

Culture and Emotional Development

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ABSTRACT

Emotions can be biologically born, but socio-culturally nurtured. Emotions are more than our personal reactions their antecedents. They play important social and political roles and are fundamental to identity and community attachments rather than simple biological bases. Suppression of emotions affects mental health. Emotions are formed and structured within particular social and cultural environment. The cultural organization of emotion development implied here is related to the prevailing cultural model of self-construal—the independent or the interdependent self.

Keywords: Culture, Emotion, Development.

Emotions can be biologically prepared or socio-culturally shaped. Through the biological processes hormones, neurotransmitters, autonomic reactions interact but cannot determine emotional qualities and expressions. Particular qualities and expressions are determined by cultural processes only. We feel happy when we are with our loved ones; sad if we lose someone near; guilty if we hurt someone unknowingly; and angry if things do not happen as we planned. There is never a moment when we do not emote. Emotions give meaning to our existence and the events that we experience. Without emotions, these experiences would be mere pieces of information. Emotions color our life experiences and inform us as to who we are, and our relationship with others around us, and how we must act.

The feeling of the bodily response is the feeling of the emotion and bodily expression of emotion involves the hypothalamus, which controls the autonomic and endocrine systems; whereas emotional experience involves the limbic system, comprising the paleocortical structures of the brain plus the amygdalae. Emotional stimulus produces visceral (instinctual) changes in the form of increased heartbeat, respiration and sweating and motor (muscular-skeletal) changes like running, hitting, facial expressions etc., and these changes are the source of the subjective experience, or feeling, of the emotion. Once the emotional stimuli reaches the brain's six-layered neocortex via subcortical systems, the subcortical systems simultaneously and independently

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inform both the neocortex, causing emotional experience, and the relevant peripheral bodily systems, causing bodily responses.

Emotional development includes an understanding of emotions and their meaning, appraisal of emotion-evoking situations, knowledge of appropriate emotion expression, and regulation of emotions. Emotional development of a child is depend up on the responses that he received from his parents (love, warmth, caring etc.) towards his/her own emotions ; or his expressive behaviours that results in the formation of an attachment/ bond between the two. Such attachment experiences have a profound influence on the development of other interpersonal relationships that form later in their life, and have implications for relating them to their own children in future. (1). If a parent inadvertently or deliberately engages in a pattern of inappropriate emotional responses (aversion, anger or abuse), the child can be said to have experienced *emotional abuse* (2)

The relationship between emotion and cognition is important to understand the reason and rationality. However, the role of culture in emotion development has not yet been systematically studied. Research on the socialization and development of emotions and regulation usually focuses on parenting and family and is mostly conducted among European-American populations. Even within a culture; different people may not necessarily understand or experience emotion in exactly the same way. Sometimes the same event may be experienced differently by people of the same culture. Emotional expression, experience and perception are innate and genetically transmitted (3). Whether the emotions play a more dominant role in our actions, thoughts, decisions, planning, reasoning or is it cognition which initiates these processes is still not very clear. The extent of mediation of culture, emotion and cognition is something which must be elaborated and researched upon. Because culture is both cumulative and directed, culture has a unique ability to produce highly complex adaptations to local conditions in relatively short periods of time.

According to *Bhagawadgita*, the emotions derive significance when examined in the context of human desires, and starting with perception and volition, cognition emerges when a desire crystallizes. Desires lead to behaviors, and the achievement or non-achievement of a desire causes positive or negative emotions. Through the practice of *karmayoga*, contemplation and self- reflection, we can manage our desires and thus manage emotions in a healthy way. This is a very significant contribution which helps to understand the role of desire in understanding and predicting emotion and behavior. Positive emotion (*Raga*) is generated by happiness and (*dvesa*) or hostility or negative emotion is generated by unhappiness. Hence, when desires are fulfilled we are happy and have positive emotions, which then lead us to seek such desires .When desires are not fulfilled, we become angry, unhappy and hostile. This model is an example of how indigenous psychologies can contribute to universal psychologies (4).

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The cultural organization of emotion development implied here is related to the prevailing cultural model of self-construal—the independent or the interdependent self. In many Western cultures, the model of independence dominates, regarding the self as an independent, separate organism. In contrast, in many non-Western cultures the cultural model of interdependence prevails, defining the self by social relationships (5). Persons with an independent self-construal experience and express their emotions as internal personal characteristics striving for autonomy and individualistic self-assertion.

Person with an interdependent self-construal experience and express emotions as a means for maintaining interpersonal harmony rather than as an authentic representation of emotions; they view emotions as part of self-other relationships, reflecting social reality rather than inner personal experiences (6). Thus, the prevailing cultural model of the self-assumed influences the appraisal, experience, expression, regulation, and developmental variations of emotions. In Western cultures, positive and negative emotions are usually seen as being in opposition to each other while in Asian cultures positive and negative emotions can coexist as complementary components positively correlating (7. 8).

When the meaning of positive emotions is based on the cultural model of the independent self, happiness is often related to ego-focused, socially “disengaging emotions” like individual success, autonomy; self-esteem; pride etc., When the model of the interdependent self prevails, positive emotions are often experienced as interpersonally “engaging emotions” like success in tasks of interdependence, good social relations etc., (9). According to the cultural model of the independent self, a positive self-conscious emotion in the context of independence is pride. Pride signals and reinforces the accomplishments of the independent self. Pride signals a disengaged emotion characterized by independence in achieving identity-goal congruence(10).

In contrast, in the cultural model of the interdependent self, positive emotions are defined through socially engaged emotions based on connectedness to other people and adjustment to social relationships. Identity-goal congruence is achieved by maintaining harmony in the group, and promoting group-members’ goals focusing on avoidance of interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, pride is only evaluated as a positive emotion when one’s achievements serve others’ goals or when success is not attributed to the self but to the joint efforts of the group or social honor(11). Otherwise, pride indicates an undesirable, isolating social distance between the self and others. In the cultural model of independence, shame is a negative emotion reducing self-esteem. In contrast, in cultures favoring an interdependent self, shame is a positive emotion which indicates social engagement, relatedness, striving for social conformity, and motivation to perform better in the future; this underlines the preference of self-critical, continuous effort (12). Therefore, different from the independent self-construal, pride does not fit with the interdependent self-construal but shame does.

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Shame, the corresponding emotion of pride – affects our identity and interaction in what Cooley (13) calls the ‘looking-glass self. This implies that others opinion about us and our own judgment about others opinion, produces a self-image or sense, which causes us to feel pride or shame. Shame surfaces when we see ourselves negatively through the eyes of the others. Shame is a taboo for men since they are often socialized to repress all signs of weakness. Rather than recognizing and accepting shame through withdrawal, men tend to respond to status loss by defending themselves and resorting to aggression and violence .Shame surfaces when we see ourselves negatively through the eyes of the other. Suppression of shame contributes to men’s violence (14, 15, and 16).

The emotional appraisal of antecedent events for universal emotions is quite similar for people in different cultures. For example, the most frequent elicitors of happiness across cultures have been “relationships with near ones”, “temporary meetings with friends,” and “achievement situations”. The most frequent elicitors of anger have been “relationships” and “injustice”. The most frequent elicitors of sadness have been “relationships” and “death” (17). Cultural events, the birth of a new family member, body centered “basic pleasures”. Same types of situations or events not necessarily triggered the same emotion in people across the globe.

In a study of appraisal *process* of sadness, anger and fear in American and Indian participants appraisals of powerlessness characterized incidents provoking anger and also fear, whereas appraisals of relative power differences brought forth anger. Also, appraisals that an event was caused by someone else elicited anger, but not sadness or fear, whereas events caused by circumstances elicited sadness or fear but not anger (18). Emotion appraisal processes were more similar than different across cultures which reveals that we all born with the same capacity to experience, express, and perceive the same basic set of emotions in so far as appraisal processes is associated with the seven emotions as: Happiness, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, shame, and guilt .

It is important to understand that expressive component is relatively independent from other aspects of emotion appraisal processes and suppression of emotion may lead to negative mental health. There is an intrinsic link between expression and emotional experience, expressing an emotion intensifies the negative experience at times as it may allow for a renewed confrontation with the stimulus situation, open up the possibility for cognitive change as in case of reliving a traumatic event and thereby influencing negative mental health. Research indicates short term effects of expression, giving free reign to anger or sadness may establish a self- reinforcing cycle, where the expression of the emotion intensifies the negative experience (19). We need to explore the structure and mechanisms underlying affect through a link between emotion and cognition in an earnest effort to understand how it contributes to wellbeing. Taking a holistic view of health, emotions are integrated with a particular emphasis on Indian tradition of thought, the theory of Karma. Thus intention is to stimulate a novel way to look at feelings and improve our understanding of emotional responses.

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In India, due to predominance of interdependent self-model of cultural organization of emotional development, in order to protect the honor of parents and other siblings, the girls used to get married very early because it was considered disgraceful for a girl to remain unmarried for too many years after menstruation. Not until mid-twentieth century that compulsory schooling was introduced and education became a common experience for all children, the poor families put their children to work at early ages doing activities such as working on the family's own farm or elsewhere. Generally, boys were more likely to work earlier than girls who usually stay home to help their mothers. In large families, some children were sent to school to receive elementary education or were taught by their parents at home to acquire the necessary knowledge they would require to work and support their families. Only in wealthy families that boys, and to a lesser extent girls, would receive higher education.

Emotional development of children were subjected to difficult legal, cultural and political issues, putting the right of children to be free from harm on one hand, against the right of families to privacy and the rights of parents to raise and discipline their children without external interference, on the other. Behaviors like corporal punishment are considered abusive in one culture may be considered acceptable in another culture. Likewise, parental behaviors that are appropriate at one stage in a child's development may be inappropriate at another stage of development. For example, the level of supervision needed for toddlers may differ from that for adolescents. There are instances where abuse or neglect can occur even though the perpetrator did not intend to commit it just like in the case of parent and child.

In India, due to strong inter-play between emotional development and cultural organization of interdependent-self, orthodoxy and conservatism generally dominate the social and cultural characteristics and mechanisms of middle class society. Traditional beliefs and customs have significant influence over a wide range of cultural, behavioral, and attitudinal manifestations in the society. Children are usually well taken care of in terms of basic needs, and are expected to show almost total subordination and obedience to their parents. Corporal punishment by parents is a common practice, especially in less modernized portions of the society. Beating up a child severely or breaking his or her bones by a total stranger is likely to be considered as a crime punishable by the law. However, the same act of violence on the child, when committed by the child's parent, may, in many societies, raise some second thoughts that, despite the probable unequivocal condemnation, may delay or prevent the initiation of necessary and appropriate forms of intervention.

Factors that affects emotional development:

Factors associated with child's emotional development can be broadly grouped in to four domains: parent or caregiver factors, family factors, child factors, and environmental factors. *Parent* or caregiver factors are related to personality characteristics and psychological wellbeing, history of maltreatment, substance abuse, attitudes and knowledge, and age. *Family factors* that

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may stand as impediments emotional development of child include marital conflict, domestic violence, single parenthood, unemployment, financial stress, and social isolation. Supportive, emotionally gratifying relationships with a healthy network of relatives or friends may enhance the chances of better emotional development of child, especially during stressful life events.

Certain child factors can make some children more vulnerable to abusing behavior. The age of the child, his or her physical, mental, emotional, and social development, may increase the child's vulnerability to maltreatment, depending on the interactions of these characteristics with the parental factors outlined above. *Environmental factors* are often present in combination with parent, family, and child factors. They include poverty and unemployment, social isolation, and community characteristics such as violent neighborhoods, societal attitudes, and promotion of violence in cultural norms and the media. The factors that may contribute to child maltreatment in one family, such as *poverty*, may not result in child abuse in another family. The interaction of multiple factors across these four domains is recognized to be underlying child maltreatment incidents.

Emotional abuse and emotional maltreatment and their ramifications on mental health of children:

Unlike in physical abuse, the weapons used against children in emotional abuse are not visible such as hands, belts, cords, or sexual acts, but rather ugly, hurting words or cold, uncaring silence. Although no physical pain or sexual contact is ever endured, the consequences can be just as severe and long-lasting. Emotional abuse endured over a long period of time results in post-traumatic stress, depression, suicide, substance abuse, and obesity (Hornor, 2010). Here are some forms of child abuse and maltreatments commonly experienced by children.

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other types of exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity. The abuse takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. *Physical abuse* Child physical abuse refers, generally, to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviors include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, pushing, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behavior (20).

Emotional abuse, also called emotional maltreatment, psychological maltreatment or psychological abuse refers to a parent or caregiver's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts toward a child and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurture and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission have a high probability of damaging a child's self-esteem or social competence and may be perpetrated in following five behavioural forms (21).

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Rejection is a form of emotional abuse, whereby the adult refuses to acknowledge the child's worth and the legitimacy of the child's needs. *Isolating*, involves the adult cutting the child off from normal social experiences, preventing the child from forming friendships, and making the child believe that he or she is alone in the world. *Terrorizing* is that the adult verbally assaults the child, creating a climate of fear, bullying and frightening the child, and making the child believe that the world is capricious and hostile. *Ignorance* involves deprivation of the child of essential stimulation and responsiveness, stifling the emotional growth and intellectual development. Finally, *corruption* involves the adult 'dissocializing' the child, stimulating the child to engage in destructive antisocial behavior, reinforcing that deviance, and making the child unfit for normal social experience.

Neglect refers to the failure by the parent or caregiver to provide a child, where they are in a position to do so, with the conditions that are culturally acceptable as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing (22). Neglectful behaviors can be divided into different subcategories. *Physical neglect* is characterized by the parent's or caregiver's failure to provide basic physical necessities, such as safe, clean and adequate clothing, housing, food and health care. *Emotional or psychological neglect* is characterized by a lack of parents' or caregivers' warmth, nurturance, encouragement and support; it is noted here that emotional neglect is sometimes considered a form of emotional abuse or maltreatment. *Educational neglect* is characterized by a parent's or caregiver's failure to provide supportive educational opportunities for the child. Finally, *environmental neglect* is characterized by the parent's or caregiver's failure to ensure environmental safety, opportunities and resources (23).

A general definition of child *sexual abuse* proposes that child sexual abuse involves "the use of a child for sexual gratification by an adult or significantly older child/adolescent". Child sexual abuse as "any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards". Sexually abusive behaviors can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, and oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, and exhibitionism and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography (24).

Other forms of child abuse bullying or peer abuse, sibling abuse and institutional abuse, which involves the abuse that occurs in institutions such as foster homes, group homes, voluntary or charity organizations and child care centers and organizational exploitation like child sex rings, child pornography, child prostitution, and state-sanctioned abuse.

Emotions during War, terrorism, communal violence and natural disasters:

Violence suffered during war, terrorist attacks, and communal/ethnic conflicts shatters a community's routine and safety to the extent that powerful emotions have generated often linger long. Haunted by memories of pain and suffering, the victims paradoxically search to forget the

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horror associated with such events while emotionally fixated and constituted by it. The emotions that typically accompany war terrorism and ethnic violence and the associated trauma are fear, anger anxiety, humiliation, shame and even guilt. There is a need to work through these emotions to build an environment defined by search for collective empathy and compassion. Keeping in view of the complexity of emotions, and to understand the traumatic nature of violence and remembering violence could be used as the very instrument to achieve a shift away from destructive and conflict perpetuating emotions towards those that facilitate conciliation. Reflex-like responses to the trauma of war may simply memorialize the trauma in ways that keep it 'fresh' and unresolved for an affected community. Grief, emotionally and politically transformative 'working through' the course of trauma. A turn to grief recognizes the inherent need for individuals and communities to confront intensely painful emotions and memories in order to be free of rather than trapped by them (25).

CONCLUSION:

In a science of emotion, we need to know how the experience, expression, and regulation of emotions are linked to cultural values and socialization conditions in individual development. Different paths for the development of emotions and regulation are to be expected in contexts differing in the cultural model of the self. Theoretical approaches to the socialization and development of emotions and regulation need to integrate other relevant research, focus on universalities and culture-specific pathways, inter-cultural and intra-cultural differences, and overcome ethnocentric biases. Whether the emotions play a more dominant role in our actions, thoughts, decisions, planning, and reasoning or is it cognition which initiates these processes is still not very clear. The extent of mediation of culture, emotion and cognition is something which must be elaborated and researched upon. Because culture is both cumulative and directed, culture has a unique ability to produce highly complex adaptations to local conditions in relatively short periods of time.

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