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0521640946 - The Hidden Genius of Emotion: Lifespan Transformations of Personality

Carol Magai and Jeannette Haviland-Jones

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The Hidden Genius of Emotion

This thoughtful and beautifully written book demonstrates compellingly that emotions are central to individual personality development across the lifespan. Emotions are key also to understanding how the patterns of personality replicate in subsystems of the whole person and constantly provide information to support identity. Carol Magai and Jeannette Haviland-Jones draw on a wealth of contextual and film material to forge an original empirical and theoretical analysis of stability, complexity, and chaos that bridges the domains of attachment, thought, and behavior. Their unit of analysis is the individual. The search for abundant, matched case materials led them to the mid-twentieth century psychologists Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, and Fritz Perls. These lives focus the lens on lifespan transformations – of themselves and then on those whom they would transform, their clients. *The Hidden Genius of Emotion* presents a new approach to personology, autobiography, biography, narrative studies, psychotherapy, and theory of emotions and will itself be a dynamic for new directions in the twenty-first century.

Carol Magai is Professor of Psychology and Founding Director of the Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Human Development at Long Island University. She has authored more than one hundred publications and is a charter member of the International Society for Research on Emotions and a Fellow of the American Psychological Association.

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To the memory of my mother

The mother and daughter reunion is only emotion away

CM

To Terry

The genius who transformed this life

JMH-J

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Preface

In this book we use concepts from emotions theory, dynamic systems theory, complementarity, and attachment theory to model the complex process of personality development and change. Like other accounts of complex systems from the time of Freud and Allport, through Skinner, Erikson, and Block, we use the individual as the unit of discovery and understanding. In the introductory chapter, we examine the thesis that affect is the central organizing force in individual personality and the integrative link between domains of psychological functioning. In doing so, we briefly present the historical context of research on emotion.

Even though the field of psychology has seen many recent and significant advances in emotions theory over the last two decades, much of the contemporary work on human development, clinical work, and personality development is still fragmented. In this book, we take advantage of the new understandings from emotion theory and research to forge a more integrated view of human development. Additionally, there are lessons to be learned from the hermeneutic, the postmodern, and dynamic systems approaches to knowledge that have arisen in recent times to challenge Cartesian methods of thought and analysis. Years ago, John Bowlby dared to integrate the seemingly disparate theoretical paradigms of psychoanalysis, ethology, and general systems theory in building a model of how and why humans form attachments. It has proven to be a richly generative theory that has grown beyond its own beginnings. Similarly, psychology might well profit from perspectives from today's newer epistemological and scientific models. We bring these perspectives to bear in the present project.

We view the emotion system as providing the linchpin for a more integrated science of human development. Eminent emotions scholars – most notably Silvan Tomkins, Carroll Izard, Paul Ekman, and Robert

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Plutchik – have written persuasively about the centrality of emotion in personality functioning, and Izard, especially, has written widely on the developmental aspects of the topic. We draw inspiration from these germinal writings. We explore not only the idea that affect is a central organizing force in personality development but also the idea that affect may not always behave in logical or linear ways; thus, applications from the newer epistemologies are brought to bear. To further the analysis of affect as an integrative factor across domains of personality functioning and across time, we take a lifespan perspective, applying our theoretical lens and research methods to *lives* rather than to isolated psychological processes or isolated moments in time.

Three lives are the focus of our investigation – Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, and Fritz Perls. The rationale for these particular individuals is provided in the opening chapter. The availability of extensive data on each individual – including autobiographies, biographies, vast holdings of written work, and the vivid film records of all three men in brief therapy with the same client – were important considerations. In this context, we had personality data that cut across domains of relationships, cognition, and behavior and that would be essential to document how affect organizes various modes of psychological functioning. Moreover, many of these materials were available across a long stretch of time, allowing us to track the course of development across the lifespan.

We also note the irony that although Rogers's, Ellis's, and Perls's theories are in many ways about emotion, they themselves were not aware of how affect-specific aspects of their own behavior played an important role in their theories and the ways in which they conducted therapy. Thus, the book has relevance for clinical practice as well as for personality theory. We place the work of these three clinical psychologists within the historical context of their own time as well as relate it to contemporary theory and practice.

In the second chapter of Part I, we look at the place of affect in earlier accounts of human development, most notably attachment theory and discrete emotions theory. At this point, we also introduce certain concepts from dynamic systems theory, which will serve as a basis for analyses that follow in the remaining sections of the book.

Part II is designed to illustrate the relationship between early and late developmental experiences and the way that later experiences produce and modify the architecture of emotional lives. Here, Magai (principally) uses the biographical and autobiographical materials available on each man to present their socioemotional development from the perspective

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of contemporary developmental theory. In the first chapter, which focuses on Rogers, personality is viewed from the perspective of attachment theory and research as well as from the perspective of discrete emotions theory. We trace the development of shame and interest, as linked to attachment goals, and their incorporation as ideoaffective structures over time. We show how attachment theory is enriched within the context of a lifespan view of development and how affect and attachment are integrally related but also distinct in their influence on choice points in the lifespan.

In the second chapter, which focuses on Ellis, the attachment theoretical approach to personality and socioemotional development is expanded to include the theory called self-organization, which is related to dynamic systems theory. Once again, the advantage of integrating personality research with emotional process is highlighted. The final chapter concerns the affective system of Perls; his particular therapeutic techniques, including his confrontational style, are seen as closely associated with cumulative developmental experiences, an atypical attachment pattern, and the dominance, and instability, of certain affects.

Part III deals with the link between emotion and cognition; it begins with an introduction to the system of analysis used in this part and the theoretical framework in which uses of emotional terms are shown to be related to the favoring of particular logical systems. Haviland-Jones (principally) uses this system to analyze the theoretical work of Rogers, Ellis, and Perls across their lifetimes. Emotion is shown to be the bridge between personality and theory construction. For example, Rogers is shown to have made a false start with his work on diagnosis. This early work was lacking in both passion and any focused form of logic. As Rogers elaborated specific areas with emotional content, he became capable of analyzing them with increasingly sophisticated logical systems. Inhibition of a particular emotion, in his case anger, was found to be associated with inhibition of thoughtful process. Even though Rogers had an identifiable ideoaffective system, it developed and changed across his lifespan within his work. On the other hand, Ellis's affective system is circular; that is, emotions lead to other emotions rather than to ideas, people, or content. This circularity sets up what we call an addictive ideoaffective system. The addictive system is resistant to change but becomes more elaborated by continuously amassing new data. Perls's system departs from most known models; it is both the most disorganized and most creative system of the three, swinging between extremes.

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These chapters are all directed at a deep examination of the relationship of the individual to his or her philosophical or logical systems. The relativisms of postmodern approaches are partially resolved by linking each system to affective biases within the individual. In that sense, each system is subjective, but the distinction between subjective and objective will be seen as requiring new definition as boundaries fade.

Part IV examines emotion as the integrative link between personality and therapeutic behavior. Here we focus on the “affective postures” of each therapist, that is, the embodiment of or the physical representation of the affective structure of personality, as revealed by facial expressions and body language. The affective postures are shown to be closely aligned to the value structure of each theory and to the therapeutic goals as articulated in Client-centered, Rational Emotive, and Gestalt theories. Here, the link between emotion as the integrative link in therapeutic behavior is graphically illustrated. Not only are the words and implications set out in an introductory segment in the film, but the interactive sessions with the client Gloria also bring the personalities of the three therapists alive in the immediacy of visual and audio images. The previous analyses of words and thoughts are shown to extend to and to be captured by posture and nonverbal behavior. A microanalytic exposition of sections of each session shows how the nonverbal and verbal uses of emotion influence the behavior of the client on a moment-to-moment basis and how she in turn affects each therapist. This affective interaction is the very substance of what psychoanalysts refer to as transference and countertransference but here the emotion-specific aspects of this process become observable. Ultimately, each therapeutic system, like each man, presents a particular emotional focus for the client. When offered the choice of therapist for continuing contact, the client, Gloria, chooses the one most closely aligned with her current emotional conflicts.

In Part V, we draw together the various observations that emerged in the course of this study and integrate them with existing knowledge about emotion processes and dynamic systems. We also address the issue of the progress of lives over time, a process that is particularly difficult to study in the laboratory but that is rendered uniquely feasible by the analysis of personal documents such as theoretical writings produced over a forty-year period of time and aided by biographical material. Our three clinicians provide exemplars of both stability and change, and particular emotions are shown to be linked to particular kinds of change or lack of change.

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This final section reintegrates the work in this book with prior work on the systems of emotion in pathology, healthy personality, and creative work. In the end, we return to the point that Rogers, Ellis, and Perls use their own emotion biases – *not* their “techniques” per se, but their biases – to clinical advantage; as such they were emotional savants of a sort, albeit they were opaque to their own processes.