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978-0-521-64089-3 - Emotion, Development, and Self-Organization Dynamic Systems

Approaches to Emotional Development

Edited by Marc D. Lewis and Isabela Granic

Frontmatter

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# Emotion, Development, and Self-Organization

Dynamic Systems Approaches to  
Emotional Development

*Edited by*

MARC D. LEWIS

*University of Toronto*

ISABELA GRANIC

*University of Toronto*



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## Foreword

This book offers a paradigm shift in the way emotion is conceptualized. There is, at a minimum, the paradigm shift from seventeenth-century Newtonian models of cause and effect, antecedents and outcomes, toward twentieth-century dynamic systems models. The latter are characterized by self-organization through iterative feedback processes that afford the possibility of both stability and change, dynamic pattern formation and emergent innovation, order and chaos, determinism and indeterminism. Dynamic systems models generalize to supernovas, insect communication, the growth of cities, and economic cycles. This should be plenty of paradigm possibilities for anyone.

When dynamic systems ideas are used in psychology, however, scientists get more than just the principled application of those ideas. All the other disciplines that partake of dynamic systems thinking deal with concrete and measurable entities. The pulsing of stars and insect wings, the disposition of shopping malls and market swings have two things in common: (1) they can be counted, quantified, and reduced to numbers, and (2) they are substantiated in actual entities of flesh and stone. The psyche – the complexity of human experience – is none of that, neither commensurate nor substantial. Psyche coexists with matter, lives in bodies and ecosystems, but it is fundamentally nonmaterial. Psyche is emergent at the very core of its ontology whether we have dynamic systems ideas about it or not.

Every spiritual discipline in human history has been created to account for the mysterious transcendence of the psyche. The works of spiritual leaders are narrative accounts based on direct observation of psychological experience. Read the descriptions of Moses, Christ, Augustine, Buddha, and Gandhi. You'll find compelling testimonies of developmental transformations, of unpredictable and unprecedented psychological processes, wo-

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ven together by agonies and ecstasies. It is not by chance that spirituality is connected with the deepest of human emotions: facing one's most dreaded fears, dealing with profound loss, or being transported by boundless joy.

I beckon the reader of this scientifically groundbreaking book on emotional development with a reminder about the connection between emotion and spirituality, not because it appears as a major theme in the subsequent chapters, but rather to help frame the work reported here in the entirety of the paradigm shift to which, at least implicitly, it speaks. Emotion is grounded in the matrix of the body, affecting and being affected dynamically by every part of it. Heat and color come into the cheeks and neck, the breath betrays pain and passion, the heart pounds or flutters, genitals stiffen and slacken, legs quiver or run like hell. Emotion is visceral like nothing else. If you didn't get the message of your subversive thoughts just wait until your stomach clenches or your heart breaks to find out what is really going on.

Read the chapters of this book to get a state-of-the-art rendering of the codynamics of the brain and body, the person and context, in the formation and development of the emotions. If you haven't been fortunate enough to let the dynamic systems perspective reinvent your way of looking at the physical and psychological universe, this book is a great place to start. The science of dynamic systems is already captivating, and its application to emotions is, well, compelling and provocative. Enjoy!

Sure, you are invited to do the academic thing – raise questions, challenge the authors, pick friendly fights – if you want. All these notable and accomplished scholars can take care of themselves. But I urge you not to stop there. Pay attention to what is happening to you emotionally as you read and as new ideas are created in your dialogues with the authors. Check your whole body. While your thoughts are ticking away with the logic of ifs and thens, notice if your feet want to dance or to kick or if your breath is shallow or full. Can you pinpoint a single, specific location of the emotion in your body? As you stockpile reasons for believing in your own views or evidence for the author's point in your own data or experience, notice how those feelings of agreement and disagreement are connected to what you might want to say to the author, or to your colleagues about the author. Can you separate your "own" emotion from the process of communication generated between you and the imagined other? Can you distinguish intention from desire?

I want to tell you that emotion transcends the body even though it is of the body, but I know that such knowledge can come only from the testi-

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mony of your own experience. I want to say that everyone can appreciate how emotion connects us to all things, but I know that the psyche has reasons to select congenial evidence without homage to the dynamic system from which it derives its nourishment and existence. I want to tell you that emotions are available to navigate in a vast network of relationships, ways of experiencing communion and estrangement, a seventh sense: intense as red and soft as a caress. I want to state that claiming ownership of emotion has no moral warrant, any more than coveting the air we breathe or the earth on which we walk. All I can really tell you is that all this wanting hurts, that words are inadequate, and that explanations are poor substitutes for the living truth of emotional experience.

So read, yes. This book takes a huge, meritorious step toward encompassing the dynamic system of emotional experience. Read and discover what can happen when scientists collect the immeasurably raw data from their own hearts.

*Rome, Italy*  
*June 1999*

ALAN FOGEL