The acquisition of reflexive social emotions: the transmission and reproduction of social control through joint action

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Introduction

In recent years there has been a considerable change in the way emotions have been conceptualised (Averill, 1974, 1976, 1980; Harré, 1986, inter alia). Underlying these more recent developments is a view of emotions as culturally and historically situated social practices. They represent essentially social psychological approaches to emotionality influenced by comparative work. Indeed there is a complementary resurgence of such work in anthropology as well (for example, Lutz, 1989). There is, however, another important issue that has remained a relatively open question, namely how such social practices are culturally transmitted from one generation to another. This invites a developmental perspective on social constructionist approaches. One interesting facet of combining these two perspectives is that it also permits a better understanding of the social origins of adult emotionality. This chapter is a preliminary contribution towards an understanding of how emotions are transmitted and the social-developmental origins of adult emotionality.

A feature of the changes that take place in early childhood is the acquisition of gradually more differentiated categorisations of self, others and the world, reflecting the appropriation of culture. Such is the case with emotions too, where one of the essential outcomes of socialisation is the acquisition of the naming rules applying to social practices in different situations. For example, in situations where embarrassment or guilt are the culturally informed and appropriate 'names' for the outcome of a social episode, the young child may respond in culturally uninformed and therefore 'inappropriate' emotional concomitants to the event. In the case of a transgression, this may take the form of anxiety due to an actual disciplinary response from a socialising agent.

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or at later stages anxiety as an anticipation of such a disciplinary response. Later on, one may witness internalisation of the disciplinary reaction to the event that caused the transgression. Thus, early concomitants do not serve as culturally relevant or informed identifiers for the social situation in question. However, the internalisation of such social practices, namely transgression–disciplinary action, along with the abstraction processes imposed by social interaction in general (i.e. communicative demands), leads to the emergence of a novel response to the same situation which may be embarrassment or guilt. To label the emotional experience in the situation as a ‘response’ is, however, not accurate in that what is taking place is a re-representation of the meaning of the interactive conduct in situ as a function of internalisation which in turn changes the nature of the interaction, and so on. All this can be seen as a dialectical process. Thus, internalisations actually transform the nature of the situation and therefore the nature of the interaction. The processes of re-representation within evolving classificatory schemata from early childhood to early adolescence may eventually result in what is termed by the language community in this instance embarrassment. The end of such acculturation is generally defined when cultural standards are performed, since no further social demands exist to disequilibrate the nature of interaction.

Thus, one of the features of the process of cultural acquisition is the modification of interactive and interpretative routines and rules. Such routines or rules which involve naming, classification and inferential reasoning as cognitive activities and representations constitute the one side of a coin that is otherwise imprinted with the interaction or social practice in situ. What is crucial in this context is that there is a gradual refinement of the emotion repertoire from early childhood to early adolescence as a function of the differentiated interaction rituals that characterise the differences in situations and the beliefs that socialising agents hold with respect to the ‘abilities and competences’ of the child (cf. chapters by Molinari and Emiliani and D’Alessio in this volume). Something rather interesting takes place, namely that the discretisation of emotion by culture constitutes a marriage of emotion to generic situations. Thus, distinct interaction rituals become identified with distinct emotions rules. An understanding of adult emotionality is therefore incomplete without an explication of the emotion representations which in fact stand for internalised interaction routines for specific types of interaction sequences in distinct situations grouped together by language games as belonging to the same class of situations.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the acquisition of such interaction rituals and illustrate critical features of the theoretical model with empirical work deriving from a specific emotion, namely embarrassment. This empirical
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illustration is achieved by investigating the beliefs of a critical group, namely mothers, in situations where their child commits a faux pas. Mothers constitute an essential link in the social interaction that shapes children's emotional repertoires. What do they think their likely reactions and emotional experiences would be in situations involving faux pas? What do they think their child would do and experience in such situations? More importantly, why do they say the things they do? The last question constitutes the critical link between the theoretical model derived from Vygotsky's work and the empirical study reported in this chapter. The ninety mothers from whom the data are drawn were selected on the basis of their child's age, namely ten each from the age groups four to twelve. Half of the respondents' children were male and the other half female. The theoretical framework for this empirical investigation is a model of socio-emotional development extrapolated from Vygotsky's work. In concluding this section we shall elaborate briefly on the choice of emotion.

Embarrassment, the particular emotion singled out for illustrative purposes, is a 'negative' reflexive social emotion (Shott, 1979). Other examples of reflexive social emotions are guilt, shame, pride and vanity. The importance of this general class of emotions is that they entail self-reactions to internalised and accepted social standards (variously named conscience, superego, generalised other, etc.), which are abstractions acquired in the course of interaction, namely culturally supplied conventions, rules and moral values. They entail a special dynamic in contrast to primary emotions (Tomkins, 1962, 1963). They involve two special features in contrast to other emotions. First, a central process for the elicitation of negative reflexive social emotions consists in how one's self is perceived to appear to significant others as a consequence of particular actions. The actions in question are real or imagined social transgressions. Second, these emotions are self-directed, are 'punitive' and check 'deviant behaviour'. Therefore, they constitute efficient control instances within individuals, and keep their behaviour compatible with the rules, social conventions and moral values of the society within which they live. This self-monitoring function of these social emotions makes them important social psychological mechanisms through which individuals become socialised into the ways of their culture.

The sample consisted of ninety mothers of a predominantly working-class background, recruited through the local primary school. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire in terms of a specific child (for instance, their five-year-old daughter), which enabled us to include equal numbers of mothers of children at each of the nine age levels ranging from four to twelve years, and of both sexes.

This does not mean that intentional or unintentional social transgressions always lead to a reflexive social emotion, but simply that a necessary condition for their experience consists in evoking a 'perceived public self-image', which is always negative (cf. Semin, 1981, 1982; Semin and Manstead, 1981, 1982). It is also possible that reflexive social emotions are experienced, without the person having committed a social transgression, i.e. empathically.
In the context of emotional development and socialisation reflexive emotions occupy an important position because child-rearing without the acquisition of such emotions would be a very difficult business. If children did not eventually acquire any self-generated notions of social and moral accountability to keep their activities in check; if they were not to develop a sense of responsibility towards accepted social norms, rules and conventions; or if they did not acquire self-monitored social control (self-control), then the socialising process would be difficult and time-consuming if not impossible. Reflexive social emotions play a central role in contributing to the self-monitoring of conduct. In the absence of self-monitored control one would have to rely on external monitoring methods, such as physical force, punishment, deprivation, withdrawal of external rewards, withholding of love and approval, etc. These would obviously necessitate continual vigilance. This, however, is both impractical and impossible. The relations between children and their parents thus have a particular significance for the acquisition of reflexive social emotions.

Theoretical background to the acquisition of emotional representations

Recently, studies of human emotions have considered the importance of situated, constitutive practices and the role that social rules, conventions and language play in the shaping of emotional experiences (Averill, 1980; Harré, 1986). Inevitably, such orientations have meant an increased sensitivity to the socio-cultural context of human emotions.

Social rules and conventions are of paramount importance to the interpretation, expression and arousal of emotion. If this were not so, one could not account for the diverse but orderly manifestations of sadness at funerals, merriness at parties, happiness at weddings, anxiety at rites of passage, exhilaration at carnivals, or for the historical differences of emotions within our culture (for instance, Lewis, 1936) or the differences in types of emotions cross-culturally (for example, Elliot, 1960; Geertz, 1973; Levy, 1973; Lurz, 1989; Newman, 1960; Rosaldo, 1980, inter alia). Even primary emotions are subject to cultural influences, such as 'display rules' (Ekman, 1972, p. 225) which govern their expression.

The general approach adopted here is one in which, as C. Geertz puts it, 'not only ideas, but emotions, too are cultural artifacts' (1973, p. 81). This means that 'every cultural system includes patterned ideas regarding certain interpersonal relationships and certain affective states, which represent a selection from the entire potential range of interpersonal and emotional experiences' (H. Geertz, 1959, p. 225). Thus the present orientation subscribes
to the view that the way in which one interprets one's emotions and to an extent what one feels are guided by one's culture, its social rules, and conventions about feelings and emotions which govern the interpretation of social situations.

Although the importance of biological factors is not denied in such approaches, what is of focal concern is the role socio-cultural factors play in the acquisition, shaping, experience and expression of emotions. Emotions are viewed as social constructions, the meaning and function of which are to be found in the cultural system of which they are part (Averill, 1980; Gordon, 1981; Hochschild, 1979; Lewis and Michelson, 1983; Lewis and Saarni, 1985; Scheff, 1983; Shott, 1979).

One's social milieu contributes heavily to how one comes to know when to substitute, inhabit or modify expressive behaviours for certain emotions. How and when to express emotions are important feeling rules that all members of a culture learn (Hochschild, 1979; Lewis and Michelson, 1983). It is clear that adults have a good knowledge of emotions and the situations linked with them, even in cases where they have no prior direct experience with a particular situation. This knowledge is a result of the socialisation of cultural rules concerning situationally appropriate emotions. It has also been indicated that children as young as four years old can identify the emotional response appropriate to certain simple situations (Borke, 1971; Lewis and Michelson, 1983; Shantz, 1975). Thus quite early in life, children acquire the knowledge that many situations are associated with particular emotions. Studies dealing with such issues from a developmental perspective have indicated an increase in children's application of display rules with age (see, for instance, Saarni, 1982).

While it has been established that children acquire knowledge about the relationship between emotional states and situations, the processes involved in the socialisation of this knowledge are not clear. Indeed, Lewis and Michelson (1983) note that 'it is the case that children learn early in life that many situations are associated with particular emotional states, expressions and experiences. The specific socialization rules that govern the acquisition of this knowledge have not been determined' (p. 188). It has been suggested that learning (direct or indirect) as well as empathy may be involved in children coming to know how other people experience emotions in certain situations, and that social experiences of children with significant others play a very important role (Lewis and Michelson, 1983). The mechanisms involved in the transmission of such knowledge have, however, to our knowledge not been investigated.
The theoretical model

The issue is to elucidate the social psychological processes contributing to the acquisition of reflexive social emotions. Our general assumption is that the incorporation of language and representational mediation into the child's activity radically transforms early forms of mental and affective functioning. Indeed, most contemporary theories of social and cognitive development rest on the general premise that increasingly sophisticated forms of mediation (for example, metacognitions, Brown, 1978; Flavell, 1978, 1979, 1981; representations, Mandler, 1976; semiotic mediation, Vygotsky, 1981b; Wertsch, 1984, 1985) allow the developing human to perform more complex operations on objects, relationships or social concepts from an increasing spatio-temporal distance and abstraction. In our specific context, representational mediation refers to the acquisition of social representations pertaining to reflexive social emotions. The mastery of culturally supplied social representations affords the child the experience, informed use and understanding of these emotions. This type of focus is also consistent with the growing interest in 'metacognitive' processes, which control, direct and regulate other socio-cognitive and affective processes.4

The particular approach adopted here relies substantially on Vygotsky's work. He regards such mediation (see Vygotsky, 1981b) as social in two senses. First, representational mediation as a psychological tool is social, since it is the product of cultural evolution and the socio-cultural milieu. By addressing the question of emotional development as a cultural one the social plane of development is directly introduced (cf. Vygotsky, 1981b, p. 164). Furthermore, the introduction of culture through language changes the structure of socio-emotional functions. 'It does this by determining the structure of a new instrumental act just as a technical tool alters the process of natural adaptation by determining the form of labour operations' (Vygotsky, 1981a, p. 137). This particular transformation 'occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge...As soon as speech and the use of signs are incorporated into any action, the action becomes transformed and organized along entirely new lines' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24).

The second sense of 'social' refers to the 'localised' nature of social phenomena. Processes of representational mediation are observed in social

4 This view is closely related to Flavell's reference to 'social cognitive enterprises' which 'include all intellectual endeavours in which the aim is to think or learn about social or psychological processes in the self, individual others or human groups of all sizes and kinds' (1981, p. 272). Monitoring such enterprises is viewed as occurring 'through the actions and interactions among four classes of phenomena: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences, goals and actions' (cf. Flavell, 1981, p. 273).
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practices manifested in face-to-face communication and social interaction. Children's experience involves social activity in the sense that they participate in 'interpsychological functioning', namely concrete social settings involving one or more persons. These two meanings in which activity is social are combined in a great deal of the child's early experience because this experience consists of joint (i.e. interpsychological) activity with more mature members of a culture who typically define and regulate the child's activity in accordance with socio-cultural patterns. This means that much of the child's access to socio-cultural processes and structures is necessarily mediated through interpsychological processes. Indeed, the capacity for social self-regulation can itself be seen as growing out of social interaction.

As Vygotsky notes, 'Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition' (Vygotsky, 1981b, p. 163), and also, we would like to argue, with emotional development. For Vygotsky, then, later individual functioning is heavily influenced by social origins, i.e. social activity. Tikhomirov (1977), for example, notes in Vygotskian tradition that 'the fundamental law of the ontogenesis of goal formation can be formulated as follows. The processes of establishing and carrying out goals are initially divided up among people, and then they are united in the activity of a single person. The process whereby one person sets a goal for another can conditionally be called "external goal formation", and the process whereby the person sets his own goal can be called "internal" goal formation. Thus the ontogenetic law can be reformulated as the transition from external to internal goal formation' (p. 11). Basically, the adult and the child have a distributed responsibility on the basis of who is in charge of the representational monitoring of social situations. These types of consideration are also to be found in part in work on social-cognitive development (e.g., Younis's, 1980, 1984, concept of 'reciprocity').

Adult representations of children's competences, abilities and their capacity for emotionality enter the shaping of the situated adult–child social interactions in a formative manner. Such representations typically define and regulate this interaction in accordance with socio-cultural patterns. This means that much of the child's access to socio-cultural processes and structures is mediated through the joint action between parents and their child (the adult–child constellation in general and the mother–child constellation in particular). This is largely because of the child's relative lack

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of social self-regulation and the mother's particular definition of her own role in situations with her child. In this context the mother–child social constellation acquires a very specific meaning. One can regard the mother analytically as entering the child–mother dyad in a twofold manner: once as herself and then as a component of the mother–child dyad, namely as 'another' social individual constituted by 'joint action' (Wertsch, 1985; or 'interpsychological functioning', Vygotsky, 1981b, inter alia). This basically means that the mother in completing the child reproduces a social identity for the child and in doing so defines herself in an 'extended' manner, i.e. inclusive of the child's actions. She has what one may call an 'extended identity'. However, in order to be able to complete the child as a social and cognitive being she must entertain specific 'theories' (representations) which may be tacit but are essentially 'psychological'. These concern what the child ought to be and what they are (cf. Bruner, 1978).

There is a growing tradition in the developmental psychological literature which suggests that children should not be viewed as isolated in their development. They are routinely completed as cognitive and social beings by mature members of their culture, in particular their mothers. More recent work on cognitive development and problem solving also takes such a perspective, with reference to the importance of 'joint action' in the emergence of self-regulated problem solving (see, for example, Edwards and Mercer, 1987; Rogoff and Wertsch, 1984).

From such considerations about the distinctive features characterising the adult–child interaction it is possible to develop a specific model of the representational mediation processes governing emotional development. We shall illustrate the model with an example from the domain of reflexive social emotions.

It is argued that the mother and the child constitute a social unit in social interaction, in which the mother presents a complementary component to the child's actions. We shall refer to these complementary social actions as 'joint action'. One of the central features of joint action is that the mother completes the social activities of her child as a function of her representations concerning her child's abilities, capabilities and social competence. These will obviously vary as a function of those competences and abilities which the mother deems her child should actually begin to master at the specific developmental stage which the child is in (this is akin to lay conceptions of the 'zone of proximal development'; cf. Cole, 1985; Vygotsky, 1981b).

Joint action has a special social psychological significance when examined from the mother's point of view. This arises simply because the mother receives a different type of social identity through her acquired responsibility to complete acts of her child in private and public contexts. The dyadic unit
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Culturally supplied theories, about child – abilities, social competence, etc.

Idiosyncratic theories about children's abilities, social competence

Mother's representations of her child's abilities etc. which monitor her interaction with her child

Representational Mediation (The patterns of joint action involving complementary functions)

The child's emerging representational world

Figure 7.1 The model of joint action

while on the one hand being engaged in one of the most important activities of passing on cultural forms also represents an unusually tight social unit which is highly integrated in its actions. In essence, the mother, through being the constant complementing actor in joint action, regards the joint action as part of an integral presentation of her 'self'. Diagrammatically, the type of general model we are proposing here is to be seen in Figure 7.1. The factors contributing to the emergence of the child's representational world as a function of joint action are outlined in this figure.

In its early stages 'joint action' is largely other-regulated, i.e. by the mother. With the development of the child the main changes occur because of the internalisation of joint action and the consequent increase in self-regulation of the child as a function of its developing representational world. This would be correlated with a decrease in the degree to which the mother takes responsibility for the child's actions, and also a diminution in the definition of the mother's extended identity.

From the point of view of the child there is an emerging world of social conventions and rules regulating proper conduct. This is a consequence of the various social interactional processes which change their structure and shape as a function of the mother's representations. Such changes are in large part facilitated through the organising and enabling functions of language in which the child is developing its proficiency. The specific social interactional patterns which emerge constitute external guide-lines regulating social

4 At least in the case of 'good mothering'. Continuing to provide external regulation when the child is capable of self-regulation would constitute over-protective attitudes on the part of the mother.
interact in circumscribed concrete incidents. The internalisation and
generalisation of such incidents are largely mediated by language (Verruch
and Stone, 1985). As Vygotsky suggests,

In order to transmit some experience or content of consciousness to another person,
there is no other path than to ascribe the content to a known class, to a known group
of phenomena, and as we know this necessarily involves generalization. Thus, it turns
out that social interaction necessarily presupposes generalization and the development
of word meaning, i.e. generalization becomes possible in the presence of the
development of social interaction. Thus, higher, uniquely human forms of
psychological social interaction are possible only because human thinking reflects
reality in a general way.
(1956, p. 53)

Diagnosing the model empirically

An appropriate empirical examination of this framework would require a
series of case studies based on observational work and detailed idiographic
ethnographies with an analysis akin to textual demonstrations. A more
economical version of such an empirical demonstration is to identify key
concepts in the theoretical model and examine these key concepts in a
diagnostic manner cross-sectionally. Inevitably such quantitative evidence
will not prove to be as strong as one wishes, because one is relying on self-
reports (in this case on mothers’ self-reports and reports on what they believe
their children would experience and do in diverse situations). Nevertheless, if
the key concepts in the model are fruitful, then some evidence should be
obtained supporting the overall framework.

Let us isolate the essential elements in this model. First of all, we proposed
here, for the first time, a concept of ‘extended identity’ for the ‘mother’
which is derived from Vygotsky’s notions of ‘interpsychological functioning’
and ‘zone of proximal development’, namely the mother defines her
‘identity’ in social situations with her child as a result of not only her actions
but also those of her child. Let us illustrate a typical incident with an
hypothesical vignette. Imagine a mother at the supermarket with her child
during the rush hour. To help her with the shopping the child offers to get the
drinks while the mother is getting something else. ACCidentally, a bottle slips
out of the child’s hands and crashes on the floor with a loud noise and
breaks.  8

Now, with the particular theoretical framework advanced here, if the
mother defines her identity in an extended manner, i.e., inclusive of the child’s

8 This is the description provided to mothers, except that it was worded in the self-perspective
for them. Furthermore, they were asked to answer the degree of applicability of sixteen emotion
terms on five-point scales with the ends termed ‘not at all’ to ‘extremely’. The critical dependent
variable was embarrassment. The same applies for the emotionality they were asked to report
for their child.
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actions, then for mothers with younger children, who have not acquired the social practices associated with the appropriate emotional display (cf. Semin and Manstead, 1982), the mother should display embarrassment. This would be one of the elements which would result from the complementarity of the actions which are postulated by the extended identity construct. Before we explicate this and document the evidence relating to it there is one prior assumption, namely that younger children do not display or experience embarrassment in such situations, whereas older ones do. Indeed, when the ninety mothers were asked what their child would feel in precisely such a situation where the item on embarrassment was concealed among a range of sixteen different emotions, there was a highly significant correlation between age and degree of embarrassment ($r = 0.31$), and this was even higher if the mother’s embarrassment was partialed out ($r = 0.42$). The critical question is what the relationship between the child’s and mother’s embarrassment is as a function of the child’s age. If the mother and the child constitute a joint activity unit and thus the child’s activities are regarded as part of her identity by the mother, then in situations involving faux pas there is an interesting problem. One member of the unit, namely the younger child, who is the origin of the faux pas, is unable to master the culturally informed social practices appropriate to the social situation. The other (the mother) is. She, however, has to compensate for the other element in this unit which constitutes her extended identity and therefore engage in embarrassment displays. The mother duly reports experiencing this state. She certainly acknowledges, as the positive correlation with age suggests, that younger children are not capable of embarrassment displays. Now, the critical question is the correlation between the degree of embarrassment reported by mothers for themselves in such a situation as a function of their child’s age. This turns out to be in the expected direction ($r = -0.11$), and the strength of this relationship is revealed even more strongly if one controls for variations in their child’s embarrassment, i.e., if one partials out embarrassment ascribed to the child ($r = -0.31$), which shows that the less the child displays emotion, the more the mother does.

Another way of examining this relationship more directly in terms of the postulated relationship between the child and the mother is to examine the difference between the reported embarrassment of mother and child (i.e. the score obtained by subtracting the embarrassment reported for the child from the embarrassment reported by the mother) as it relates to age. As expected this correlation is negative and highly significant ($r = -0.41$). All this suggests

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7 An analysis of variance with Age, Sex and Birth Order (first versus later) as the three between-subjects factors on this variable resulted in only one significant main effect for Age ($F(1, 72) = 3.01; P < 0.01$). Indeed, on all the relevant analyses reported throughout this chapter there were no sex effects either as first- or higher-order effects.
that when the child is regarded as unable to display the appropriate emotion in a situation, the mother, as the model postulates, reports that she displays the necessary emotion for the person who is the source of the transgression thus providing for a unified but extended sense of identity.

The other collaborating set of evidence comes from three further variables which highlight the changes in the meaning mothers ascribe to the incident as a function of their child’s age. First of all, they think that the older their child the less likely it is that the incident will be perceived as the mother’s fault \( (r = 0.42) \). Indeed, they think that the public will in general have a more negative evaluation of the mother when the same incident happens to a younger child than an older child. The responses to the item ‘You should pay more attention to your child’ and the incident ‘was just an accident’ correlate -0.36 and 0.25 respectively with age. It is not surprising that the meaning of the incident changes for the mother as a function of her child’s acquisition of the social practices appropriate for the situation. With an older child the mother is more likely to regard the public as considering the event as an accident, as not her fault, etc.

There are, however, different facets to this set of findings. How does the child eventually acquire the culturally informed emotion practices? What are the interactions that take place between mother and child which are eventually internalised to form what we as adults know as embarrassment?

If the model advanced earlier is accurate, then we should find the following results. Visualise the earlier vignette in the supermarket. The mother witnesses the incident. The younger child, as we know, is as yet culturally uninformed. The mother duly displays embarrassment, thus engaging in the culturally appropriate display which publicly signals apology (Semin and Manstead, 1982). The emotion in question, as we argued in the Introduction to this chapter is ‘self-punitive’. The critical ingredient in the situation, the causal source of the incident, is probably finding the situation even quite ‘rewarding’ – all the fuss and excitement! Indeed, an essential part of the mother’s extended identity, namely the young child, has not experienced any self-punitive emotion. The mother, however, has punished herself by experiencing this emotion and displayed her discomfort publicly, thus reaffirming her belief in the rules and mores of her community. There is a bit of her identity which requires correction, and this is the child. Therefore, it is very likely that she will engage in punitive or corrective action in order to complete the public apology of her full persona which includes her child, namely a constitutive part of her extended identity.

All three questions were answered on five-point scales, with the scale ends anchored as ‘Not at all’ and ‘Extremely’. The overall question was ‘In your opinion, what would the people standing nearby think about you?’ The three critical sub-questions were: ‘Nothing, it was just an accident’; ‘You should pay more attention to your child while in public places’; and ‘It wasn’t your fault.’
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Table 7.1. Correlations of responses to vignettes with age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette 2</th>
<th>Vignette 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correlations with age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment difference score</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported embarrassment for child</td>
<td>0.31 (0.40*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported embarrassment for mother</td>
<td>-0.03 (-0.16*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reasons for child's embarrassment and age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because she realised she did something wrong</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because she made a fool of herself</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was an accident</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she did it although she knew she was not</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supposed to do it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too young to be aware of wrongdoing</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she is careless</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mother's reactions as they relate to her embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scold the child</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell the child off</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain why her behaviour was wrong</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get very cross</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be sad</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laugh it off and tell her not to worry</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Mother's embarrassment partialled out.
* Child's embarrassment partialled out.

One of the further elements of the same study consisted in an additional vignette which was included to examine the same reflexive social emotion, namely embarrassment. The results for the questions which were identical to those asked about the earlier vignette are presented in Table 7.1. The pattern of these findings is very similar to the other vignette in the questionnaire. However, the interesting part of the results in Table 7.1 concerns both the reasons for the child's action leading to the incident and the activities of the mother that are associated with her degree of embarrassment. The second major assumption made here (aside from the concept of extended identity) concerned the internalisation of interpsychological processes, i.e. the nature

9 In this case the vignette provided to the mothers was the following: 'Imagine a situation where your child wasn't paying attention to what s/he was doing and as a consequence spilled her/his soup or drink on the table cloth while you were eating at a restaurant or somewhere you were invited for a meal.'

10 All the items in Table 7.1 under 'Reasons ...' and 'Mother's reactions as they relate to her embarrassment' are responses to three-point scales. There are obvious problems for using such scales; nevertheless, given the diagnostic nature of the reported study, it is worth noting that the correlations are all in the expected direction and relatively strong.
of the interaction between child and mother is gradually internalised, giving rise to changes in the meaning of both the situation and the nature of the emotional experience. These in turn lead to different reactions to the situation producing different interpretations by the mother, etc. Elements of this dialectic are outlined in Table 7.1, in that the mother’s embarrassment is correlated with increased likelihood of ‘punitive’ actions such as scolding, telling the child off, telling the child what it did wrong, etc. However, these are precisely the interactions characterising the early child’s experience of the situation which in their internalisation give rise to the reflexive social emotion in question, namely embarrassment. The child internalises these reactions. As we mentioned in the preceding theoretical section, the specific social interactional patterns are not only internalised but generalised largely by the help of language and the requirements imposed on the use of language and the communication of some experience or content of consciousness to others.

To summarise, two types of evidence are presented for the model advanced here concerning the acquisition of reflexive social emotions. The first source of empirical evidence concerns the notion of extended identity. We find here that the nature of the social interactions in a mother–child dyad influences the mothers’ reported emotional experience and their perception of themselves. That is, when children are younger and thus uninformed about culturally appropriate classifications, responses and names for the outcome of a social episode which involves an unintentional transgression, then our results suggest that the mother is very likely to display the emotion appropriate to the situation. As we proposed, she is also more likely to engage in ‘corrective’ actions towards her young child. It is the internalisation of the nature of the social episode, the nature of the social interaction (with the correction actions of the mother), which constitutes the crux of what is acquired as embarrassment.

Conclusions

Our research strategy was a diagnostic one which attempted to highlight some of the constructs central to the theoretical model that was advanced. Consequently, two issues remain open. The first problem relates to the nature of the data, both in terms of their strength (magnitude, amount of variance explained, etc.) and their nature (i.e. correlational evidence). The second one concerns the empirical examination of the central constructs in the theory which remain unexamined. A related problem is the applicability of the model to the social domain.

There are a number of extraneous circumstances which suggest that the model is quite robust in producing the results described above (see, for instance, Table 7.1). One of them is, as we have already noted in n. 2, the
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socio-economic and educational background of the sample of mothers we employed for whom the self-completion questionnaire might not have been the optimal method. Furthermore, in Vignette 2, a number of the items were three-point scales, which do not allow for an optimal examination of the constructs in question. Finally, the strength of the findings, irrespective of magnitude, is underlined by the fact that all the postulated theoretical relationships in the model as well as their directions are matched perfectly by the obtained empirical data.

The second problem concerns the empirically unexamined assumptions on the one hand and the generality of the model in the social domain above and beyond the acquisition of reflexive social emotions on the other. Of these one of the chief questions remains an exacting empirical examination of the sequential relationship between: (a) social interaction; (b) the internalisation of social interaction; (c) the process of generalisation and abstraction. In the case of embarrassment this takes the form of (a) a social interaction involving a transgression incident – mother's corrective and/or disciplinary actions; (b) internalisation of this interaction sequence. This internalisation is accompanied by (c) a gradual acquisition of culturally informed 'gaming' rules which leads to a generalisation from the concrete to the abstract, i.e. detaching the incident from particulars, such as parental disciplinary actions or anticipation thereof to social practices in different situations, namely embarrassment in the abstract. In a diagnostic cross-sectional study only certain elements of this extended process can be captured. A further feature of this model is that the end-result of the acquisition of such social emotions presents problems when analysed synchronically. The present approach to what are essentially social psychological problems highlights in our view one such problem.

It is certainly the case, as can be seen in diverse treatments of adult embarrassment, that there is no developmental reference to the nature of this emotion. However, what is quite interesting in this context is that in the process of acquiring such reflexive emotions the terms which stand for specific, concrete and repeated social interactions get detached from these referents. On the one hand, the process of internalisation tends to a transformation through indexing such social episodes. Thus, a name or a category begins to stand for an interaction episode. What is more, such naming or classification tends to lead to the ascription of the specific to a known class of phenomena. This generalisation process, proposed by Vygotsky, but also to be found in Grice's work (1975), leads to a detachment from the origins of the experiences which are critical in the emergence and acquisition of this type of emotion and its dynamics. What remains in such a process is an individual response, which when analysed merely from a
synchronic adult point of view misses the social origin of the emotions in question - the emotion in question is in fact a re-representation of a specific social interaction - the interspsychological - which through language and the nature of language in social interaction is detached from its origins. We therefore often make the mistake of ascribing the origins and nature of the emotion to the individual and engaging in an individual-centred analysis which essentially remains reductionist and therefore ignorant of their social origin. This, however, is often, if not invariably, the result of a synchronic formulation of problems.

Finally, we should address the question of generality - however briefly. The choice of the specific emotions in the development and examination of the model in question was not purely by coincidence, but by design. This is because the emotions in question present instances of secondary emotions which refer not only relatively to salient moments in mothers' lives which are therefore well remembered or observed, but also instances where the nature of the actions they engage in are important. The situations associated with the emotions in question are relatively clearly identifiable in terms of the potential sequences of interactions in the episode and where general normative pressures exist about 'right' and 'wrong'. It may therefore be the case that applications of the model to other domains may prove to be more cumbersome in terms of identifying the relevant parameters that constitute the formative interspsychological stage.

Overall, this model adopted from Vygotsky provides, in our view, an avenue to examine more clearly a number of issues which have been voiced in social psychology over the last two decades, namely a clearer understanding of social psychology in terms of social relations. Simultaneously, it is our hope that the adaptation of Vygotsky's framework to issues which have remained predominantly social psychological and thus synchronic in terms of their analytic boundaries allows an alternative avenue towards explicating the social and diachronic origins of socio-emotional practices in adulthood.

References


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