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To cite this article: Toni Schmader & Wendy Berry Mendes (2015) Putting Feelings in a Social Context: Three Case Studies Applying Gross's Extended Model of Emotion Regulation, *Psychological Inquiry*, 26:1, 116-122, DOI: [10.1080/1047840X.2015.962445](https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2015.962445)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2015.962445>



Published online: 09 Mar 2015.



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Putting Feelings in a Social Context: Three Case Studies Applying Gross's Extended Model of Emotion Regulation

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With his extended process model of emotion regulation, Gross (this issue) lays out a detailed account of the factors that inform when different people deploy different emotion regulation strategies and how the process of emotion regulation unfolds dynamically over time. Such a perspective is informative, as it reveals that individuals are not isolated agents regulating their emotion but rather are embedded in broader social and cultural contexts that inform how best to manage their emotional reactions to events. A notable strength of the extended process model is that its level of detail and abstraction allows it to be fruitfully applied to a diverse array of research perspectives in an effort to gain better conceptual traction on the mechanisms and parameters of emotion regulation.

Our aim in this commentary is to illustrate how the extended process model of emotion regulation can be applied to a few key instances where the successful regulation of emotion is critical to meeting intrapersonal, interpersonal, or intergroup goals. Specifically, we interpret the abstract elements of the extended process model of emotion regulation in the context of people's experience of intergroup anxiety, stereotype threat, and feelings of shame for wrongdoing. With these illustrative examples, we hope to bring into greater relief how this model can help us understand the complex array of factors that inform how people might best regulate some of their most difficult emotional experiences within a social context.

Before delving into these examples, we want to start by underscoring the way in which the extended process model of emotion regulation provides a framework for understanding the role of meta-cognitive processes (or what Gross refers to as "perception" and "valuation") in shaping when people use different types of regulation strategies. For example, the decision to suppress feelings of frustration and anger from revealing themselves on your face when having a difficult discussion with a student or colleague will depend on one's broader appraisal of the value of anger for that context and as shaped by past experience with that individual, in similar situations, or from one's life history of

personal, gender-based, or cultural socialization. Although the term *metacognition* is not used in the target article, it is a useful literature to consider as one tries to formulate hypotheses about cultural, person-level, and context-specific variables (i.e., factors in the W or World component of Gross's Figure 7A) that predict when and for whom different emotion regulation strategies are used and are successful (i.e., the A or Action component of Figure 7A). Emotion scholars have acknowledged the metacognitions (i.e., attitudes, emotions, goals) people can experience about their emotional states (e.g., anxiety about feeling anxious; frustration that one is so sad; a desire to feel less angry; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Gable, 2011; Tamir, 2009; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). These metacognitions themselves can be cued by lay intuitions about the functional role of emotions in regulating our behavior and social relationships, serve to direct the situations people approach and avoid, and guide people to either enhance or down-regulate their emotional states.

In particular, as we take this metacognitive view, the perceived value or utility of different emotions becomes important for making concrete hypotheses. Obviously, this places more emphasis on the negative value we tend to assign to negative emotional states, and not surprisingly the decision to suppress or reappraise (to highlight these two commonly studied regulation strategies) most often involves negative emotions. Also, because our interest is in the role played by emotion regulation in social-evaluative contexts, we constrain our focus here to examining situations where the decision to suppress a negative emotion might be prompted by a metacognitive appraisal that a certain emotional experience would interfere with one's social and personal goals. However, in each of the case studies we discuss, we describe how people's lay assumptions about the utility of their emotional state or the situations they find themselves in might be altered to encourage a more successful coping strategy such as reappraisal or acceptance.

Case Study 1: Regulating Intergroup Anxiety

Interacting with strangers and acquaintances can often elicit affectively laden intrapersonal processes like self-presentation and impression management, and interpersonal processes such as simulating others' mental states (i.e., mentalizing) and attempting to decode thoughts and intentions of one's interaction partner (Gilbert, 1998; Mitchell, Banaji, & Macrae, 2005). When interactions happen between members from different social categories, for example, across racial/ethnic divides, the unfamiliarity with the outgroup can lead these interactions to engender stronger affective responses, most notably anxiety, than occur during intragroup interactions (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002; Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008). In addition, intergroup anxiety can stem from xenophobia or racism, which may trigger feelings of discomfort, fear, anger, and disgust. For example, White individuals interacting with Black partners compared to White partners, on average, show more *physiological threat* responses and perform worse on cooperative tasks than Whites interacting with other Whites, and these effects are exacerbated when Whites hold more implicit racial bias or have less experience with interracial group members (Blascovich et al., 2001; Mendes, Gray, Mendoza-Denton, Major, & Epel, 2007).

Unless people feel quite justified to express their anxiety or hostility toward an outgroup member (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), there is often a motivation to down-regulate, modify, or suppress these affective states in intergroup contexts (Mendes et al., 2002; Mendes & Koslov, 2013). In fact, contemporary forms of racism often implicate the process of controlling negative affective responses so as to not look uncomfortable, afraid, or anxious, out of either an authentic desire to be nonprejudiced and/or an effort to avoid appearing prejudiced to minority group members (Plant & Devine, 1998). As with other types of emotional suppression, efforts to suppress intergroup anxiety are often doomed to failure. Indeed, attempts at modifying these affective reactions when interacting with minority or disadvantaged group members can result in regulatory failures such as "overcorrection," whereby majority group members display positive overt behavior, which differs from their internal, felt affective state (e.g., Croft & Schmader, 2012; Harber, 1998; Mendes & Koslov, 2013). These efforts to suppress intergroup anxiety can exacerbate one's emotional reaction. For example, in the aforementioned intergroup studies, although White Americans exhibit greater physiological profiles of threat and stress during interracial interactions relative to same-race interactions, they

self-report more positive emotions and were more likely to smile, laugh, and spontaneously offer positive statements ("That's great," "Cool") during social interactions with Black partners relative to White partners (Mendes & Koslov, 2013). In follow-up studies, when resources were limited, using a manipulation of cognitive load, these positive emotional expressions were minimized, suggesting that intergroup interactions engage effortful emotion regulatory processes. Indeed other work reveals evidence that Whites are often cognitively depleted after interracial interactions (Richeson & Shelton, 2003).

Not all majority group members show indications of threat and anxiety during social interactions with minority group members. Those who have good friends from the minority group do not exhibit physiological threat in intergroup interactions. Although the common interpretation from the intergroup contact literature is that positive contact leads to greater familiarity and hence reduces intergroup anxiety and threat (Blascovich et al., 2001), it is important to note that the reverse may be more likely. That is, applying Gross's extended process model of emotion regulation, we note that the anxiety one feels or anticipates feeling during intergroup encounters can lead majority group members to *choose* situations that don't trigger anxiety as part of their situation selection (Figure 6). Of course, these decisions to avoid intergroup contact contribute to the lack of experience and familiarity with outgroup members.

We can further apply the extended model of emotion regulation to foster better intergroup contact experiences by modifying the metacognitive elements of these events. For example, at the metacognitive level of Figure 7A, features of one's World (e.g., past negative experiences of contact, or exposure to or endorsement of negative stereotypes about certain minority groups) can change one's Perception (e.g., Increased conscious awareness or anticipation of anxiety and arousal) and Valuation of one's experience (e.g., Anxiety could make me seem racist), which predicts an emotion regulatory Response (e.g., I will avoid the situation or try to suppress how I feel). Changing any element in this process can lead to a more positive intergroup experience. For example, when people are encouraged to reevaluate intergroup experiences as a means to gain a broader perspective, they are more likely to approach rather than avoid intergroup contact because they no longer feel it is necessary to engage emotional suppression processes (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006). Although this work has not been framed in the context of reappraisal, one can imagine that reframing one's worldview of intergroup contact as learning from others' diverse experiences or gaining a more multicultural perspective likely modifies the course of emotional experience and regulation.

Examining how majority group members respond to minority group members is only one side of the intergroup interaction. Research suggests that intergroup interactions are also affectively laden for potential targets of bias. But in contrast to majority group members, the goals of the interaction and the type of monitoring required are very different. From a motivational perspective, whereas the goals of majority group members are to be liked, the goals of minority group members are to be respected (Bergsieker et al., 2010). Minority or stigmatized group members may monitor their environment and their interaction partner for signs of danger or signals of possible discrimination, indicative of more general attentional processes like vigilance and threat detection (Frale, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2006; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007). These Perceptual processes are themselves predicted by broader features of one's World, including developmental processes of parent socialization (Peck, Brodick, Malanchuk, Banerjee, & Eccles, 2014), race-rejection sensitivity, and history of discrimination. The perceptual processes of vigilance then lead to a Valuation of one's experience, such as concerns that claiming discrimination might label one as a whiner (Kaiser & Miller, 2001) or that one's actions could confirm negative stereotypes (see Case Study 2 described next). Just as for members of the majority, such processes can lead members of disadvantaged groups to avoid intergroup interactions as a preemptive form of emotion regulation.

When we consider that both minority and majority group members are engaged in complex processes of emotion regulation during intergroup interactions, there are several additional insights that can be gleaned. For example, the overcorrecting behavior sometimes exhibited by Whites in an effort to avoid an appearance of bias can dynamically affect emotion regulation processes by minorities. On the one hand, African Americans sometimes report liking Whites who are higher in implicit racial bias because more biased perceivers often try to exaggerate their friendliness (Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). But when considering implicit and physiological responses, African Americans who receive positive feedback from Whites are also more likely to show signs of physiological threat, behavioral vigilance, and poorer performance (Mendes et al., 2008; see also Logel, Walton et al., 2009, for similar effects in cross-sex interactions). That is, majority group members' "overcorrection" can be interpreted as disingenuous, leading to heightened vigilance and a lack of trust (Major et al., 2014). This constant monitoring of the person and situation by both interaction partners can divert attentional processes away from the social interaction at hand, undermining performance and increasing stress and anxiety. On the other hand,

negative treatment by Whites might indicate discrimination and trigger feelings of anger for minority group members, yet there are social and group costs for claiming discrimination. Thus the cultural context in which majority and minority group members interact with one another triggers ideological perspectives on intergroup contact (W), increasing vigilance to negative affect and sources of threat (P), concerns about the social costs if one's emotional state is detected (V), and the regulatory response to suppress or otherwise down-regulate the feelings (R).

Case Study 2: Regulating Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat occurs when people fear that their behavior in some domain might confirm, either in their own eyes or the eyes of someone else, a negative group-based stereotype (Steele, 1997). Theoretically, there are a broad range of contexts when individuals might experience stereotype threat (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007), and meta-analyses have pointed to reliable evidence that individuals underperform on complex cognitive tasks when reminded of negative stereotypes about an important or salient social identity (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Walton & Spencer, 2009). Research in the last two decades has made important strides to uncover a host of interrelated mechanisms that underlie these performance deficits (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Of greatest relevance to the present topic is evidence that the impairments to executive function that occur under stereotype threat are at least partly the result of effects to suppress or push out of mind negative thoughts and feelings aroused in situations of stereotype threat. In situations of stereotype threat, people are more likely to employ emotional suppression as a coping strategy, a strategy that can be quite ineffective and counterproductive (Johns, Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2008).

Several studies now find support for the negative effects of emotional or thought suppression in producing performance impairments under stereotype threat (Johns et al., 2008; Logel, Iserman et al., 2009; Schuster, Martiny, & Schmader, 2014). For example, women and minorities who are anticipating being tested on their abilities divert attention away from threat or anxiety-based words if they think attending to these words will reveal how anxious they are feeling (Johns et al., 2008). This increased tendency to avoid appearing anxious subsequently predicts impairments to working memory capacity needed for successful performance on difficult math or verbal tasks. These effects parallel broader evidence that emotional suppression can be cognitively taxing (Richards & Gross, 1999, 2000).

The effects just summarized can be contextualized in the language of the extended process model of

emotion regulation. Translating from Figure 4B, the phenomenon of stereotype threat can be understood as a case where a Situation (e.g., Taking a math test as the only woman in the room.) biases Attention (e.g., Increased attentional vigilance to errors and mistakes) and Appraisal (e.g., If I do poorly, I could confirm the stereotypes people have about women), leading to an affective response that is both physiological (e.g., increased cardiovascular threat or blunted activation) and psychological (e.g., increased anxiety or disengagement). At the metacognitive level of Figure 7A, we can now say that the features of the World (e.g., Past cultural or familial framings of anxiety) can change one's Perception (e.g., Increased conscious awareness of one's anxiety and arousal) and Valuation of one's experience (e.g., Anxiety could undermine my performance and makes me look and feel like I am performing stereotypically), which predicts an emotion regulatory Response (e.g., I should suppress the anxiety I'm feeling).

With this metacognitive process clearly spelled out, one can easily formulate and test hypotheses about how changes in the world, one's perception, or one's valuation of anxiety under stereotype threat can facilitate a more adaptive coping response, even if the situation itself still cues stereotype threat and its associated feelings of anxiety. The assumption in this work on emotion regulation processes under stereotype threat is that people actively try to suppress anxiety because of a Valuation they make that anxiety is perhaps both harmful for their performance and/or likely to provide yet further confirmation of the stereotype. By this logic, then, people should be freed from the performance impairing effects of stereotype threat if they hold the belief that anxiety is at the very least benign, and perhaps even beneficial for performance. In several studies, providing people with information that anxiety is benign or beneficial (or having a dispositional tendency to reappraise negative emotions) not only reduces the tendency to avoid appearing anxious under stereotype threat but also increases performance for women on a math test (Johns et al., 2008; Schmader, Forbes, Zhang, & Mendes, 2009). Other research shows that encouraging people to attribute their anxiety to stereotype threat rather than as indicative of personal failing has similar benefits (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005). And the benefits of reappraising anxiety or stress can be experienced more broadly, not just under stereotype threat, and have a measurable impact on high-stakes testing and other outcomes (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013; Jamieson, Mendes, Blackstock, & Schmader, 2010; Jamieson, Nock, & Mendes, 2012).

Case Study 3: Regulating One's Experience of Shame

In 1971, the emotion scholar Carroll Izard reported the results of a simple and undercited study in which people from a variety of different countries were asked to rate the value of several emotional states. Across the majority of countries surveyed, shame was rated as one of the least valuable emotions to experience. In more recent unpublished data (Lickel, Kushlev, Savalei, Matta, & Schmader, 2013), shame and other self-conscious emotions are also rated to be the emotions people are most likely to suppress. However, shame, unlike anger, may not be so easily down-regulated (Kassam & Mendes, 2013). People's tendency to want to suppress and push out of mind feelings of shame is consistent with the prevailing view both within and outside of psychology of shame as a maladaptive emotion. Shame is an emotion that people feel in response to a perceived flaw in who they are or when a misdeed is attributed to internal, global, and uncontrollable features of oneself (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Tracy & Robins, 2006). Not surprisingly, then, experiences of shame often predict a desire to escape, deny, or avoid situations that elicit this emotion (Tangney et al., 1996). And when experienced chronically, shame-proneness is predictive of poorer psychological well-being, maladaptive behavior, and even recidivism in criminal populations (Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992). And perhaps especially because feelings of shame are elevated at the mere thought that others might learn of your wrongdoing (Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002), it should be expected that people are loath to reveal their emotional experience of shame to others.

However, new research is beginning to question the prevailing view that shame, at least as a state experience, is necessarily maladaptive. Functionally, shame has been discussed as an outgrowth of submissive displays that evolved as a nonverbal response to wrongdoing designed to show vulnerability and avoid social sanction or exclusion from a protective social group (Fessler, 2007; Keltner, 1995). From this point of view, a subjective appraisal of shame might therefore provide a signal of the potential for rejection and could initiate not only prosocial behaviors to reestablish connections to others (de Hooge, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2008; de Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2007; Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012) but also individual efforts to correct or change the perceived flaw in one's identity (Lickel, Kushlev, Schmader, Matta, & Savalei, in press). There is now converging evidence to support this more functional and beneficial view of shame. For example, in a unique longitudinal study of former prison inmates, a

tendency to experience shame predicted later recidivism only to the degree that it predicted more maladaptive externalizing behaviors. Controlling for this tendency to lash out at others, shameful feelings predicted somewhat lower rates of recidivism (Tangney et al., 2014). In addition, a recent meta-analysis suggests that an important moderator of whether state experiences of shame predict either avoidance or approach is the degree to which a more adaptive response is likely to be effective (Leach & Cidam, 2014).

Such evidence suggests that given a different metacognitive appraisal of shame, people might be more motivated to capitalize on the personal and pro-social benefits that this emotion can motivate. For example, efforts to suppress feelings of shame, just as with intergroup anxiety and stereotype threat, might leave people feeling cognitively depleted and less able to deploy top-down executive processes needed to manage complex social encounters or embark on efforts for long-term behavior change. For example, in research branching from the thought suppression literature (Wegner, 1994), people experienced a heightened rebound of negative affect and lowered self-esteem when they suppressed personal experiences that were especially shameful (Borton & Casey, 2006; Borton, Markowitz, & Dietrich, 2005).

Just as we did earlier in this commentary, we can also translate this newer work on shame into the language of the extended process model of emotion regulation. Starting with Figure 4B (the original model), events in a Situation (i.e., committing a wrongdoing) can prompt Attention to others' reactions (i.e., as threat of punishment or rejection is feared) and Appraisal of the event (i.e., I did this because of a flaw in who I am) and an emotional Response (i.e., I feel ashamed). At the metacognitive level (represented in Gross's Figure 7A), features of the World one lives in (i.e., cultural socialization to emphasize self-enhancement) can alter one's Perception (i.e., subjective concern with appearing submissive or socially diminished) and Valuation (i.e., feeling ashamed is at odds with the goal to be better than others), which elicits the type of regulatory response (i.e., I should suppress my feelings of shame so others don't find out and I don't feel so bad about myself). But as described earlier, these suppression efforts can be maladaptive, might actually exacerbate shame-based rumination and the externalization of blame onto others.

Of importance, changing the input from the World or the Perception or Valuation of one's response might effectively alter the trajectory of shame. As past research as shown, there is cultural variation in how emotion is valued (Tsai et al., 2006). And in Izard's cross-national survey, one country did not place such low value on shame—Japan. Rather in

collectivistic cultures, the social adaptive significance of shame is more highly valued, which is why many collectivistic cultures have been referred to as shame cultures (Benedict, 1946; Wong & Tsai, 2007). As predicted by the extended process model of emotion regulation, when the valuation of one's emotional experience is altered, so too is the response. Some research suggests, for example, that people in a more collectivist culture more willingly report and even share with others their feelings of shame (Fischer, Mansted, & Rodriguez Mosquera, 1999), and in collectivist cultures, shame is not indicative of lower self-esteem (Wallbott & Scherer, 1995). With a more positive valuation of shame, people might reap more of the beneficial effects of experiencing this emotion.

Conclusions

In sum, we have here tried to translate the metacognitive perspective provided by the extended process model of emotion regulation to specific examples where people are especially motivated to regulate negative emotional experiences. More specifically, we have examined those domains where people experience self-conscious or negative emotions that can interfere with broader personal, social, or societal goals. Having positive intergroup experiences, performing up to one's potential, and learning from one's mistakes are all ways in which people can experience growth out of difficult emotional episodes. Yet in many of these cases, people's lay intuitions about the value of their emotional experiences of anxiety or shame might lead them to default to suppression or avoidance as the preferred means of emotion regulation. What we have tried to highlight here is the practical impact of Gross's broad-based view of emotion regulation. Efforts to change worldview inputs, perceptual processing, or more proximally the valuation of negative emotional states might be an effective means to alter the outcomes of these challenging situations.

Note

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