

## Book review

### In search of an emotional development theory

**Manfred Holodynski, Wolfgang Friedlmeier, *Development of emotions and emotion regulation*. Springer, New York, 2006, ISBN: 0-387-23281-8 (cloth), xviii+ 265 pp., \$69.95**

Kurt Lewin had it right: There is nothing so useful as a good theory. This is especially true for the study of emotional development.

Why? Because after decades of conceptual blinders and blind alleys, research on emotional growth has emerged with new perspectives and fresh ideas about developmental change. But what is needed to thrust emotions to the center of developmental thinking is a theoretical view that provocatively integrates what is known and offers exciting new hypotheses. Where is the John Bowlby for emotion developmentalists?

To understand the importance of the current moment, think back to what we thought we knew about emotional development not long ago. From the psychoanalytic heritage came the view that emotions develop through the prism of emergent intrapsychic realities, underscoring the fundamentally irrational and frequently disorganizing influences of emotions on behavioral competence. More recently, developmental study has been guided by structuralist accounts that portray emotions from the beginning as discrete, biologically organized constellations of expression, physiology, and subjectivity. Subsequent research has shown that emotions early in life are neither so disorganizing nor so well-organized, and each account marginalized developmental analysis to the changes in appraisal, elicitation, or socialization that modify emotional experience while leaving untouched the fundamental nature of emotion itself.

While taking the best of these earlier traditions (such as the emphasis on relational influences of the psychoanalytic tradition, and the structuralist concern with emotional communication), contemporary researchers have moved in more productive directions. Developmental study is guided by the view that emotions are biologically and psychologically adaptive, and that their development is important to social communication and social understanding as well as to psychological well-being. Functionalist thinking has provided a more open-ended definition of emotion (linked to individual goals) that offers new ways of thinking about emotional development, and has contributed to the explosion of research interest in emotion regulation and its association with competent functioning. Developmental research is also increasingly informed by biologically-oriented and genetically-informed research designs, studies of early risk for affective psychopathology, and the growth of emotion understanding in infancy and early childhood. But these advances do not constitute a coherent theory (for one thing, functionalist approaches still have difficulty answering “what is an emotion?”), even though they signal that the time is right for a useful one.

Creating a new theory of emotional development is not for the faint-hearted. One reason is that the study of emotional development is breathtakingly integrative, entailing changes in developing neurobiology, temperamental individuality, relational influences, self-awareness and self-regulation, developing emotion knowledge, personality organization, considerations of emergent affective psychopathology, and the cultural construction of experience. What contemporary developmental theory is equal to this integrative challenge? Moreover, it appears likely that the story of emotional development will be complex and self-organizational (Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, *in press*), involving mutually regulatory processes that dynamic systems approaches model but do not quite explain or predict. For a science oriented around linear growth models, this is a formidable conceptual challenge.

In this light, *Development of Emotions and Emotion Regulation* is not the book we are seeking, but it takes us closer to the theory we need. The authors, Manfred Holodynski and Wolfgang Friedlmeier, set out to “formulate a theory that embeds the development of emotions and their regulation within their social and cultural context” (p. 6). Theirs is a life-

span analysis, although their primary interest is with growth from birth through childhood. Although the authors provide a thoughtful overview of alternative theories of emotional development and review research relevant to their own formulation, this book is neither a theoretical integration nor a comprehensive review of research in this field. Instead, readers should choose this book if they are interested in a new and different theoretical view of the development of emotion.

One feature that makes this approach new and different is the set of questions orienting the authors' analysis.

- What is the relationship between the form and function of emotions, and does this relationship change during development? What can account for the progressive decoupling of emotional experience from emotional expression over time, such that adults can report salient emotional experiences that are undetectable on their faces or physiology?
- How are emotions regulated and regulating, and how do these functions change with development? What is the association between the earliest emotions as behavior regulators of caregivers (who soothe and nurture young offspring) and emotions as later self-regulators? How do emotions function as signals both to others and to the self? How does emotion fit into broader systems of behavioral regulation?
- How does culture infuse emotional development? How does the construction of emotion as it is culturally transmitted harmonize with the biologically adaptive qualities of emotion that we share as a species, and the personal meaning of emotion for each individual?

With the authors' interest in form and function, the semiotic qualities of emotional signals, and the progressive internalization of emotional experience, readers will recognize this analysis as centrally informed by European (e.g., Vygotskian) modes of psychological analysis. Indeed, this is one of the qualities that make this analysis provocative, although readers in the United States will find the approach challenging, the language occasionally difficult, and references sometimes inaccessible (unless the reader is conversant in German).

The volume begins with an introductory overview followed by a chapter surveying alternative conceptual approaches to emotional development, which is useful as an orientation to what follows and a valuable theoretical overview in itself. Next, the authors introduce their "internalization model" in a third chapter that constitutes the core of their analysis. To Holodynski and Friedlmeier, like many other functionalist theorists, early emotional experience derives from the expressive and physiological reactions to events appraised as relevant to an individual's goals. Emotional expressions serve, in these cases, an interpersonal regulation function, such as in how a toddler's cries motivate caregivers' efforts to provide comfort. Beginning at around age 6, however, a crucial developmental transition occurs when these expressive and bodily reactions begin to be mentally represented rather than physically experienced because these representations can also be the foundation for emotional experience. As a consequence, these internalized emotional expressions become intrapersonal signs for the self (not others) concerning changes in person-environment transactions that require adaptive coping. This developmental transition is crucial because, according to the authors, it permits more complex, flexible and efficient regulation of behavior and expressive control, and also incorporates emotional appraisal into strategic functioning (or, in the authors' words, "[t]hese mental expression signs also make it possible to use emotions to 'color in' thoughts over future action scenarios and thereby evaluate them in motivational terms" [p. 92]). The semiotic function of internalized, expressive emotional signs also enlists emotional expressions into the meaning system of the culture.

This leads to Holodynski and Friedlmeier's fourth chapter on the ontogenesis of emotions and their regulation, which includes a number of other interesting ideas concerning emotional development. Consistent with other emotion theorists like [Sroufe \(1996\)](#), the authors argue that early interactions with caregivers are crucial to transforming the raw arousal states of newborns into conscious emotions as adults expressively mirror the infant's emotional reactions, elicit a resonant response through the infant's motor mimicry, and respond with behavioral initiatives that address the child's goals and thus confer organization to the baby's emotional behavior. Thus newborns do not have true emotions, they argue, but emotions are forged from early contingent relational experience through the adult's coregulation of infant behavior. Interestingly, the authors use an analogous argument to explain the development of self-evaluative emotions (like pride, guilt, and shame) in early childhood through the adult's contingent responding with emotional expressions in evaluative circumstances that elicit a resonant response in the child. Holodynski and Friedlmeier also argue that by middle childhood, the internalization of emotionally expressive signs is accompanied by the progressive "miniaturization" of overt emotional expressions. In other words, there is a progressive weakening of the intensity of emotional displays when individuals are alone such that

adults can experience subjective emotionality in the absence of its manifest expression. This follows from their view that expressive signs have assumed an interiorized intrapersonal function rather than serving as interpersonal signals, although competing explanations (emphasizing the social functions of emotional displays) and their own research findings suggest that miniaturization may be both emotion- and context-specific.

In their final chapter, the authors tackle culture and emotional development. Rather than touring worldwide variability in emotional lexicons, emotion beliefs, and child socialization practices, the authors instead provide a thoughtful discussion of cultural ethnotheories of emotion before evaluating their internalization model against the evidence of comparative cultures. The evaluation is not exhaustive and, perhaps a consequence, the internalization model survives well, leaving readers to wonder for themselves how generalizable are some of the developmental processes the authors have described. If parental contingent mirroring of infant emotions is variable cross-culturally (Keller, 2007) and, as the authors acknowledge, emotion-specific in Western families, for example, what does this mean for the significance of these experiences in the development of conscious emotion?

Taken together, *Development of Emotions and Emotion Regulation* offers an admirable account of the internalization of emotional experience and its psychological origins in the context of a developmental theory of emotion. The authors offer conceptual proposals that are novel, well founded, and thought provoking. The primary shortcomings of their analysis owe to its limited scope. Many relevant domains of research bearing on emotional development are given limited attention. If a child's construction of emotional experience is important to understanding developing representations of emotional signals and their meaning, for example, it is unfortunate that the authors have not drawn on the large research literature on developing emotional understanding to elucidate how representations of emotional experience are so guided. Their internalization model also entices readers into considering how mental representations of emotional signals might contribute to risk for affective problems in children whose early relational experiences are troubled or traumatic, but excepting a brief foray into attachment theory the authors have little to say about this issue. The authors' schematic models of emotional processing, with their emphasis on the influence of (real or internalized) physiological and expressive reactions, also invite consideration of research on the developing neurobiological and neurohormonal foundations of emotional experience. The authors' comment that brain processes and mental processes belong to different system levels misses the point that understanding developing neurobiology provides insight into influences on concurrent developments in behavioral and psychological processes, as work on emotion regulation is beginning to show (Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, in press).

Most strikingly, the authors have virtually nothing to say about emotional development in adolescence and little about adulthood. In some respects, this is sensible if developing internalization of emotion signs is the central theoretical concern. But there is no sense in ignoring the remarkable changes in emotionality during the adolescence (a fundamental challenge for theories that posit linear increases with age in the "miniaturization" of overt emotional expressions) or the equally portentous advances in emotion regulation throughout the post-childhood years for a comprehensive view of the growth of emotion.

*Development of Emotions and Emotion Regulation* is important, however, not only for taking us closer to a useful theory of emotional development but also for the practical value of such a theory. Contemporary research on emotional growth is enlivened by its applications to work in developmental psychopathology and understanding the conditions that heighten emotional vulnerability beginning early in life. Although this was not a primary concern of the authors, their internalization model has potentially valuable applications to understanding how children internalize emotional representations based on troubled early experiences that can contribute to enduring risk for affective problems later in life. In this respect, a good theory is valuable not only as a catalyst for scientific advance, but also for advancing human well-being.

## References

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