



Societal Influence on Emotional Competence

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ABSTRACT

Emotions are universally experienced irrespective of culture and geographical location. They are subject to cultural connotations, intercultural settings, and interpersonal relationships. Emotional Intelligence constitutes of identification, management and judgement of emotions for self and others. This fulfills the purpose of socio-cultural communication. Different paradigms have emphasized varied perspectives to understand emotional development as a result of social setting. Evolutionists were pre-occupied with social roles that emotions facilitated, modern day theorist position on a spectrum of debates (positivist to constructivist). In a world where survival is based on exchange, emotional reciprocity holds connect with status, power, relation, setting, and wider network. Individuals not physically emote but contextually learn to display emotions. The evolutionary process and continuous revisions in academia, medicine, corporate roles and other professions benchmark emotionally competent individuals. According to sociological analysis, geographical locations play a significant role in emotional aspects of an individual's personality. Therefore, this paper reviews how residing in a particular social environment can affect emotional competence, particularly in children. The scope of this paper remains on the increased awareness about sociological revelations that influence experiences. This implies to bring a change in thinking pattern and in historical definitions of concepts.

Keywords: Emotions, society, socio-economic status, emotional intensity

The term 'culture' is perceived as an umbrella term which encompasses other sub systems that are embedded together. The characteristic feature of cultural processes involve shared understanding at different levels and between different elements in a culture. For instance, cognitive practices such as perceiving, believing, evaluating, and communicating are interwoven processes which are communal to individuals with a similar historical underpinning, persons sharing language, and people living in the same geographical location (Bagheri, Kosnin & Besharat, 2013). Culture is an essential construct in interpreting human behavior in social situations.

Research has identified the interplay between social structures which affect emotional arousal in individuals (Stets & Turner, 2014). In addition, sociological analysis also reveals the influence of geographical location on

an individual's emotional aspect. Therefore, this paper reviews how social conditions influence emotional development, particularly in children.

This conceptual paper focuses on understanding if sociological conditions affect socio-emotional personality; patterns of emotional competence which include awareness, regulation and expression; and if it impacts resiliency. The scope and reach of this paper emphasizes on sociological models in order to identify markers for socio-emotional development that can create emotional dysregulation; and poor management in children. The underlying understanding and knowledge of disturbed emotional patterns causing behavioral problems (Crane, 1991).

The other focus remains on the increased awareness about sociological revelations that influence experiences.

The idea is to bring a change in thinking pattern and in historical definitions of concepts such as socio-economic status; and emotions, respectively. For this purpose, the review includes articles from journals, books and theoretical conceptualizations dated nineteenth century onwards to recent formulations.

Socialization

Society is a sub-system which is considered as one of the components to form a cultural connotation. A particular society or a family system and educational organization function on the predetermined and pre-established norms, rules and structures by the universal cultural collection. In addition, smaller clusters existing within a culture also begin to articulate their own ways of functioning. Thus, culture plays a dominant role in forming structures, rules and interpret human behavior at work and in home environments (Bagheri, Kosnin & Besharat, 2013). One of the common and continuous spread of cultural idea occurs by the process of socialization.

For the purpose of social communication to be fulfilled, it is important for members of different social units to be able to perceive their own emotions and emotions of other individuals. A social unit is considered to be comprised of dynamic individuals such as groups of teams, communities, and societies regardless of physical presence and time disparities (Scheve & Luede, 2005). Emotions are relatively stable as a construct with roots in the society. In addition, as a phenomenon, emotions are considered to change according to the desires and demands of the social context. The social context is the living place inclusive of embedded social relations; network and community. The content of information is influenced by social environment (Cornelius, 2000).

Theoretical Composition on Emotions

Literature stores varied and revised theoretical conceptualizations on emotions. Evolutionary sketching draws Durkheim's conceptualization on emotions being considered as the glue that use logical supposition to socially hold people together in a social environment (Durkheim, 1893). Till 1970s, Durkheim's understanding of emotions was being practiced by members of the

society such as popular sociologists Weber and Samuel. He purported that emotions is not just a single entity emerged from individuals solely.

On the other hand, modern theories re-discovered the existence of emotions in a socio-cultural setting by academia orientation emphasizing on studying social behavior. This modern day re-discovery led to spectrum arguments by positivist's paradigm and social constructivist paradigm. The spectrum denotes the degree of predetermined biological vulnerability to the phenomenon of emotions. Individuals with the positivist's paradigm align themselves to minimal presupposition to biological characters influencing emotions and emphasizing relations aspects. Although, social constructivists also focus on social relations, traditions and processes that cater emotional phenomenon but they disregard biological orientations completely. Thus, the continuum explores concepts such as emotional regulation, emotional expression (Hochschild 1979), and institutions impact on social behavior (Fineman, 2003).

Emotional Competence in Children and Adolescents

Foremost, it is essential to explore if emotions and social structures share a reciprocal relationship such that emotions are a result of social relationship such as social status and power and affect many social groups (Kemper, 1981). In addition to physical survival, social survival is also influenced by emotions. Emotions play a social function. This social function explores how emotional expression involves two mechanisms such as relatability to others and response from others. Thus, emotions in social setting allow adaptation to the changes in a social environment (Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, & Youngblade 1991).

One of the prominent ways of emotional regulation, expression and interpretation is performed by identifying emotions as positive and negative. It is well established that cultural influence determine the type of emotion being displayed. Identification or recognition of emotions precisely is the awareness of one's emotions. Emotional awareness is an essential aspect and a precursor for emotional regulation to take place. Often

cultural norms provide a basis for social communication to occur in different social settings.

The exchange of response in any conversation involves different components such as facial expressions, voice tone, and knowledge of words to name a few. Therefore, the ability to recognize one's own emotional state and others allows definite responses which could be shaped by the cultural understanding for variant of emotions. For example, inability to identify aggressive component in an opposition limits the chances of escape for an individual.

Recognition increases the possibilities of positive regulation. The ability to manage one's emotions in socio-cultural setting is a significant requirement in an intercultural setting. Researchers have found higher regulatory behavior for emotional components directs positive adjustment in social environments (Russell, 1991). Multiple settings would have norms that govern the regulation and expression of emotion based on the context. For example, suppression of emotion is not encouraged in an individualistic culture while internal feelings are expressed. Therefore, culture plays a dual role as an influencer in emotional domains and allowing for assessment of emotional behaviors known as emotional competence a member possesses. The ability of an individual to become aware of his or her emotions and others in accordance with the appropriate situation (Meyer, Solovey & Caruso, 2004).

Children are not only influenced by their culture but their primary caregivers such as parents. In addition to children, adolescence is the primitive and vital age group which goes through frequent and intense emotional changes. Neurobiological alterations experienced in this age is associated with increased emotional vulnerabilities. In comparison to younger and older children, adolescent's age group show social reorientation in brain areas (Telzer *et al.* 2014). In addition, Telzer also mentions social environment especially, family members (e.g. parents) influence emotional competence in adolescence. This has been referred to as social referencing or modeling (observational learning) when adolescents evaluate the profiles of their parent's emotional expressivity in order to present their own emotional behavior.

Adolescents who have the inability to identify, describe and express emotions in families with lower levels of cohesion are clinically labelled as alexithymic (suffering through alexithymia) (Telzer *et al.* 2014). Goleman (1995) commented on the current emotional state of adolescents from this generation. He defines them to be more depressed; emotionally troubled and vulnerable to worry. Further, being depicted as lonely and nervous along with acts of impulsive behavior, disorderly (Goleman, 1995).

Anthropologists view human behavior as a result of human emotions. There are multiple perspectives on the study of human emotions. There are many who dominantly follow a socio-cultural perspective while others conceptualize emotions as innate. The former approach explores experiential learning and the latter emphasizes on the biological domains of emotions. For instance, Ekman contributed by enlisting the six basic universal emotions (happiness, anger, disgust, surprise, anger and fear) (Ekman, 1992). These play a role in communication, especially via facial expression for the ideas of danger and safety as expressed by Ekman and colleagues (Ekman, 1993). Further, Ekman also revealed that each emotion behavior activates an automatic are in the body and brain.

Cross – Cultural Parameters on Emotions. On similar lines, ethnographers found different cultural settings to evoke different emotional feelings and responses specific to that culture. For example, the universal emotion of happiness is expressed and evaluated differently in different cultures. Cross-cultural research studies have found that the emotion of happiness is internally experienced in individuals from American culture while people from Japan report to have relational understanding (Fredrickson, 1998). Thus, it can be understood that there exists cultural scripts or cultural norms which allow regulation, expression and evaluation of emotions (Gottman & Levensen, 1992). In addition to the cultural context and concepts of emotional competence, it is also important to review briefly the construct of emotional intensity.

Emotional Intensity. Emotional Intensity is found to be a multidimensional concept which is reliably measured by

EIS. The two independent dimensions which contribute to the multidimensionality of emotional intensity includes both, positive and negative emotions. Emotions composite a component of individual's personality such as traits. According to Larsen (2009), individuals experiencing positive emotions with which intensity will also experience polaroid emotion of negative emotions also with the same intensity (Larsen, 2009). Emotional intensity is not dependent on the valence of the emotion such as positive or negative. The EIS has gained cross cultural support. It is well understood that it is essential to study the psychometric properties of scales for cross cultural evidences. For example, self-report measures for constructs such as emotional intensity is important for various cultural understandings such as display rules, regulation, and reporting (Matsumoto, 1993).

Social Theories of Emotions

Sociological theorists have different perspectives on the social influence on emotions. Averill (1980) emphasizes on the social roles that play a significant role in emotion research. Instead of defining emotions from as a unitary variable, he characterized it as a socially determined phenomenon based on different individual interactions. Others like Scheff have explored the concept of social bonds which are instituted by emotions and vice versa (Scheff, 1988). Similarly, research has also emphasized the concept of social sharing (Parkinson, 1998) that is, the role of communication as a function of emotions. Emotional experience is effected by sharing them, especially negative experiences (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rime, 2001). National Centre for Children in Poverty (NCCP) reported lower income family groups and neighborhood characteristics can negatively affect socio-emotional development of children. This negative affect often results in behavioral problems; emotional dysregulation and poor comprehension (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009).

Further, power dynamics and status relations influence emotions mainly, as a reaction (Kemper, 1978). For instance, patterns of specific self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt are considered to be socio-culturally consistent when it comes to expression and interpretation (Scheve & Luede, 2005). According to

Frank (1988), when individuals suppress emotional expressions, it could negatively affect the formation of coalitions, negotiations, collective teams and actions within a social group or unit. Emotional deficits which characterize emotional dysregulation are primarily understood by three dominant constructs, experience; expression; and arousal mechanisms (Lanteigne, 2011). In adolescents, scholars have found discordant responses across the three constructs to be a cause of psychological problems. The study focuses on exploring two objectives, the psychological problems as a result of discordance between three constructs. And, emotional regulation habits that affect socioemotional functioning.

Lanteigne (2011) found socioeconomic problems in adolescents (male and female) categorized in two out of three clusters. One of them categorized as 'Suppressive' (high experience, high arousal, low expression), the adolescent participants display social anxiety; avoidance and non-acceptance of their emotions. This makes them competent for job interviews, however, inhibits their social interactions to make friends. Early adolescents, conceal their emotions purposefully, while older adolescents might be unaware of this occurring as a practiced condition. The other cluster, 'Experience – Expressive' (high experience, low arousal, high expression) has limited awareness about emotions hindering regulatory behavior (Lanteigne, 2011).

Role of SES on Emotional Development

Further, there have been various studies on socio-economic status (SES) and its effect on wellbeing, particularly in early and late adolescence. This review applies the understanding of authors Brooks – Gun and Duncan (1997), define SES as the difference which exists in the availability and use of resources between higher SES children and lower SES children. It is perceived as the services, facilities, parental opportunities and goods which are provided to children from a high SES family in order to better their life and benefit growth. On the other hand, these resources and access to them is lacking for children from lower SES increasing likeability for developmental problems (Brooks-Gun & Duncan, 1997). The underlying argument remains to define SES as a phenomenon of financial capital (material and social

resource) which also emphasizes on social relationships (Krieger *et al.* 1997).

In order to define SES, especially low SES, it is important to consider other co-occurring factors which include mental illness; exposure to teratogens and hazardous environmental conditions to name a few. Researchers identify this as the third variable that is, it is not advised to view low SES without the co-factors as these highlight or mediate the effect of SES further (Garbarino, 1999). Schreuder (2010) quoted Litcher and Johnson's explanation of rural economy. The contemporary understanding of rural community (poor economic status) is not restricted and limited to the lower income family. Schreuder defines rural community as individuals residing in living conditions where, there is lack of schooling; limited access to transportation; partial or minimal medical services and other civic utilities; and physical isolation. Thus, a child's development is considered to be affected by situations that make them suffer through emotional distress (Schreuder, 2010). This could result in an emotional handicapped adult later in life.

Biopsychological perspective also confirms literature on association between childhood poverty and emotion dysregulation. Kim *et al.* (2013) found negative physical and psychological associates of emotion with adult neuronal processes. Children who were born in poverty conditions, showed emotional dysregulation in adult life because of the reduced prefrontal cortex activity in brain and poor suppression ability of amygdala (Kim *et al.* 2013). Maladaptive functioning, vulnerability of depression and acts of delinquency are often observed in low SES adolescents (McLoyd, 1997). Disturbed social functioning and psychiatric symptoms are highly consistent in low SES children as compared to children from affluent circumstances (Bolger *et al.* 1995). There are also contradictory findings by Conger and colleagues (1997) as no significant relation was established between poverty and adolescent problems which is determined by the factor that adolescents themselves were the informants and not parents or teachers that might have affected the findings.

Garbarino (1999) states that child abuse, aggression among peers and violence in the community setting

are often witnessed by low SES children (Garbarino, 1999). Other evidence reveals that low SES children in urban social settings show signs of behavioral problems (Crane, 1991); and have higher exposure to guns and knives (Osofsky, 1999). Social order is reduced in lower SES due to the existing co-factors as explained by the social disorganization theory (Sampson, 1992).

Additionally, Dhoundiyal and Venkatesh (2009) screened 120 urban and 120 rural adolescent girls (school going and non-school going) using SDQ (strengths and difficulties questionnaires) assessing five behavioral scale constructs (conduct problems; hyperactivity; emotional symptoms; peer problems and pro-social behavior). Irrespective of the location, school going adolescent girls were found to have problematic behavior presentation in areas of conduct; peer relations; pro-social behavior and emotions. School going girls were seen to loose temper; engage in cheating and fighting behavior due to social norm practices. These scales were positively correlated with fear; aggression; and sadness. Further in their research, Dhoundiyal and Venkatesh found rural girls to be closed and not readily sharing their difficulties (Dhoundiyal & Venkatesh, 2009).

A survey investigation by Jamadar and Sindhu (2015) on tribal adolescents of Karnataka found emotional intelligence and creativity being impacted by socio-economic status. It was established that higher SES income group individuals have more emotional intelligence and creativity as compared to individuals from lower SES. In addition, it was also established that adolescents from age group 16-19 years were better in emotional intelligence and creativity as compared to the age group 12 – 15 years. Further, no gender differences were found (Jamadar & Sindhu, 2015). Lack of education due to poverty results in poor self-concept such as a low self-esteem. Kundu (1984) finds this to be an outcome of personal and social relations being negatively affected due to the deprivation.

Garnezy (1993), a resiliency researcher has identified three categories that act as moderators. These include personality characteristics (self-esteem; control; efficacy; coping ability; affective reactions); family dynamics

(values, rules, support); and external support. These independently provides modified reactions and adaptive ability to stressful social settings.

Critical Evaluation

A critical understanding reflects the knowledge that emotions play a significant function in communication as a process of socialization. Overall evaluation predominantly suggests that evolutionary and contemporary theorists remain consistent on the finding that emotions play an essential role in communication within a social group. However, the bias of contemporary theorists is towards the sociological revelations which undermine the role of biological perspectives.

Empirical Evidence. According to literature, emotions are universal. A rigorous research review and conceptual understanding has led the author of this conceptual paper to view emotions acting on three different levels. These levels include, physiological, cognitive and social. The former two domains allow different methods which are more empirical in nature to explore the role of emotions in human social behavior. For example, somatic marker hypothesis has been the latest research tool being used to understand the social knowledge reflected at brain level changes. There is more popularity due to increased awareness of the biomarkers available to address the brain level changes in areas specific to emotions. Further, rich empirical evidence is available confirming the relation between brain development and other physiological factors associated to emotional changes.

Self-Reports. The other method such as self-report measures for emotional intensity also has various critical reviews. Emotional Intensity Scale (EIS) by Bachorowski and Braaten (1994) compensates for AIMS (Affect Intensity Measure) limitations such as it lacks the distinction between intensity and frequency of emotional experience. There are variant differences among researchers on the factors that influence affect intensity. Further for standard use of such scales across different cultures is challenging even though it has received wide support for cross cultural studies. For example, cultures where the paradigms differ such as American and Japanese cultures, the emotional mood

regulation varies there. Thus, the construct for emotional intensity for negative mood regulation will not depict a symbolic translation of the scale for the two cultures (Mearns & colleagues, 2009). Although there are reported findings on the differences in between nonwestern (e.g. Indian) and Western cultures for evaluation of emotions (Elfenbein *et al.* 2002; Roseman *et al.* 1995); and display rules (Matsumoto, 1993). However, emotional intensity in comparison is a less influenced factor (Pandey & Saxena, 2012). In conclusion, it could be due to the lack of conceptualization for the phenomenon of emotional intensity, often referred to as affect intensity (Cooper & Mc Convile, 1989).

Issues: In addition, this knowledge and awareness is constrained to biological approaches. However, it should be understood as the integration of two levels that is, sociological process in the environment linking to changes in brain mechanisms. For instance, the process of socialization leads to the influence at all levels, overt and covert in the primary emotions of an individual. Although researchers depict this notion, there are limited questionnaires which are suitable for research in various areas to conduct research on emotions. This could also be due to recent conceptualization of the term 'emotional intelligence' and defining it properties to the target population. Further, there is also outcome perceived at these three levels where emotions are affected. Although individually there is exhaustive literature on emotions and group behaviors but compliance behavior is another domain which needs to be studied more socially as a sociological finding. This is because merely literature on emotional compliance is associated with task relevant material studied by the expert field of social psychology to understand, predict and control human social behavior.

SES: Research indicates that a global understanding has been accepted of the term socio-economic status (high SES and low SES). The defining criteria of this spectrum is financial capital which is universally accepted as a social understanding. However, latest developments and advancements demand people to go further and understand the properties of this spectrum. For example, there is no composite way of measuring or determining the outcome on child well-being or have a

predictive indicator by monetary linkage. The broader characteristics include resource availability, luxurious facilities, and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, interdisciplinary methodological approaches are latest developments in the field to understand sociological experiences and other mechanisms such as the field of neurosociology (TenHouten 1997). The review on emotions has led to the conclusion that emotions play critical roles in decision making such as for personal and situational goals; and communication. These two processes involve the key determinants of emotional competence that is, identification, regulation and analysis of emotions. It is also clearly practiced by the social unit an individual is brought up in which determine the cult of these practices as a compliant behavior and not a deviant one.

In addition to the specific variable of lower socio-economic status, research on resiliency in this particular field is still developing. It is process of advancing from acceptance of social environment affecting emotions progressing to understanding of coping mechanisms that equip the individual. There is need for changed predicaments to improve the conditions of emotional vulnerabilities for children in different areas of the society.

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