

## Socialization, Society's "Emotional Contract," and Emotional Intelligence

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Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad's excellent target article serves as our jumping off point for a consideration of emotional socialization, its meaning, and the role of emotional intelligence within it. Understanding emotional socialization, we thought, could be enhanced by understanding how such socialization can be distinguished from emotional interaction. To address the distinction, we started with a concrete example of everyday interaction:

It is 8:00 a.m., and the parents of a 1-year-old girl are trying to get her to day care and themselves to work. The mother is dressing the baby, and the father is giving the baby medicine. After the baby is dressed, the father takes her to the kitchen for breakfast. In her high chair, the baby meticulously places cereal into her mouth piece by piece as her parents rush to get ready. Next, the baby turns her sippy cup upside down and, after determined shaking, creates a satisfying puddle of orange juice in front of her. She grins widely as her mother enters the kitchen; her mother smiles and waves back, and says, "Hello, baby!"

The television is on, and the newscaster is talking about another shooting in the schools; several politicians comment briefly on reducing violence. Meanwhile, the father is on the phone with the doctor's office to report that the baby is still rubbing her ear and he is wondering whether she should be evaluated for an ear infection. The office wants the baby to come in. When the father asks the mother if she would take the baby to the doctor, she exclaims, "You just punched a big hole in my day! I would have to reschedule an appointment ...." The baby looks at the two of them. The father responds, "I'll wait for the plumber if you do it."

They turn back to their daughter. "Now Baby," father says, "in a minute we are going to pick you up and take you to the car, so please prepare yourself." The mother comes from the sink with a washcloth. As her parents approach, the baby screams in protest. Nonetheless, they clean the baby's hands and face (and wash up the orange juice) while trying to calm her. The father then lifts her out of the high chair and she quiets down as her parents carry her to the car.

### Emotional Interaction and Emotional Socialization

The example just given includes plenty of emotional interaction. There is caring as the baby is given medicine and fed. There is a moment of love and needfulness as the

baby gazes at her mother, and the mother gazes back. There is anxiety and sadness at the newscast about children shot in school. There is worry talking to the doctor and frustration at changing a schedule. There is the baby's distress at being washed off, and the parents' possible shame at imagining what the day care employees would think if she were not clean. In other words, common parent-child activities, such as preparing a baby for day care, involve near-continuous emotional interaction.

Can it be said that these emotional interactions also involve socialization? Aren't the parents modeling caring as they clothe and feed their baby? Aren't they encouraging mutual delight and love as the mother returns the grin of her infant daughter? Doesn't the newscaster model courage and composure in response to tragedy? Don't the parents model cooperation in the face of stress when discussing rearranging schedules? Don't they also model how the needs of society sometimes overrule the needs of the individual when they wash their baby's hands—over her objections—to get her ready for day care? Finally, don't they teach her the redeeming powers of attachment and love as they quiet her on the way to the car?

Perhaps, from one perspective, all this is socialization. However, surely some emotional interaction is primarily emotional interaction, not socialization. Consider the baby's grin and the mother smiling in return. In the average case, is this socialization or simply the mother taking delight—at a chiefly psychological level—in her baby's grin? True, some modeling may be occurring at a secondary level, but this interchange of grins strikes us as more about human nature than socialization. If every emotional interaction can be reinterpreted as socialization, what does the concept of socialization add to the picture?

### Defining Socialization

Eisenberg et al. appear to take their definition of socialization from an earlier article by Maccoby and Martin (1983). Those earlier authors defined parental socialization as:

... how parental behavior supports children's learning to inhibit behavior that would be irritating or injurious to others, and at the same time fosters the acquisition of positive behavior that society demands, including helpfulness and thoughtfulness toward others,

self-reliance, acceptance of responsibility, and the acquisition of skills that will support successful adult functioning. (p. 2)

This definition of socialization appears consonant with many other psychological definitions of socialization: They appear focused on teaching children and adults good social behavior (e.g., Burton, 1968, p. 534; Clausen, 1968, p. 3).

### Social Contract Conceptions of Socialization

Is socialization ever defined differently than as the encouragement of good behavior? Some definitions can be distinguished from Maccoby and Martin's (1983) because they emphasized a social arrangement in which an individual forms a contract with society for their twin betterment. In this conception, society sets goals and intentionally changes its members so that they meet such goals. For example, a sociology textbook by Park and Burgess (1921) states the following:

Socialization ... sets up as the goal of social effort a world in which conflict, competition and the externality of individuals, if they do not disappear altogether, will be so diminished that all men may live together as members of one family. (p. 496)

This definition, and others like it, communicates the idea that society is an agent (i.e., exerting social effort and promoting its own goals). The reason that the individual's behavior must be changed is that the individual does not necessarily find social requirements easy to adhere to. For Freud, both the individual and society had to compromise dramatically in order to function together. This compromise was never easy: "the two processes of individual and of cultural development must stand in hostile opposition to each other and mutually dispute the ground" (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 88). Fromm (1955) presented this same view in a more balanced fashion, perhaps, when he wrote, "An objective examination of the relation between society and human nature must consider both the furthering and inhibiting impact of society on man, taking into account the nature of man and the needs stemming from it" (p. 77).

The social contract can be viewed in action in many places. For example, school boards create learning environments designed to strengthen students' studying and need for knowledge. Students who behave according to the school's demands become educated. Religious councils interpret rules of observance to strengthen the spiritual practices and group identification of community members. Members who behave accordingly are rewarded spiritually. Families themselves also qualify as groups, and families, it may be

said, attempt to create positive environments so as to encourage offspring to build more family ties and more families. Still, the gaze from mother to child may be outside all of this—part of what comes naturally, in contrast to what society dictates should be.

From this perspective, socialization most plainly takes place when society promotes its social contract. As used here, the social contract is a philosophical concept that describes the relation between citizens and their society (e.g., Hobbes, 1651/1991). Society sets up a social contract via its agents: law makers and law enforcers including governmental leaders, clerics, educators, and parents. People who behave according to the rules specified in the social contract are provided certain benefits by society in exchange. People who break the contract may be deprived of such benefits or punished. Within this philosophically conceived social contract is discussion of a person's emotional life and emotional behavior. For example, one is supposed to love one's country, one's mother, one's spouse, and one's child. Subsections of the social contract dealing with emotion may be referred to as the *emotional contract*.

### The Emotional Contract

What is the emotional contract? From our perspective, understanding the emotional contract is necessary to understanding emotional socialization. Eisenberg et al. don't delineate one, and yet we must attempt to make it explicit to know what most people are trying to achieve. Western philosophy and psychology generally agree that (a), other things being equal, happiness is good for people and distress is bad; (b) people seek happiness; and (c) other things being equal, it is easier to be happy when others are happy as well (e.g., Mayer & Salovey, 1995, Table 1). To attain such conditions, it is useful to try to maximize pleasant emotions over the long term. Openness to emotion is also important because it permits emotional information to be recognized and coped with, thereby promoting conditions that foster happiness. We might refer to this as a "hygienic" emotional contract, in the sense that good hygiene promotes health—mental and otherwise. It certainly does not apply to all circumstances, but it is a fair start for a working model.

This hygienic model appears implicit in much psychological literature. Thus, Eisenberg et al.'s review often treats happiness as an end in itself, and they note such outcomes as, "preschool children who express positive emotion are liked by peers." Openness, too, is sought. For example, Eisenberg et al. write, "moderately high levels of encouragement of the expression of emotion are associated with positive socioemotional development for children." Conversely, they add, closedness and negative reactions constitute a poor strategy: "nonsupportive parental reactions ... [are as-

sociated with] ... low levels of children's emotional and social competence."

These brief selections communicate the general goals that are sought: happiness as the end-state and openness so as to understand obstacles to happiness. Good theoretical rationales, both moral/ethical and psychological, underlie such goals (Mayer & Salovey, 1995).

### Hygienic Contracts Versus Living in the Real World

The characterization just given of the emotional contract as involving happiness and openness is, however, incomplete. Although, according to the hygienic contract, social behavior should aim at maximizing happiness, there is no exact specification of exactly how that should be accomplished. For example, happiness might be increased by delaying gratification, but the contract fails to specify the proper balance between short- and long-term happiness. That is, society's emotional contract is far from straightforward or without complex interpretation. Perhaps that is why Eisenberg et al. note that the positive outcomes of encouraging emotionality are "not strong or consistent," and may even lead to expressions of anger and aggression. Similarly, negative, closed parental emotional styles "seldom have been associated with all types of negative outcomes examined ...." To require people to aim for happiness and openness makes a great deal of sense philosophically, but in the real world of helter skelter social influences, competing subcultures, and individual differences, adhering too strictly to the hygienic contract results in a fairly repressive view of human psychology. Why should we agree that everyone needs to be happy, anyway? For example, some groups may choose emotional contracts that emphasize self-sacrifice rather than happiness, or even sadness rather than happiness because it is more in agreement with their worldview (see Parrott, 1993). Society contains a vast assortment of people with greatly differing characteristics, and those different characteristics encourage different approaches to emotions.

Although a contract may be agreed on, society may not hold up its end of the bargain. There are simple cases where the contract is likely to be honored. Consider how the parents in the opening example wash the baby's hands. This is part of the social contract wherein hand washing is exchanged for lower rates of contagious disease. Although the baby plainly prefers to avoid having her hands washed, she must subjugate her feelings about it. This will likely be rewarded with less illness, although if a serious contagion makes people ill, some members of society may feel cheated—that is, that the contract has been broken. Other parts of the contract are more controversial. Consider the issue of child care arrangements. Day

care involves giving up some contact with one's child in exchange for going to work. How good a contract this is has generated serious debate (e.g., Scarr, Phillips, & McCartney, 1990). Even the best society, and family within it, require multiple instances of compromise and sacrifice to operate. According to Fromm (1941), "The social character internalizes external necessities and thus harnesses human energy for the task of a given economic and social system" (p. 284). Moreover, there can exist some entire societies or nations that are dysfunctional and destructive (e.g., Baumeister, 1997; Freud, 1961/1930; Mayer, 1993), and the same can be said for individual families as well. In such cases, violating the social and emotional contract(s) may be an urgent necessity.

### Emotional Contracts and Emotional Intelligence

In everyday living, therefore, the hygienic emotional contract should probably not be followed blindly; instead, it should be understood and interpreted. We are to honor our parents, but what if those parents were abusive? We are to be socially effective, but what if our peer group consists of alcoholics? We are to be good citizens, but what if the government is corrupt, engaged in a wrongful war, or otherwise in error? To use an analogy to public health, just as the rules of hygiene are, on the one (unwashed) hand, sometimes too laborious to adhere to, and, on the other hand, sometimes insufficient to prevent disease, so the hygienic emotional contract is sometimes too demanding to adhere to and sometimes insufficient to bring about generally good outcomes.

In such cases, the individual must understand and reason with feelings. The individual must be flexible enough to tolerate or accept their own social ineffectiveness at times, to forgo happiness for larger goals, and, if necessary, to find happiness in deeper ways.

Such pursuits go beyond the hygienic nature of coping research. Hygienic coping is good to talk about and teach, but let us always acknowledge that something more will be needed for most people some time in their lives; that something more will require the individual to employ emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). They must accurately perceive emotion in themselves and others, assimilate emotion in thought (e.g., recognize and use emotions that are present), understand emotional meanings, and manage emotion. Ultimately, a thorough thinking through of the emotions on the part of the individual may be an important source of coping that is not yet recognized in the literature.

Individuals who think about emotions will have their own interpretations of the emotional contract. They may hold novel opinions that contradict the hygienic model but, nonetheless, work in their specific case. Some people may decide that, in their circumstances, emotions

are not so important, or that it is more important to help others than to feel good, or that they are willing to forgo social effectiveness in a group that is immoral or dangerous. Only by understanding the social contract and how well it has been honored, only by understanding the person's specific needs, and their fit to society, can we go beyond studying emotional interaction and really understand an individual's emotional socialization. In the meantime, the comprehensive and careful work by Eisenberg et al. provides an important foundation for understanding the hygienic models of emotional socialization presently represented in the literature.

#### Note

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## Toward an Expanded Model of Emotion Socialization: New People, New Pathways

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The framework provided by Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad in their target article is highly valuable and serves the two goals of any good theory: It integrates the existing literature well and it offers interesting hypotheses for future research. However, several caveats are in order. In this commentary, we argue that there are other pathways, other socializing agents, and other relationships between socializing agents that merit more attention.

#### Where Have All the Fathers Gone?

Although gender of parent is recognized formally in the model, most of the research reviewed in the target article focuses on mothers rather than fathers. Moreover, when mothers and fathers are discussed, they are treated as relatively equivalent socialization agents. To stimulate research on the relative contributions of mothers and fathers to the socialization of emotions, an explicit framework needs to be devel-

oped that articulates the ways in which fathers and mothers differ in terms of their behavior, affective expression, and emotional regulation. In addition, the types of interactive styles of fathers and mothers need to be specified with particular attention to the ways in which these styles could contribute to children's emotional socialization.

There are several compelling reasons for including fathers in studies of emotional socialization. Although women are more emotionally expressive than men (Hall, 1984; Manstead, 1991), this may be an oversimplified picture because socialization style, context, and target need to be considered (Halberstadt, 1991; Halberstadt, Eaton, & Crisp, in press). Furthermore, fathers' and mothers' typical styles of interaction may influence emotional development. Mothers, especially with infants and young children, tend to be more verbal, didactic, predictable, and less extreme in their levels of stimulation in social interactions, whereas fathers tend to be more physical, unpredictable, and