive development, but continue to have questions. *Why* should such desomatization, miniaturization, and internalization occur? Why is it useful? Holodynski and Friedlmeier hint that such processes render the emotional experience—with its attendant

need for goal-related action—more economically processed and experienced. I agree, but am not sure that in every case this economy is necessary or even most adaptive. Certainly if one is alone and feeling pride over successfully finishing what has been a very onerous task, it is more economical in terms of time and energy spent to feel this feeling internally without the shout of joy and pride that one might use in one's office (so that one's office mate might join in the experience in some way). But might not an adult's heartfelt yelp of joy, or sad tears emanating from love thwarted, be just as adaptive as more internalized experiences, even under solitary conditions? The question seems to me, particularly for adults, what true advantage is conveyed? For children and adolescents and for negative emotions in particular, however, perhaps this desomatization does allow for more efficient action, either problem- or emotion-focused. Another question is whether miniaturization and internalization are always most useful, or at least most prevalent, in solitary situations. I think these interesting questions bear empirical investigation.

Holodynski and Friedlmeier note that they focus upon *intrapersonal* regulation in their discussion of their model and its types of emotion-related regulation, and that for reasons of space, interpersonal regulation is not discussed. However, as they also assert, interpersonal regulation of emotion continues through childhood and adolescence (and even adulthood!). Such interpersonal regulation of emotion involves "which emotions to show in which situations to whom with which expression" (2006, p. 154) and "use of expression signs to optimize interaction with others directed toward serving one's own motives" (p. 154). During middle childhood and adolescence, social success is often maximized via a "cool rule," in which expressive signs are muted within social interaction with peers (Denham, von Salisch, Olthof, Kochanoff, & Caverly, 2002). It would, therefore, seem an important extension of Holodynski and Friedlmeier's work to examine the model's operation within ontogenetically transforming processes of interpersonal regulation.

What of these expressive signs and symbols? Their existence is the authors' second major proposition that I wish to highlight. That is, external expressive reactions can transform into signs and symbols via interaction *within a culture*. For example, this influences what a smile may mean. It can be used symbolically (i.e., "I act as if this is the way it is"; Holodynski & Friedlmeier, p. 67). Furthermore, in part due to the growing child's capability to use these expression signs and symbols, emotion action regulation and reflective emotion regulation (two terms to which I will return) move from *interpersonal* to *intrapersonal* control. With this seemingly simple idea, Holodynski and Friedlmeier lay the foundation for new theorizing and empirical findings in two areas of paramount concern in emotional development: (a) socialization of emotions by caregivers on the individual level; and (b) cultural influences on the development of emotions, on the group level.

In terms of socialization of emotions by caregivers, the authors do an intriguing job of laying down new groundwork for the socialization and interpersonal control of emotion beginning

in infancy; they also often bring in related areas of inquiry, perhaps relatively new in their application here, which bolster the model. For example, the emphasis on intuitive parents' affective mirroring in infants' interpersonal regulation of emotion (actually, the infants' and caregivers' *coregulation* of emotion) seemed a definite strength to me, showing us how the socialization of emotion can begin even before "basic" emotions are in place. Next, Gergely and Watson's (1999) ideas on the infant's sensitivity to contingency help us understand how infants learn about emotional experiences from their caregivers, with their bodily sensations slowly transforming into conscious feelings.

At times these new areas of inquiry initially seem a little out of place (see also material on language development when Holodynski and Friedlmeier discuss volitional regulation), but upon deeper reflection, almost without fail the sense and innovation of the authors' thinking shines through, strengthening the work. All is moving toward the *intrapersonal* use of *expressive signs and symbols* resulting from the ontogenetic process of *internalization of emotion*.

After discussing these and other aspects of emotion socialization during infancy, the authors note that children learn to choose self-regulatory actions, especially after they develop a more advanced form of self-other distinction. The intuitive caregiver begins to require more regulation to be done by the child, and the child notes, and adopts, the regulatory strategies used by the parent. According to the authors, caregivers encourage the preschool child to: (a) adopt new motives that fit with cultural norms (e.g., sharing instead of keeping all the toys to oneself); (b) apply expression signs in intrapersonal emotion action regulation (e.g., realizing that one is feeling sad about missing a friend and what can be done to fix the problem); (c) use language in volitional regulation (e.g., beginning to use words to denote their feelings instead of screaming); and (d) use emotions symbolically in reflective emotion regulation (e.g., considering the meaning of their sadness and how to lessen the feeling via discussion, distraction, and even symbolic play). All of these pressures toward intrapersonal regulation of emotion are intuitive on the caregivers' part, but no less important for that.

The authors note that there are also specific socialization components, some perhaps less intuitive and more purposeful than those noted above, that promote children's learning of emotion-related regulation strategies—(a) direct instruction (as when parents demand compliance without fussing); (b) reinterpretation of causes of emotions; (c) modeling (as when the parents' own emotional reactions serve as means for children to learn regulation); (d) discourse (as when children and parents talk about each others' emotions—antecedent causes, means of coping, and consequences); and (e) symbolic play. Others, including myself (Denham, 1998; Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998) have put forward rather similar components of socialization of emotion, and the present authors do an admirable job of placing these techniques within their model. Fruitful dialogue could come from comparing these authors' views of socialization of emotion with Holodynski and Friedlmeier's, and from testing the current and

earlier authors' socialization components' contributions to aspects of the internalization model.

It is also important to note that, while discussing the move from interpersonal to intrapersonal control of emotion regulation, the authors highlight the role of culture in shaping emotional experience and regulatory action. They rightly note that less work has been done examining components of their model as they are played out in cultural variations or similarities; but the research they describe in Chapter 5 is intriguing and points the willing researcher in a direction to build upon current understanding. For example, in our work (Denham, Caal, Bassett, Benga, & Geangu, 2004) we found similar appraisals of happiness, sadness, and anger-provoking causes of Hispanic, Japanese, Romanian, and American preschoolers' parents' emotions, but somewhat different intercultural means of expressing these emotions. Such differences could be searched for, and examined, within the developmental and social psychological literature, and considered for their fit in the internalization model, in order to promote new study.

A third set of important ideas are the authors' views on four types of regulation: (a) habitual action regulation; (b) emotional action regulation; (c) volitional action regulation; and (d) reflective emotion regulation. These have all been touched upon here already, but bear some specific discussion. The demarcation seems a useful one: both volitional action regulation, dependent as it is on universal symbols (as in language) and the existence of a self system, and habitual action regulation, in which actions correspond with learned expectations and need neither emotions nor volitions, round out the ways in which concerns that *could* evoke emotions can be dealt with.

Only emotional action regulation and reflective emotion regulation will be discussed further, however. In emotional action regulation, emotions regulate actions that relate to our motives and concerns, whereas in reflective emotion regulation, an emotion is regulated through action (see also Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004). This division of effect seems potentially very useful. It is noteworthy how many people (again, myself included; Denham, 1998) have struggled to define *emotion regulation*, with its emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. In the past I have tried to follow Thompson's widely-acknowledged integrative definition: "Emotion regulation' consists of the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994, pp. 27–28). That is, emotion "regulation" is necessary when the presence or absence of emotional expression and experience interfere with a person's goals. Chief among the reasons for the continuing difficulty in "pinning down" emotion regulation, however, is the apparent inextricability of regulation from the experience, expression, and understanding of emotion. Measurement issues also abound. It would seem that the internalization model, with its thorough demarcation of some of these elements, might be a good template upon which to understand developmentalists' past efforts in this area, from which to plan future work not only in coming to agreement about the phenomenon itself, but also in planning measurement tools and empirical studies guided by the model. For

example, specific emotion action regulation pathways in the model could call for very specific modes of measurement, and the duality of emotion action regulation and reflective emotion regulation could perhaps help to resolve the quandaries of "where is this emotional/cognitive/behavioral?" (Eisenberg, Champion, & Ma, 2004). Emotion regulation and socialization of emotion researchers could well unite in such efforts.

In short, there are an amazing number of ideas and implications to be digested and drawn from this volume—it is a goldmine for the emotions researcher. But, although the aforementioned premises and foci are undoubted strengths of the volume, it is not an easy read—one must be devoted to the study of emotions, and open to new ideas, to take in all the kernels of wisdom within. Not all the ideas are ones I could totally agree with—for example, I worked long and hard to agree that shame comes from rejection, but still don't necessarily see the centrality of being spatially removed from the parent (perhaps a relatively minor point in the overarching scheme of things). At times I lost the thread of ongoing logic and picked it up again pages later. Nonetheless, my final analysis is that everyone interested in emotions research and theory—*everyone*—should read this book.

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