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Emotion-Eliciting Appraisals of Social Situations

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There is a notable dialectic in current emotion theory and research. On the one hand, and as the contributions to this volume attest, emotions are highly social. One of the basic functions commonly ascribed to emotion (e.g., Scherer, 1984) is that of *social communication*. Through their observable, expressive manifestations (postural, facial, vocal, etc.) emotions are thought to communicate much to members of the social environment about the emotional person's thoughts, feelings, and likely behaviors—for instance, whether the person is likely to strike out in anger, to give up and withdraw in sadness, or to perceive a serious danger in fear. This information can then be used by the perceiver to regulate his or her actions to both the expressive individual and the affect-eliciting circumstances—to apologize to the angry person, to offer support and comfort to the sad one, or to become more vigilant to potential danger in the fear-inducing circumstances. In addition, as several contributions in this volume emphasize (e.g., Bless & Fiedler, this volume; Clore & Storbeck, this volume; Forgas, this volume; Huppert, this volume; Sedikides, this volume), our own emotional states affect our perceptions and cognitions in ways that influence decision making (e.g., Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, this volume), interpersonal behaviors (e.g., Ciarrochi & Blackledge, this volume; Holmes & Anthony, this volume), and a broad array of additional behaviors that have social implications.

On the other hand, within *appraisal theory*—currently the dominant theoretical perspective concerned with the antecedents of emotion—the elicitation of emotions is viewed as a largely *intrapersonal*, self-centered process. On this view, emotions are elicited by appraisals or evaluations of what one's circumstances imply for *personal* well-being (see Smith & Lazarus, 1990). How one's circumstances are appraised is hypothesized to determine one's emotional state, with different appraisals leading to the experience of different emotions. As reviewed below, much of the research conducted to date on appraisal theory has maintained the self-centered focus evident in the above definition of appraisal. Although the

research on appraisal theory working from this self-centered focus has contributed greatly to our understanding of the antecedents of emotion, it seems likely that the value and applicability of appraisal theory would increase if the approach would more explicitly embrace the highly social nature of emotion.

Therefore, we have two distinct goals in this chapter. The first is to review the current status of appraisal theory—to outline the major assumptions of the theory, to indicate the main theoretical issues addressed by research on the theory, and to review the empirical status of the theory. The second is to discuss some ways in which appraisal theory is being, and might be further, developed to increase the degree to which the theory both reflects and can theoretically account for the highly social nature of emotion.

APPRAISAL THEORY, ITS MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS, THEORETICAL ISSUES, AND CURRENT STATUS

Since its inception (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1966) a primary purpose of appraisal theory has been to explain the often large and readily observable individual differences in emotional response to highly similar sets of circumstances (see, e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Smith, 2001). For instance, an upcoming exam might represent an anxiety-producing threat to one individual, an invigorating challenge to another, and a largely nonaffective chore to yet a third. To explain such variation, appraisal theory asserts that emotional reactions are not directly elicited by the circumstances (or stimulus situations) themselves, but rather are elicited by the results of an evaluation, or “appraisal” of what those circumstances imply for the individual’s personal well-being. This evaluation is proposed to take into account not only the nature of the circumstances themselves, but also how those circumstances relate to the individual’s personal goals, needs, and abilities (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Thus, different individuals (having different goals, needs, and abilities) will often appraise the same set of circumstances quite differently, and thus will respond with quite different emotions.

The development and testing of appraisal theory has been directed toward translating this general postulate into a series of more specific models that could then be subjected to empirical test. Virtually all of the work on appraisal theory conducted to date can be conceptualized as contributing to the development and testing of three distinct types of appraisal models—structural, procedural, and relational—each of which we review in turn.

Structural Models

The vast majority of theoretical and empirical work on appraisal theory has been directed toward the development and testing of *structural models*. These models attempt to describe the appraisal conditions under which different emotions are evoked (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 1984; Smith & Lazarus, 1990). In particular, they have been developed to describe the *contents*

of appraisal: the specific evaluations made by the individual, as well as the outcomes of these evaluations, which are responsible for evoking different emotions.

Several such models have been proposed (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1984, 1991; Scherer, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Although these models differ in several respects (e.g., in some of the specific appraisal dimensions proposed to differentiate emotional experience; see Scherer, 1988 for an in-depth comparison of some of these models), far more telling is the fact that, overall, they are highly similar in the appraisal dimensions they propose and in the ways that outcomes along these dimensions are hypothesized to differentiate emotional experience.

Thus, in one form or another, the existing structural models of appraisal include some sort of evaluation of how important or relevant the stimulus situation is to the person, and this evaluation is hypothesized to determine the strength or intensity of the resulting emotional reaction. They also include an evaluation of whether the situation is desirable or undesirable, which is hypothesized to differentiate pleasant or positive emotions (resulting from appraised desirable circumstances) from unpleasant or negative ones (resulting from appraised undesirable circumstances). Two additional dimensions of appraisal have generally been represented in the structural models to further differentiate among different forms of emotion associated with undesirable circumstances. First, most models include one or more dimensions reflecting the person's assessment of the degree to which he or she is able to cope, or contend, with the situation. The evaluation of coping ability is hypothesized to differentiate emotions such as sadness and fear (associated with appraised low coping ability) from states of calmness, challenge, and determination (associated with appraised high coping ability). Second, most models also include some sort of an evaluation of who or what caused, or is responsible for, the situation, typically represented as an evaluation of self- versus other-responsibility. This responsibility evaluation is hypothesized to differentiate between emotions of anger (appraised other-responsibility) and shame or guilt (appraised self-responsibility).

To date, a considerable body of research has been directed toward testing these models, and substantial evidence in support of them has accrued. In particular, many studies have now asked participants to report on both their appraisals and a wide array of emotions across a variety of contexts, including diverse retrospectively remembered experiences (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Scherer, 1997; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993), and hypothetical vignettes (e.g., Roseman, 1991; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The results of these studies have been highly supportive of the appraisal approach. In each of these studies, not only have the experiences of different emotions been consistently found to be reliably and systematically associated with different appraisals but also the specific relations observed between the appraisals and the emotions have largely been in line with the models being investigated. Thus, at the present time, there can be little question that the patterns of appraisal hypothesized by the structural appraisal models to elicit specific emotions are, by and large, strongly correlated with those emotions.

Much of the more recent work on the structural appraisal models has attempted to build on and test the documented relations between appraisal and emotion in one of two ways. First, there have been a number of attempts to address the methodological limitations of the existing work. As critiqued by Parkinson (1997; Parkinson & Manstead, 1992), virtually all of the research cited above has been strictly correlational, and it has been heavily dependent on the examination of either remembered or hypothetical events. Thus, there is considerable ambiguity as to whether appraisal is a causal antecedent of emotion as hypothesized, and there is some question as to whether the documented relations reflect actual linkages between appraisal and emotion, or whether they more directly reflect respondent's lay theories concerning those linkages (Russell, 1987). Although these methodological concerns have not yet been fully resolved, a number of more recent studies have begun to address them. In particular, a number of studies have examined appraisal-emotion relations in the context of meaningful, ongoing experiences (e.g., Griner & Smith, 2000; Kirby & Smith, in press; Roseman & Evdokas, 2004; Smith & Ellsworth, 1987), and in several of these studies, efforts have been made to manipulate the appraisals to be examined either quasi-experimentally (Griner & Smith, 2000; Kirby & Smith, in press) or experimentally (Roseman & Evdokas, 2004). In each case, these methodologically stronger studies have also been highly supportive of the structural appraisal models being examined. Thus, evidence is mounting to indicate both that the documented relations between appraisal and emotion reflect genuine linkages rather than mere lay theories, and that appraisal serves a causal role in the elicitation of emotion.

In addition to these attempts to shore up appraisal theory, there have also been attempts to examine whether the appraisal patterns hypothesized for particular emotions are necessary and sufficient for the experience of those emotions, and the results of these studies suggest that the hypothesized links between appraisal and emotion may not be as invariant as hypothesized. For instance, Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, and de Boek (2003) have provided data suggesting that, although appraisals of other-responsibility bear a strong relation to anger, they are neither necessary nor sufficient to evoke anger. Such studies, although currently rare, are important for the development of appraisal theory because they suggest important boundary conditions for the theory and present challenges that should help spur the theory's further development.

Procedural Models

The second class of appraisal models being developed and tested are *procedural* ones designed to describe the processes underlying the emotion-eliciting appraisals. That is, these models describe the cognitive operations by which appraisals are made. A primary theoretical motivation for these models has been to explain how appraisals can serve as elicitors of emotions when often the emotions seem to arise automatically, unbidden, and outside of the person's conscious awareness (Smith & Kirby, 2000). As critics of the appraisal approach to emotion have correctly noted (e.g., Izard, 1992; Zajonc, 1980), such quick and seemingly

automatically elicited emotions are very difficult for appraisal theory to handle if appraisal is a conscious, volitional, largely verbally mediated process. From the beginning, appraisal theorists have been very consistent in maintaining that appraisals could be automatic, fast, and “intuitive” (e.g., Arnold, 1960), rather than necessarily being conscious and volitional (see Smith & Kirby, 2000). However, until recently, appraisal theorists have remained largely silent as to *how* appraisals might be made automatically and outside of awareness. A number of process models have now been proposed in an attempt to fill this explanatory void (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Leventhal & Scherer, 1987; Scherer, 2001; Smith & Kirby, 2000, 2001; van Reekum & Scherer, 1997).

Although, as with the structural models, the proposed process models differ in a number of details, they are formally rather similar in that they each propose that appraisal involves at least two distinct levels of processing: a slow, deliberate, likely verbally mediated form of processing, often referred to as “conceptual processing” (Leventhal & Scherer, 1987) or “reasoning” (Smith & Kirby, 2000), and a fast, automatic, memory-based mode of processing involving such things as priming and spreading activation, often referred to as “schematic processing” (Leventhal & Scherer, 1987) or “associative processing” (Smith & Kirby, 2000). It is this latter mode of processing that enables appraisals to elicit emotions quickly, automatically, and outside of awareness. For instance, as proposed by Smith and Kirby (2000), as memories associated with particular emotional reactions and appraisals become activated (e.g., due to perceived similarities between the past experiences and one’s present circumstances), the associated appraisals become activated as well, and when those appraisals become sufficiently activated, the associated emotion will be automatically elicited.

Although the Leventhal and Scherer (1987) model was proposed some time ago, it is only fairly recently that concerted efforts to develop and test such models have been undertaken (e.g., Scherer, 2001; Smith & Kirby, 2000, 2001). Thus, although there is good support for the general plausibility of these models (e.g., Sloman, 1996; Smith & DeCoster, 2000), few data have yet directly tested them. Given that many critics of appraisal theory (e.g., Izard, 1992; Zajonc, 1980) have tended to assume that appraisal generally corresponds to reasoning or conceptual processing as described by the process models, the relatively little research that has been conducted has been directed toward documenting the existence of the more automatic mode of associative or schematic processing. For instance, in one series of studies, over the course of repeated trials in a video game van Reekum (2000) had participants quickly categorize spaceships differing in the sounds they emitted as friends or foes. Then, halfway through the game, participants were told to switch the contingencies, such that former “friends” were now “foes,” and vice versa. Although at the time of the switch participants had explicit conceptual knowledge of the changed contingencies, reaction times were substantially slowed for several of trials following the switch, which van Reekum interpreted as interference from an associatively conditioned expectation that had been established during the initial trials. This suggested that for a number of trials the spaceships were being appraised in opposite ways at the conceptual (reasoning) and associative levels of processing. In another study, Kirby, Edwards, and Smith (2004) have

presented preliminary data that appraisals of coping ability can be incidentally primed, and that such primed appraisals can influence both one's emotional reactions and one's performance on a challenging problem-solving task. Specifically, primed appraisals of high coping ability, relative to ones of low coping ability, were associated with decreased feelings of resignation, and increased probability of solving the problem when attempting to solve a difficult math word problem.

Such initial findings are encouraging, but, obviously, the process models are in need of further development and testing. Current efforts in our lab are pursuing this end. First, to shore up the evidence for the existence of multiple levels of processing in appraisal, we are replicating and extending our initial appraisal priming study (Kirby et al., 2004) to examine the degree to which associative effects can be observed with subliminal priming. In addition, we are currently pursuing studies designed to explore the boundary conditions of both reasoning and associative processing, and to explore ways in which the various levels of processing interact.

Relational Models

A third class of appraisal models, *relational* ones, have also begun to be developed and tested. These models attempt to describe the relational antecedents of emotion-eliciting appraisals, or, in other words, to describe the information that is drawn on in making the appraisals. As reviewed above, a central tenet of appraisal theory is that emotion-eliciting appraisals represent evaluations of what a person's circumstances imply for his or her personal well-being *in relation to* his or her goals, needs, and abilities (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). In the work conducted on appraisal theory to date, however, relatively little attention has been devoted either to specifying the types of situational and personal information that is drawn on in making the appraisals, or how this information is combined to produce appraisal outcomes. For example, although there is now considerable research examining the degree to which appraisals of other-responsibility contribute to feelings of anger (e.g., Kuppens et al., 2003; Smith & Lazarus, 1993; Smith et al., 1993) there has been very little work examining the types of situational and/or dispositional information that are drawn on to determine whether and to what degree the other person is to be held accountable.

The goal of relational models of appraisal is to address this type of issue. Such models are potentially theoretically very important because they greatly increase the predictive utility of appraisal theory: by knowing both which features of the person and/or the situation are likely to be drawn on in appraising one's circumstances, and how those features are likely to be combined to produce specific appraisal outcomes, one gains the potential to predict how a particular individual is likely to appraise, and thus respond emotionally to a particular set of circumstances. In fact, a theoretical emphasis on the relational nature of appraisal is a hallmark of appraisal theory that has been frequently discussed in the literature (e.g., Lazarus, 1966, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Smith & Lazarus, 1990), and described as one of the most important properties of appraisal. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that relatively little research has been directed toward documenting the relational nature of appraisal.

In fact, to our knowledge, our research group has been the only one actively pursuing the development of relational models of appraisal. To date, we have initiated three distinct lines of inquiry, each examining the relational antecedents of a particular appraisal component included in our version of a structural appraisal model (i.e., that of Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Here we briefly review our initial progress along each of these three research lines.

First, we have investigated the antecedents of appraisals of *importance*. Smith and Pope (1992) hypothesized that the perceived importance of a situation would be a joint function of a person's concerns and the degree to which a situation was relevant to those concerns. To generate specific, testable hypotheses from this principle, they noted that individuals vary in the degree to which they are committed to, or motivated by, affiliative versus achievement concerns. They reasoned that when confronted with an achievement relevant situation, individuals high in achievement motivation would respond with higher appraisals of importance, and stronger emotion, than would individuals lower in achievement motivation. Conversely, for affiliative situations, individuals higher in affiliative motivation should respond with higher appraisals of importance and stronger emotion.

Using remembered experiences and hypothetical vignettes, Smith and Pope (1992) confirmed these hypotheses for achievement-relevant situations, but not for affiliative ones. However, in a subsequent study (Griner & Smith, 2000), involving a real-time interpersonal interaction (a teaching task), the hypotheses were supported within the affiliative domain as well: while anticipating the start of the task, affiliatively oriented individuals reported that they viewed the upcoming task as having more affiliative relevance, and in line with this they reported their appraisals of importance, and their feelings of interest as being stronger than did less affiliative individuals. In combination, these studies provide considerable support to Smith and Pope's (1992) hypotheses regarding the antecedents of appraised importance.

In a parallel fashion, Smith and Pope (1992) proposed that appraisals of *coping ability* were a joint function of both the demands of the task confronting the individual and the individual's perceived abilities relevant to those demands. They reported on a pilot study in which individuals selected to be either more or less confident of their mathematical abilities reported on their appraisal and emotions while working on a difficult math task. As predicted, higher levels of perceived math ability were associated with higher levels of appraised coping ability, higher levels of felt challenge, and lower levels of resignation. These initial findings were replicated and extended in a subsequent study reported by Kirby and Smith (in press).

Finally, Smith and colleagues (e.g., Smith & Noser, 1998) have attempted to model the informational antecedents of appraisals of *self- versus other-responsibility* hypothesized to differentiate between the emotions of guilt and anger, respectively. In their analysis, Smith and Noser (1998) follow the lead of Smith and Lazarus (1990; Lazarus & Smith, 1988; Smith et al., 1993) and draw a distinction between attributions, such as that of causal locus as discussed by Weiner (1985), and appraisals, such as those of responsibility. In what they refer to as a "Heiderian" (Heider, 1958) attributional analysis, Smith and Noser (1998) argue that all else being equal, attributed causal locus will determine

appraised responsibility. However, several mitigating factors including evaluations of intentionality, foreseeability, and controllability can moderate this relationship through their influence on the perceived justifiability of the situation. Generally speaking, the extent to which the mitigating factors combine to increase the perceived justifiability of the perceived causal agent for the unwanted situation (whether oneself or someone else) will be held less responsible for the situation, resulting in reduced levels of anger or guilt.

Drawing on data involving both remembered experiences, and learning one's grades on a midterm exam, Smith and Noser (1998) found considerable support for their account. Both justifiability and causal locus were found to contribute to appraisals of responsibility, and the influences of justifiability and causal locus on the relevant emotion (i.e., on anger and guilt) were mediated through the appraisals of responsibility, as hypothesized. In addition, any effects of the mitigating factors of controllability, foreseeability, and intentionality on responsibility, and hence anger or guilt, were mediated through the assessment of justifiability.

These initial developments are quite promising. In each case much has been learned about the nature of the antecedent information that is evaluated in making a particular type of appraisal. As noted above, such information is important for developing the theory to the point where it can be used to predict or explain a particular individual's specific emotional reactions to a certain set of circumstances. Although promising, these initial developments only scratch the surface of what needs to be done in developing relational models of appraisal. The antecedents of the full complement of appraisal dimensions contributing to emotion elicitation need to be modeled, and even for those that have been examined so far, their antecedents need to be examined across a much broader range of contexts than has been the case to date.

ON INCREASING THE SOCIALITY OF APPRAISAL THEORY

At the outset we noted that there is an important theoretical tension in appraisal theory. Whereas emotions are highly social phenomena, emotion-eliciting appraisal, at least as depicted in current theory, is highly self-centered. Having reviewed the current state of development of appraisal theory, we would now like to turn our attention to briefly considering ways in which appraisal theory might be further developed and extended to better account for the social nature of emotion. Although we believe that the theoretical depiction of appraisal as self-centered is largely accurate, it is also clear that these appraisals do not occur in a social vacuum. For modern humans, many emotion-eliciting situations are social creations, and often highly interpersonal. Even deeply personal events, such as losing one's job, or learning that one has a serious chronic illness have important, wide-ranging interpersonal implications. Therefore, we believe that in its future development, it is vital that appraisal theory more explicitly embrace the highly social nature of both appraisal and emotion. In exploring the ways that the sociality of appraisal might be better captured theoretically, we begin by considering

how certain appraisals and emotions encompassed by the theory already are quite interpersonal. Then we consider several directions in which the theory might be profitably extended to increase its sociality.

Inherently Interpersonal Appraisals and Emotions Already Handled by Appraisal Theory: Anger and Guilt

At least two of the emotions commonly considered by appraisal theory—anger and guilt—are associated with appraisals that are inherently interpersonal. Both emotions are associated with an evaluation of who, either the self or someone else, is responsible for an undesired situation: if someone else is held responsible, then anger results, whereas if one holds oneself responsible, guilt results. The social nature of these two emotions and their antecedent appraisals are further highlighted if one considers the functions posited to be served by these emotions (e.g., Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980; Smith & Lazarus, 1990; Tomkins, 1963). The function commonly proposed for anger is to remove an external source of harm (i.e., the person appraised as responsible for the problem) from the environment, and to undo the harm if possible; whereas in guilt the focus is on the self, who has been appraised as responsible, and the proposed function of guilt is to motivate the person to make reparations for harms that he or she has caused, and more generally, to motivate pro-social behavior. In both cases, the appraisal of responsibility serves to identify a social target toward whom to direct one's emotion-related behaviors, whether it be to get someone else to stop their harmful behavior in anger, or toward oneself to make amends to others for perceived wrongs that one has committed.

Although we feel that appraisal theory has more of a social orientation than may at first appear to be the case, it is nonetheless true that appraisal models need to be extended to better take the social context of emotional experience into account. One way to accomplish this is to increase the range of emotions addressed by structural appraisal models.

Accounting for Differences among Guilt, Shame, Embarrassment: The Need to Extend Appraisal Models

Consider the emotions of guilt, shame, and embarrassment. All three emotions are often referred to as “self-conscious” emotions (e.g., Tangney, 1990, 1992), and all three arise in negative circumstances appraised as having been brought about by oneself. Thus, all three emotions share some strong “family resemblances.” In fact, historically, shame and guilt have often been treated as synonyms referring to the same underlying emotion, and there is a long tradition of considering embarrassment to be a mild form of shame (e.g., Borg, Staufenbiel, & Scherer, 1988; Tomkins, 1987). However, although the exact differences among these emotions remain somewhat controversial, there is a growing theoretical consensus emerging regarding the key differences among them (e.g., Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005; Sabini, Garvey, & Hall, 2001; Sabini & Silver, 1997; Tangney, 1990, 1992).

First, there is a fair degree of consensus that guilt focuses on a specific event or transgression committed by the person that violates internal standards (e.g., Tangney, 1990), whereas in shame the focus appears to be more on a more general problem regarding the self—often a perceived character flaw (e.g., Parkinson et al., 2005; Tangney, 1990). Second, in both shame and embarrassment there appears to be a focus on the evaluation of the (flawed) self by others that does not seem to characterize guilt (Parkinson et al., 2005; Sabini et al., 2001; Tangney, 1990). However, in shame the negative evaluation by others need not have occurred, but can be simply anticipated if others were to find out about the perceived flaw (Parkinson et al., 2005; Tangney, 1990). In contrast, in embarrassment actual public exposure of the perceived flaw is more central (Parkinson et al., 2005). In addition, in shame the person believes that the flaw he or she is concerned about revealing is real and reflects a true shortcoming in his or her character, whereas in embarrassment the person views the perceived flaw as something that might lower his or her esteem in the eyes of observers, but which in his or her own eyes does not reflect a true personal shortcoming (Sabini et al., 2001; Sabini & Silver, 1997). For example, a woman who trips while walking across a stage to receive an award will likely feel embarrassed, but not ashamed, because although worried that the audience might think she is clumsy, she knows this is not the case, but that it was a momentary distraction, not general clumsiness that led her to trip.

In general, as currently proposed, none of the current major appraisal models (i.e., Roseman, 1984, 1991, 2001; Scherer, 1984, 2001; Smith & Lazarus, 1990) do a terribly good job of capturing the differences among these three emotions. None of the models even consider embarrassment, and thus they have not attempted to differentiate it from shame and guilt. Moreover, the Smith and Lazarus (1990) model does not differentiate between shame and guilt, but rather hypothesizes that both emotions are associated with appraisal of holding oneself responsible for an undesirable situation. Although other appraisal models (e.g., Roseman, 1984, 1991, 2001; Scherer, 1984, 2001) do make some fairly minor distinctions between the appraisals associated with shame versus guilt, it appears that none of them have the available constructs needed to adequately capture the concern, seemingly central to both shame and embarrassment, that one may be, or is in the process of being, judged by others and that oneself is likely to be found lacking. We are not yet sure of the best way to build such an evaluation into any of these appraisal models without giving the models too much of an ad hoc feel. However, we believe that efforts to do so will reflect an important extension to appraisal theory that will increase the theory's ability to account for the social aspects of emotional experience, and we are currently pursuing this avenue ourselves.

Appraisal as a Social Process

A second way that appraisal theory can be extended to better take the social context of appraisal and emotion into account is to begin to consider appraisal as a social process, rather than as a purely intrapersonal one. Although consideration of the descriptions of existing appraisal models might lead one to suspect that

most emotion-eliciting appraisals are made by lone individuals with little or no input from others in the social environment, this clearly is not the case. We are a gregarious species and we talk to one another about the important things that are happening in our lives (and which are likely to be accompanied by considerable emotion). The information we extract from such conversations very likely systematically influences and shapes the appraisals, and hence the emotions, we experience. Although, to our knowledge, appraisal theorists have not yet considered how input from the social environment might affect appraisal, we believe that it is important for appraisal theory to develop in this direction. Below we highlight three literatures we believe provide important leads as to how appraisals are likely to be influenced through social interaction.

First, *seeking social support* is a common coping response to stressful events (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; Ptacek, Smith, & Dodge, 1994). In addition to seeking help, or instrumental support, individuals often also seek informational and emotional support. That is, they talk with their friends about the stressful events, gaining information about them that might change their appraisals of, and hence their emotional reactions to, the situation.

A very similar theme can be found in the literature on the *social sharing of emotion*, advanced by Rimé and colleagues (e.g., Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000; Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991). An extremely common, almost ubiquitous response to strong emotional experiences is to seek out opportunities to talk about the emotional experience with others in one's social environment. In these conversations the person will talk about the circumstances leading up to the emotional reaction, his or her feelings in the situation, and his or her reactions to the experience more generally. In reviewing their work on the social sharing of emotion, Rimé, Corsini, and Herbette (2002) note that this sharing appears to be related to a need to "search for meaning" and/or to come to terms with the emotional event. In other words, it appears that through this social sharing others in the social environment help the person to shape and validate his or her appraisals of emotionally significant events.

In the third literature, Snyder and colleagues (e.g., Snyder, 1989; Snyder & Higgins, 1988, 1997) have examined the role of excuses in a process that they refer to as "*reality negotiation*." They have found that when caught in a situation involving a personal transgression (i.e., a situation that should elicit guilt or shame), individuals will engage in a "negotiation" with others in the social environment, in which, through the use of excuses they seek to minimize the negative impact of the situation on themselves. Notably, the excuses that are proffered are typically designed to reduce the perceived seriousness of the transgression (referred to as "valence-of-act" by the authors, but essentially the appraised motivational incongruence of the situation), or the person's perceived responsibility for the situation (referred to by the authors as "linkage-to-act"; e.g., Snyder & Higgins, 1997). Thus, through the excuses, the person who committed the transgression seeks to minimize the appraisals leading to shame or guilt. The investigators note that the persons in the social environment often serve as active co-conspirators in the reality negotiation process, and often work with the person

to support the modified appraisals meant to be produced through the offered excuses (Snyder & Higgins, 1988).

Together, these three literatures indicate that emotional experiences are very social in a way that must strongly influence the person's appraisals of emotion-eliciting circumstances, however self-centered those appraisals may be. Whether it is conceptualized as support seeking, emotional sharing, or reality negotiation, individuals appear to talk extensively with others in their social environment about their emotional experiences, and it appears that these emotion-related discussions serve to help shape the person's appraisals of the emotion-eliciting event. Thus, it appears that a very important and promising direction for the development of appraisal theory is to make more meaningful contact with the literatures alluded to above, and to begin to explicitly model the influences of the social environment on the appraisal process.

Social Extensions to the Self and Self-Interest

Although, as we have been arguing thus far, both the contents and processes of appraisal are more socially oriented than current appraisal models suggest, it is still the case that, ultimately, we agree with the theoretical characterization of appraisal as highly self-centered, in that appraisal is an evaluation of what one's circumstances imply for *personal* well-being. However, in this final section, we want to argue that even this self-centeredness can be subject to considerable social influence.

First, our sense of self does not develop in a vacuum, but rather in a social context. We come to identify with certain individuals and groups and to differentiate ourselves from others. This identification process can have profound effects on our self-concept, and thus on how we appraise our social environment. It is now generally accepted that people's identities are shaped in part through their relationships with others (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001; Hogg, 2001; Lancaster & Foddy, 1988; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Smith, Coats & Walling, 1999). As individuals enter into close relationships with others, these relationships help the individual to define his or her goals, values, and expectations in ways that help determine what the individual will appraise as important, what he or she will appraise as good or bad, what is blameworthy, and so on. And thus, by helping to shape the individual's identity and beliefs, these sources of social influence also help to shape the individual's personal appraisals and emotions.

Second, our self-interest is not purely about our own individual self. Instead, when we are in very close relationships, and when we strongly identify with another person or group, we can incorporate these others into our self-concept, such that their well-being becomes an extension of our own personal well-being. Specifically, it appears that the boundaries of one's self-concept can be expanded to incorporate certain others, such that their interests become one's own self-interest as well. As noted by Smith et al. (1999), "close relationships and group membership both involve some sort of merging of self and of other" and "this process may deeply influence cognition, affect, and behavior in relationships and

group contexts” (pp. 881). Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe (2001) noted that this merging of oneself with another entails that people to some degree assume their close other’s motives and cognitions. Thus, in appraising the relevance of one’s circumstances for personal well-being, the concerns of the other explicitly can be taken into account.

The boundaries of the self also can be extended to encompass others through the social roles we assume (Lancaster & Foddy, 1988). These roles are almost always connected to a significant *role-other*: mothers have children, husbands have a wife, graduate mentors have a graduate student, and so on. Often in the eyes of the social environment, due to the role relationship, the way in which the role-other behaves is in part perceived as the responsibility of the actor. For example, a young child’s behavior in public is often seen as being the responsibility of the child’s parents. Thus, when the child acts out in public (e.g., throwing a tantrum in a grocery store), the parent is often viewed with disapproval. Thus, it becomes part of the parent’s direct self-interest to help the child to successfully navigate the particular public encounter. There are numerous social roles that a person might assume (parent, teacher, caregiver, etc.), in which by taking on the role, the person becomes directly responsible for another’s well-being. In such cases it is very natural and adaptive for the self-interests of the parties involved in the role relationships to become heavily merged.

Thus, it appears that the definition of the “self” that provides the basis of one’s self-interest in appraisal is itself rather socially defined and quite interpersonal in nature. Expanding the scope of appraisal theory so that it more explicitly takes into account the social, interpersonal nature of the self represents an important future direction for appraisal theorists.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Appraisal theory represents an important and influential approach to understanding emotion. In fact, it appears to be the only contemporary theoretical approach that provides a viable account of *how* emotions are elicited. In this chapter we have reviewed the current status of appraisal theory, noted several directions in which the theory is currently being developed, and identified a new direction in which we think it is very important to begin extending the theory. As we have reviewed, there are a number of well-developed *structural appraisal models* that identify the specific appraisals hypothesized to elicit specific emotions, and the empirical data in support of such models are quite strong. By themselves, the existence of these well-validated structural models makes the appraisal approach a valuable one for understanding the elicitation of emotion. In addition, however, two additional classes of models are currently under development, and they promise to further strengthen the value of appraisal theory: *process models* that outline the cognitive operations underlying appraisal, and *relational models* that identify the situational and dispositional information that is combined in appraisal to produce the emotion-eliciting evaluations of what one’s circumstances imply for personal well-being. In terms of appraisal theory’s future development, we have

highlighted the importance of extending the theory to better capture the social nature of appraisal. We have made the case that, although nominally focused on one's personal self-interest, appraisals are highly social in several respects: individuals often discuss with others their emotional experiences, and these discussions almost certainly help define the individual's appraisals of those experiences; one's self-concept is in part defined by significant others in the social environment; and the boundaries of the self-concept can be expanded to incorporate the interests and concerns of others who are sufficiently important to the person. As a result, however self-centered appraisals might be, they are often far from selfish.

Thus, it appears that appraisals, although based on one's self-interest, are, in fact, every bit as interpersonal and social as the emotions they elicit. If appraisal theory is to meet its full potential, such that it can be better integrated with theoretical perspectives that emphasize the social and interpersonal nature and functions of emotion (e.g., Bless & Fiedler, this volume; Forgas, this volume; Holmes & Anthony, this volume), it is crucial for the theory to better explain and account for the highly social nature of both appraisal and emotion. Efforts toward achieving this goal are under way in our lab, and we hope other appraisal theorists will expand their research lines to address these important issues as well.

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