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Expression, Nonexpression, and Well-Being: An Overview

INTRODUCTION

Both popular culture and clinical lore contain a belief that people *must* express their emotions or "bad" things will happen to them, physically or psychologically. On talk shows, over dinner tables, in private diaries, and in psychotherapy offices, emotional expression is commonplace. This venting of emotions is fueled in part by the pervasive belief in our society in the importance of "letting one's feelings out" rather than "bottling them up." In support of this belief, numerous empirical studies have demonstrated mental and physical health benefits associated with emotional expression, as well as psychophysiological costs associated with inhibited expression (see Pennebaker, 1995, for recent examples).

Countering the belief that expressing emotions is healthy is the similarly pervasive belief that *not* expressing emotions is a sign of strength or maturity or even virtue. In the media, romantic heroes still tend to be "the strong, silent type." Moreover, describing someone by saying, "Oh, she is very emotional" is usually not a compliment. It carries the connotation that this person is somehow childish or lacking in self-control (cf. Shields,1987). This belief that nonexpression is preferable to expression also has some empirical support. Expression can intensify distress (Laird, 1974; Lanzetta, Cartwright-Smith, & Kleck, 1976), and it can interfere with active coping efforts (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; cf. Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Unrestrained expression can also have a destructive influence on interpersonal relationships (Tavris, 1984, 1989).

Either belief, that expressing emotions is universally adaptive or maladaptive, is a black-and-white view of phenomena with numerous shadings. In this book, we hope to capture the complexity of both expres-

sion and nonexpression, in order to clarify when and how they are related to well-being. We draw upon the breadth of theory and research on this topic and present it in the context of a coherent conceptual framework. We describe the role of expression in individual and social functioning, emphasizing its importance in daily life as well as in clinical practice.

Throughout the book we refer to several key terms: *Emotional experience* is the subjective, felt sense of emotional responses. We define *emotional expression* as observable verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate and/or symbolize emotional experience. Expression can occur with or without self-awareness, it is at least somewhat controllable, and it can involve varying degrees of deliberate intent. *Nonexpression* is the lack of expression. We use the term *emotional behavior* to refer to *either* expression or nonexpression. Expression and nonexpression are overt manifestations, which may or may not correspond to covert processes, like emotional experience (e.g., Kennedy-Moore & Stone, 1999; Kring, Smith, & Neale, 1994; Gross & Levenson, 1997). So, for example, one person might refrain from expressing even though she is experiencing a great deal of emotion. Another person might express vociferously, while experiencing only a minor degree of emotion.

Emotional expression is the link between internal experience and the outside world. As such, it carries enormous theoretical and practical importance. In daily life, expression is the means by which people communicate experience and influence relationships. In therapy, emotional behavior provides important information about how clients are feeling, how they are managing their feelings, and how they are relating to the therapist (J. C. Watson & Greenberg, 1995; J. C. Watson & Rennie, 1994). However, expression and nonexpression come in many different forms, which can have many different consequences for well-being. In the next section, we describe some of these varieties of emotional behavior.

Varieties of Nonexpression

Whether a particular instance of emotional behavior is adaptive or maladaptive depends on the form and the context of that behavior. Looking first at nonexpression, there are many reasons why people might not express their emotions. For example, they might not recognize their emotions, they might dislike expression, or they might not have the opportunity to express. Different causes of nonexpression can yield different consequences.

Consider the case of a rape survivor who insists that she is "over" the rape and says she wants to have an intimate relationship with a man. However, she is puzzled by the fact that every time she starts to get close to a man, she finds a reason to break off the relationship. This might be an in-

stance of nonexpression due to unrecognized feelings. Perhaps, for this woman, being in a close relationship evokes feelings of fear, vulnerability, or shame. Maybe she is not consciously aware of these feelings, or maybe she just interprets them as dissatisfaction with the man. This kind of nonexpression can be harmful when it entails difficulties in understanding one's own emotional experience and using this understanding to guide behavior in an adaptive way. For example, this woman might be focusing on meeting Mr. Right when her difficulties have more to do with coping with the feelings evoked by staying with Mr. Right. In order to change her pattern of prematurely ending relationships, it might be important for this woman to become aware of and to express (to herself, to her lover, perhaps with the help of a therapist) the feelings that have led her to break off relationships in the past.

On the other hand, consider a recently unemployed man who values self-control and stoicism in the face of adversity. He is acutely aware of his feelings of failure or betrayal but nevertheless believes that the best way to handle these feelings is to bravely march forward. In this case, nonexpression reflects personal beliefs and attitudes that are closely tied to this man's sense of identity. For him, nonexpression might be an adaptive coping strategy. Being able to control his emotional behavior is central to his sense of personal competence, and, for him, it could be an important prerequisite to actively dealing with his unemployment.

Still another example of nonexpression is a lonely teenager who relocates because of his parents' divorce. He is filled with a variety of complicated and conflicting feelings, such as anger and relief, guilt and betrayal, sadness and hope. However, because of the move, he no longer has a close group of friends in whom he can confide. He is far away from his father. He senses that his mother is preoccupied with and more than a bit overwhelmed by the process of setting up a new life for them, so he is reluctant to "burden" her with his feelings. He feels the strain of wanting to express his feelings while believing that he can't. This form of nonexpression, which stems from perceptions of the social environment as prohibiting expression, can compound distress and *may* even compromise physical health (see study by Lepore, Silver, Wortman, & Wayment, 1996; and reviews by Pennebaker, 1992; Tait & Silver, 1989).

All three of these examples involve a lack of overt expressive behavior, but they represent different forms of nonexpression. The rape survivor's nonexpression involves a lack of conscious awareness of her feelings. The unemployed man's nonexpression stems from personal values, and the teenager's nonexpression involves a perceived lack of opportunity to express. Because these different forms of nonexpression involve various degrees of understanding and acceptance of emotional experience, we believe they have different consequences for well-being.

Varieties of Expression

The effects of expressing emotions also vary, depending on what is expressed, to whom, and how. Expression can contribute to self-knowledge, and it is necessary for the development of emotional intimacy, but it is a risky undertaking. Even when they believe expression is important, people may be ambivalent about expressing their feelings (e.g., Coyne, Wortman, & Lehman, 1988; L. A. King & Emmons, 1990) or having someone else express to them (e.g., Coates & Winston, 1987; Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991). For example, Pennebaker (1992) describes how, only 3 weeks after the 1989 earthquake in San Francisco, 80% of area residents said that they wanted to talk about the quake, but less than 60% said they wanted to hear about it. In fact, about 1 month after the quake, T-shirts began appearing saying, "Thank you for not sharing your earthquake experience." When someone expresses emotions, particularly intense, negative emotions, it can be frightening, stressful, or overwhelming for the recipient (see review by Pennebaker, 1993c). If recipients of emotional expression respond negatively, the person expressing might feel rejected, misunderstood, embarrassed, or betrayed.

The complexity of the relationship between expression and well-being is apparent when we consider the example of anger expression within a marriage. Ideally, when couples express anger, they feel better afterward: they resolve their conflict, they gain mutual understanding, and they have a greater sense of satisfaction with the relationship. However, expressing anger can also make couples feel worse (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fruzzetti & Jacobson, 1990; Gottman, 1993b; Gottman & Levenson, 1986). Sometimes anger expression deteriorates into an exchange of increasingly hostile criticisms, aimed at hurting the other partner rather than resolving any issues. Which pattern prevails depends on how the partners express their feelings and the overall relationship context of that expression. Is the level of anger expression moderate or intensely negative? Do the partners couch negative statements within a framework of relationship-building remarks or are they completely hostile? How do they respond to each other's expressions? Do they acknowledge the partner's comments or just counterattack? Do the partners generally have positive or negative views of each other and their relationship? Is anger expression a relatively rare occurrence between them or are they constantly battling each other?

Clinical Applications

This kind of multifaceted understanding of the various forms of expression and nonexpression is critically important in clinical work. Many psychotherapy clients present difficulties that can be understood as problems related to emotional behavior. Some clients have explosive outbursts of

expression; others show highly constricted expression; still other clients vacillate between these extremes. Each of these patterns can be maladaptive.

In general, therapists need to help clients find a delicate balance in their emotional expression, so that clients can (1) understand their feelings rather than be overwhelmed by them, (2) harness the energy of their emotions for planning and action rather than be either thoughtlessly driven by it or paralyzed by it, and (3) communicate their emotional experience to others in a way that enhances interpersonal functioning rather than impairs it. This delicate balance entails using expression as a means of gaining self-understanding and relating to others in life-enhancing ways. It involves reflecting upon emotional experience and integrating it with other aspects of the self rather than either acting impulsively or shutting oneself off from experience.

The specific ways in which expression is addressed in therapy depend, of course, on the needs of particular clients. For example, therapists might help clients to use expression as a means of processing and symbolizing their emotional experience. They might help clients recognize patterns in their emotional behavior. They might communicate about the impact of clients' expression or nonexpression on the therapist, which could be important information for understanding the clients' other relationships. Therapists might also facilitate clients' efforts to use new forms of emotional expression.

Summary

In summary, emotional behavior (i.e., expression or nonexpression) plays a key role in individual adjustment, social interaction, and therapeutic process. So far in this chapter we have emphasized a multifaceted view of emotional behavior that takes characteristics of the individual and the psychosocial environment into account. We have suggested that expression or nonexpression can take various forms and can have either positive or negative consequences. What and how people express (or don't express) affects their own emotional experience as well as the nature of their relationships with others.

However, just recognizing that emotional behavior is complicated is not enough. If a multifaceted view of emotional behavior is going to be useful for guiding clinical or empirical understanding, it must to be couched in a coherent framework that provides a systematic way of thinking about the various forms of expression and nonexpression and their various consequences.

Below, we introduce our model of the process of expression and nonexpression. The model serves as the organizing framework for this book. As we describe in later chapters, the model also points to ways of cultivating

balance in emotional behavior. Our central thesis in this book is that adaptive emotional behavior is characterized by integration, flexibility, and interpersonal coordination. What is important is not how much people do or do not express, but rather the degree to which they are able to integrate their thinking and their feeling, to draw upon their emotional experience without being driven blindly by it, and to consider the interpersonal impact of their emotional behavior without discounting their own experience.

A PROCESS MODEL OF EXPRESSION AND NONEXPRESSION

Before we can understand the role of emotional behavior in day-to-day life or in clinical problems and interventions, we first need to understand how expression and nonexpression come about. Kennedy-Moore, Greenberg, and Wortman (1991) proposed a model for the process by which covert emotional experience is translated into overt emotional expression. This process involves a series of cognitive-evaluative steps that are driven by affective experience and in turn influence that experience. Disruptions at different points in this process result in different forms of nonexpression.

This model was originally developed in an effort to make sense of conflicting findings concerning the health effects of emotional behavior, by integrating emotion theory with research on emotion-related personality traits. Individual steps in the model, and the theory and research supporting them, are discussed in later chapters. For now, we focus on a descriptive overview of the process of expression and the various forms of nonexpression. To illustrate the model, let's look at a hypothetical example:

> The evidence is there in her hand: a letter from the other woman. Marla found it in the pocket of her husband, Alfred's, raincoat, while she was gathering up clothes to take to the dry cleaners. There is no doubt about it. He has been having an affair—apparently for quite a while: Last week's trip downstate wasn't their first rendezvous.

Now what happens? That depends on what sort of person Marla is and what her circumstances are. First we look at the process of expression, and then we consider ways this process might be disrupted, resulting in nonexpression.

The Process of Expression

Let's say Marla does express her emotions in response to finding the letter. How does this expression come about? The rectangles in Figure 1.1 (adapted from Kennedy-Moore et al., 1991) make up our basic model of

the process of expression. Each rectangle illustrates an internal, intermediary step between the occurrence of an emotion-eliciting event and overt expressive behavior.

Step 1: Prereflective Reaction

The first step (top rectangle) in the model involves prereflective reaction to an emotion-eliciting stimulus. This reaction entails perception of the stimulus, preconscious cognitive and emotional processing, and accompanying physiological changes. Marla rapidly and automatically (i.e., without effort or intention) appraises the significance of the letter and reacts with some level of affective arousal. This arousal is a bodily signal that something important is happening that warrants attention and/or action.

Step 2: Conscious Perception of Response

In the next step, Marla becomes aware of her affective reaction—in effect, hearing the bodily signal. She consciously perceives that she is distressed. She might even notice specific bodily signs such as a racing heart or shaking hands.

Step 3: Labeling and Interpretation of Response

The third step of the model involves labeling and interpreting the affective response. The bodily signal entailed in affective experience is fairly crude, so as soon as Marla becomes aware of such a response she begins to process this experience cognitively. Drawing upon internal as well as situational cues, Marla determines that the response is emotional rather than purely physiological. At this point, Marla recognizes (for example) that she feels angry and betrayed. She begins to flesh out the meaning of her experience.

Step 4: Evaluation of Response as Acceptable

In the fourth step of the model, Marla evaluates her emotional experience in terms of her own beliefs and goals. At this point, Marla considers her experience in light of her implicit or explicit beliefs about what is important or typical or desirable and determines that her feelings are valid and acceptable.

Step 5: Perceived Social Context for Expression

Finally, Marla evaluates the match between her experience and her current social context. If she perceives that revealing her feelings is possible or desirable in her interpersonal environment, then, finally, she expresses these feelings.

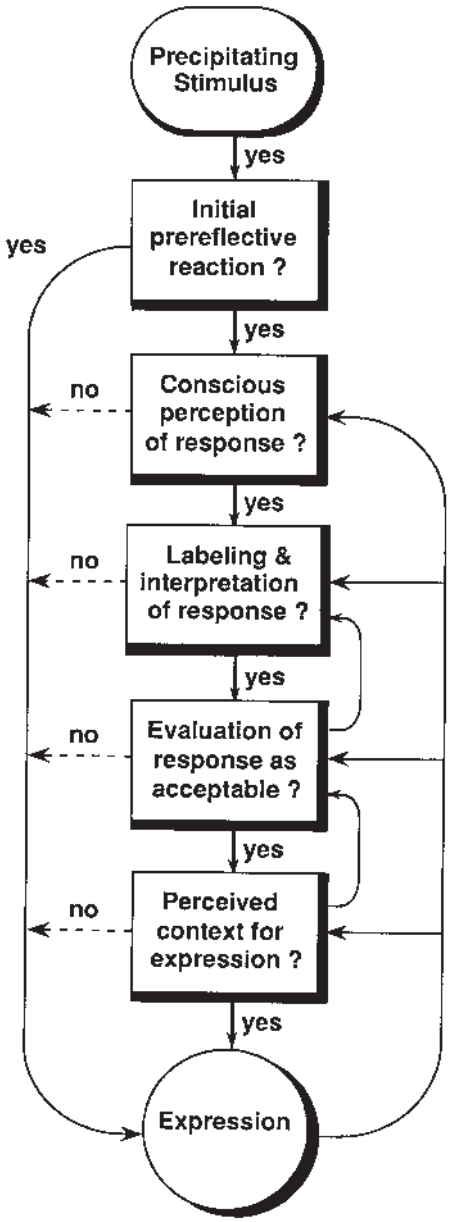

FIGURE 1.1. The process of expression.

The steps in the process model of expression are important not only for determining whether expression occurs, but also for determining the form that it takes. Marla might express her feelings in many ways. She might confront her husband as soon as he walks in the door, angrily flinging the letter at him. She might sob wretchedly by herself. She might call her sister and confide her feelings of betrayal. Specifically what and how she expresses depends on her awareness, interpretation, and evaluation of her experience and her context.

Qualifications to the Basic Model of Expression

The basic model represents expression as the culmination of a series of internal, cognitive-evaluative steps that influence and are influenced by affective experience. However, expression doesn't necessarily occur in such a neat, orderly way. Sometimes people just burst out with an emotional expression without having processed their experience fully or even at all (S. Epstein, 1990; LeDoux, 1989, 1996). Often, expression involves an iterative, reflexive process. People don't usually just process their experience once, express it, and have done with it. More typically, they express repeatedly, reworking and refining their understanding of their emotional experience (e.g., Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991).

The arrows on the left of Figure 1.1 illustrate these important qualifications to the basic model. The first qualification concerns expressive leakage. The downward arrow indicates that some degree of expressive behavior follows directly from the initial prereflective reaction, bypassing the cognitive-evaluative steps. This is particularly the case when the affective reaction is very strong, but subtle expressive signs leak out even with milder reactions (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Haggard & Isaacs, 1966; see discussion by Collier, 1985, concerning awareness and control of expression). The dashed sideways arrows feeding into the downward arrow show that expression can leak after each of the steps. This occurs when the magnitude of the reaction exceeds the individual's capacity to contain it or process it further (cf. Gross & Muñoz, 1995). So, for example, Marla might show signs of tension or resentment even if she is not aware of experiencing these. If she is extremely distressed by the letter, she might burst into tears, even if this is the last thing in the world she wants to do. We call this kind of expression *leakage* because it is experienced by the individual as less volitional than the more conscious, more deliberate, step-by-step path to expression represented by the basic model. (We will say more about this point later in this chapter.)

The second qualification to the basic model involves the recursive nature of the process of expression. The upward arrows to the right of the basic model depict feedback loops, in which later steps in the model inform and reelicit earlier steps. Expression is a source of self-knowledge. For ex-

ample, bursting into tears might prompt Marla to observe that she is more upset about Alfred's affair than she realized. Expression is also a means of eliciting information from others. Marla might tell her best friend about the letter and express feelings of inadequacy. But, hearing her friend remark "I can't believe you're not furious with him" could help Marla recognize and accept her feelings of anger.

This model of expression can be applied to either general dispositions to express or to specific instances of expression, and to either positive or negative emotions. Emotional expression can be thought of as a trait in that there is considerable consistency across time and across situations in the degree to which individuals express their emotions. Some people tend to express a lot, others tend to express less (e.g., Gross & John, 1997; Kring et al., 1994). There is also consistency across emotion domains: In general, people who are very expressive of negative emotions also tend to be expressive of positive emotions (Gross & John, 1997). However, a full understanding of expression requires that we look at both a global, trait level and more specific levels. For example, a particular expressive style may be effective in general but ineffective with respect to a specific situation, such as a traumatic event. A particular instance of expression might carry very different implications for someone who rarely expresses than for someone who frequently expresses. A person who readily expresses positive emotions but has difficulty expressing negative emotions is likely to have a very different social milieu than someone who readily expresses negative emotions and only rarely expresses positive emotions. Laboratory studies suggest that the expression–well-being relationship depends on whether we are looking at between-subject or within-subject variability (Buck, 1980) and whether we are talking about expression of positive or negative emotions (Gross & John, 1997).

So far, we have described our model for the process of emotional expression. We have outlined a series of intervening steps between an emotion-eliciting stimulus and overt emotional expression. We have also suggested that these steps can sometimes be bypassed, resulting in expressive leakage. We now turn to the question of how nonexpression arises.

Disruptions in the Process of Expression

Figure 1.2 (adapted from Kennedy-Moore et al., 1991) illustrates how disruptions at different points in the process of emotional expression result in different forms of nonexpression, which can have different consequences for well-being. The circles in this figure represent various factors associated with nonexpression. These factors can potentially be assessed by clinicians or researchers. They can be either dispositional, meaning they pertain to the individual's enduring personality characteristics, or situational, meaning they involve transitory circumstances.

Disruption at Step 1: Minimal Prereflective Reaction

One form of nonexpression occurs when the precipitating stimulus (top oval) evokes only minimal prereflective reaction (first rectangle). Most people would consider news of a partner's infidelity to be very serious, even alarming, but Marla might not perceive this information as particularly threatening. People differ in the strength of their affective reactions. In laboratory studies, people show marked individual differences in their responsiveness to the same stressor (see reviews by Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992; R. J. Larsen & Zarate, 1991; Rothbart & Posner, 1985). For example, people differ in their thresholds for experiencing pain (A. Petrie, 1967). More broadly, Larsen and his colleagues (R. J. Larsen & Diener, 1987; R. J. Larsen, Diener, & Emmons, 1986) have demonstrated that people differ in the typical intensity or magnitude of their affective experience. Individuals low in affect intensity consistently report milder reactions to both positive and negative events, compared to individuals high in affect intensity. So, perhaps because of her temperament or her cognitive style (R. J. Larsen & Diener, 1987; R. J. Larsen, Diener, & Cropanzano, 1987), Marla might be one of those people who just doesn't tend to get ruffled by life events—no high highs or low lows. She might not react much to finding the letter because, in general, she has a very high distress threshold.

Situational factors could also influence Marla's initial reaction to discovering her husband's affair. If her marriage had been distant and failing for a long time, it is conceivable that Marla might respond to the letter with indifference. If she'd been feeling guilty about her own affair, she might even react with relief.

If Marla truly experiences little or no distress in response to finding the letter, we would not expect her to express any negative affect. Nor would we expect this lack of expression to be detrimental. Clinically, encouraging people with this form of nonexpression to "let their feelings out" makes no sense. They aren't holding their feelings in, they just aren't reacting much. In fact, nonexpression stemming from low reactivity may be a sign of particularly good adjustment (Wortman, Sheedy, Gluhoski, & Kessler, 1992). These individuals may be more serene or content, and their milder emotional reactions may exact less physiological toll than more extreme responses (R. J. Larsen & Diener, 1987).

Disruption at Step 2: Motivated Lack of Awareness

Let's say that Marla *is* distressed by the letter. If Marla finds her experience too threatening, she might block it through motivated lack of awareness. This form of nonexpression entails disruption at the second step in the process of expression, which concerns conscious perception of the affective response. The concrete evidence in the letter means that Marla can't deny the

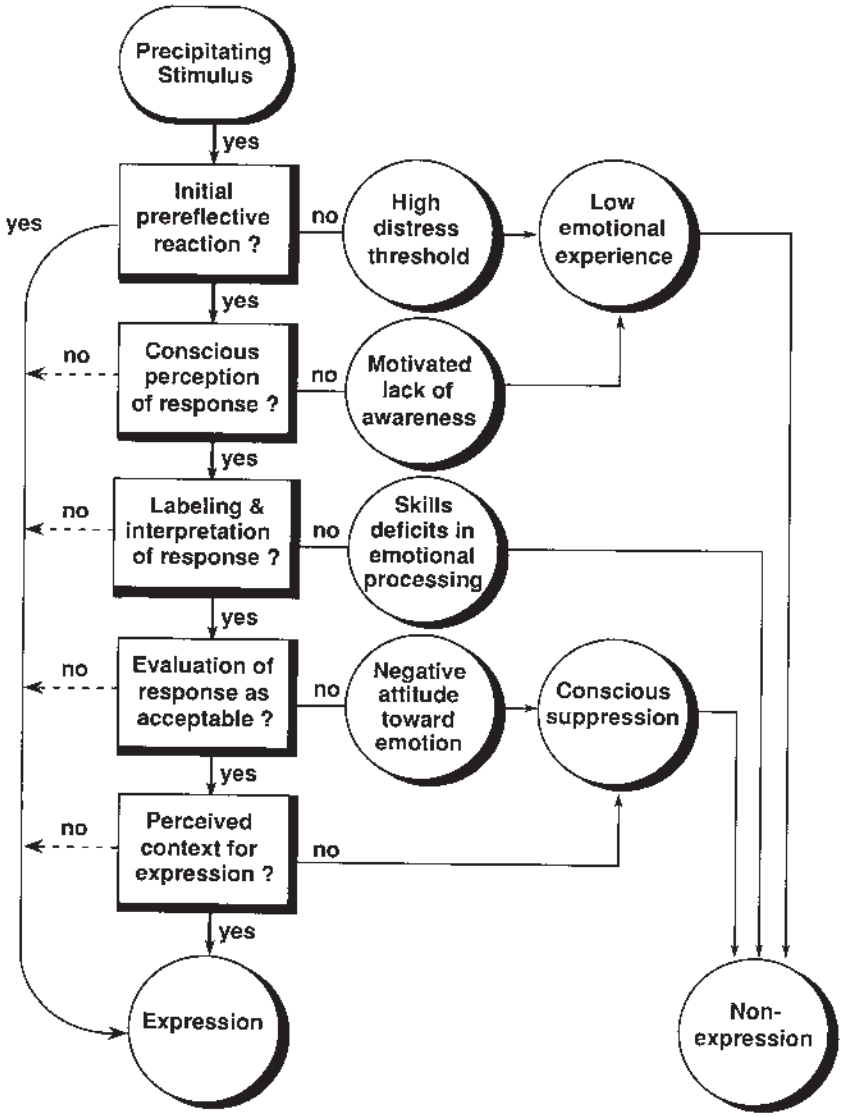

FIGURE 1.2. Disruptions in the process of expression.

existence of the affair, but she *can* deny its impact on her. She might tell herself that she is not really upset, that she feels fine, that the affair is not such a big deal and she is certain she and Alfred will work things out in a reasonable manner. This type of emotional defensiveness could be part of a general disposition to avoid acknowledging unpleasant emotional experience, such as the repressive coping style identified by Weinberger and his colleagues (Weinberger, 1990; see also Bonanno & Singer, 1990; T. L. Newton & Contrada, 1992). Alternatively, it could represent a more specific sensitivity. Marla might be able to acknowledge negative feelings in other areas of her life, but perhaps being happily married is so central to her sense of self that she can't bear to recognize the particular feelings evoked by the letter.

Blocking emotional experience from awareness in this way might have some short-term, "just-getting-through-the-day" kinds of benefits, but the long term is likely to be problematic. The rape survivor described at the beginning of this chapter may be an example of this form of nonexpression. Her behavior suggests that being in a relationship is somehow distressing to her. However, she is not aware of experiencing any distress. Motivated lack of awareness of affective experience means that this experience can't be used to guide behavior in adaptive ways. It's like going through life blindfolded. When nonexpression results from failure to acknowledge emotional distress, particularly intense distress, it is likely to be maladaptive.

Disruption at Step 3: Skill Deficits in Emotional Processing

Even if Marla is aware of her distress, she might not express if she lacks the skill to label or interpret her experience. Marla might know she feels "bad" but be unable to symbolize that experience more completely. This form of nonexpression entails disruption of Step 3 of the model, which concerns the labeling and interpretation of the affective response. Alexithymia (Sifneos, 1972; Taylor, Bagby, & Parker, 1991) is a personality trait that exemplifies this form of nonexpression. It refers to a lack of verbal understanding of emotional experience, and it has been linked to general dysphoria, eating disorders, substance abuse, and somatization.

The problem with an inability to interpret feelings is that it is a dead end. If Marla only knows that she feels bad, this doesn't suggest any ways for her to respond to this feeling. On the other hand, if she is able to symbolize and differentiate her feelings more completely, she might recognize that she feels frightened that Alfred will leave her, that she feels jealous and rejected and wonders what the other woman has that she lacks, that she feels betrayed and questions whether she will ever be able to trust him again, etc. These more comprehensive views of emotional experience make it possible to engage in more targeted and probably more effective coping efforts.

Disruption at Step 4: Negative Attitude toward Emotion

Assuming Marla is aware of her emotional response and able to label and interpret it, she still might not express her feelings if she evaluates her response as unacceptable. This evaluation might stem from a global negative attitude toward emotion (Allen & Hamsher, 1974; Joseph, Williams, Irwing, & Cammock, 1994) or more specific beliefs such as "It is dangerous to express anger" or "People in good marriages don't get mad at each other."

The implications for well-being of this form of value-based nonexpression are not clear cut. Because these individuals are aware of their feelings, they could conceivably deal with them adaptively, even if they don't openly express them. Clinically, we believe it is very important to respect clients' individual values. A conviction concerning the importance of nonexpression may be part of a client's highly valued cultural or personal belief system, like it was for the unemployed man described at the beginning of this chapter. However, sometimes an individual's goals or beliefs concerning emotional behavior can be problematic, such as when they are impossibly difficult or require so much effort that they interfere with functioning in other areas. Expressive goals and beliefs can also be problematic when they are contradictory, creating a distressing sense of ambivalence and inner conflict (King & Emmons, 1990). In these cases, it may be important to help clients reexamine and perhaps alter their beliefs concerning emotional behavior.

Disruption at Step 5: Perceived Lack of Opportunity to Express

Marla might be fully aware of her feelings and consider her experience valid, but she might refrain from expressing if she is afraid other people will respond negatively. Like most of the other potential impediments to expression, this belief can range from being situationally specific (e.g., she expects her mother-in-law to ring the doorbell any minute) to more global (e.g., she is a very lonely person with no close friends or confidants).

Suppressing due to social context is not necessarily a bad thing. Under plenty of circumstances the best thing to do is to refrain from showing any distress: in a meeting with the boss, at a party, on a first date. In fact, the inability to modulate emotional behavior can be problematic. However, having a confidant and social support are critically important to well-being (G. W. Brown & Harris, 1978; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990; Wills, 1990). So, we would expect this type of nonexpression to be maladaptive when it involves not just suppression in a particular context, but a general lack of close relationships that permit emotional sharing, such as the case of the lonely teenager with divorced parents that we de-

scribed earlier. This type of suppression is especially likely to be troublesome when it is coupled with a strong desire to express (Pennebaker, 1992; Tait & Silver, 1989).

For simplicity, the model presents expression and nonexpression as mutually exclusive alternatives. However, expression and nonexpression are relative rather than absolute terms. There is no such thing as complete expression or complete nonexpression. No one can ever communicate every subtle nuance of his or her emotional experience to another person. This is partly due to limitations of language and other expressive gestures, and partly due to the fact that experience is dynamic. Expressing experience changes that experience (e.g., J. C. Watson & Greenberg, 1996). Similarly, nonexpression is never complete. The different forms of nonexpression described above refer to restricted or attenuated expression rather than a complete absence of overt signs of emotion. For example, the lonely teenager who believes that his context disallows expression might still show subtle nonverbal signs of emotion. Emotional behavior is a continuum, with the degree of expression or nonexpression depending (in some way) on the strength of the precipitating stimulus and the prominence of the various individual and situational factors that can impede expression.

Summary

The model we have presented describes the process of emotional expression and how disruptions in this process can lead to nonexpression. This process begins with an individual's prereflective reaction to an emotionally relevant stimulus. The individual then becomes aware of this reaction, labels it as emotional, and evaluates the response as appropriate with respect to his or her own values and the perceived social context. Then, finally, the covert experience is translated into overt expressive behavior. Each of these steps can be interrupted by characteristics of the individual or the situational context, resulting in different forms of nonexpression. Specifically, nonexpression may stem from minimal reaction, motivated lack of awareness, skill deficits in emotional processing, or deliberate suppression due to personal values or perceptions of the social context.

The model provides a systematic way of thinking about expression and nonexpression that can help clinicians understand their clients' difficulties with emotional behavior and identify ways of addressing these difficulties in therapy. For example, clients whose nonexpression stems from lack of understanding of experience and clients whose nonexpression stems from lack of acceptance of experience would require very different clinical approaches. In the case of lack of understanding, it might be important to help clients focus closely on their experience, so that they can learn to recognize their own bodily and expressive cues and to differentiate and symbolize their feelings (see discussions by Gendlin, 1981; L. S. Greenberg,

Rice, & Elliott, 1993). In the case of lack of acceptance of experience, charging full-speed ahead, dealing directly with emotional experience might be alarming or threatening to clients, so a more gradual approach may be necessary. It may be important to talk about the meaning of expression and experience for that particular client, before he or she can feel safe enough to reveal any feelings to the therapist.

KEY THEMES CONCERNING EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

The process model also highlights some important themes concerning emotional expression. Specifically, it illustrates the distinction among the components of emotion, the continuum of expressive awareness and control, the interplay between cognition and emotion, and the importance of the social context. These themes are critical for understanding the relationship between emotional behavior and well-being, and they are emphasized throughout this book. Each of these themes is described below.

Distinction among Components of Emotion

One theme that the model highlights is the distinction among four components of emotion: arousal, experience, reflection, and expression. *Arousal* is the physiological response, which begins in Step 1 of the model, with the initial prereflective reaction. *Experience* is the phenomenological, felt sense, which begins in Step 2, with the conscious perception of response. *Reflection* involves thoughts pertaining to emotion. These thoughts involve monitoring experience, expression, and arousal; making sense of them; and evaluating them (cf. L. S. Greenberg et al., 1993; Kennedy-Moore, 1999; Mayer & Gaschke, 1988; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995; J. C. Watson & Greenberg, 1996a). In the model, reflection is represented by the cognitive-evaluative steps, Steps 3, 4, and 5. Finally, *expression* is the observable behavior component of emotion, which occurs either automatically in response to arousal or more deliberately, after the cognitive processing described by the model.

The four components of emotion do not necessarily correspond. For example, someone might be emotionally aroused without realizing it (high arousal–low experience), express without wanting to (high expression–negative reflection), or exaggerate about a minor degree of experience (high expression–low experience). Assessing all four components of emotion is essential for distinguishing among the different forms of nonexpression, and, more generally, for fully understanding clients' emotional responses. Lack of concordance among the different components can have important clinical implications. For example, Rachman and Hodgson (1974) found that, following treatment, agoraphobics who reported minimal fear on a

questionnaire but still reacted physiologically to exposure (low experience–high arousal) were more likely to relapse than those who showed little fear on both questionnaire and physiological measures (low experience–low arousal).

Continuum of Expressive Awareness and Control

Another theme illustrated by the model is the continuum of expressive awareness and control. Expressive behavior ranges from primitive, automatic reactions to deliberate communications. Many theorists have emphasized this distinction between spontaneous and controllable expression, with the former being more innate and the latter being more subject to social learning (e.g., Buck, 1989). In the process model depicted in Figure 1.1, the spontaneous expression is depicted by the downward arrow on the left, stemming from the initial prereflective reaction, whereas the more deliberate expression flows from the various cognitive processing steps. However, the model depicts these two pathways to expression as ending up in the same place, and for the purpose of examining the relationship between expression and well-being, we consider the more primitive and more elaborate forms of expression together. This merging is unconventional. Usually researchers and theorists who talk about the more spontaneous, nonverbal forms of expression don't talk about the deliberate verbal forms and vice versa. Certainly each form has unique characteristics. They also have different neurological underpinnings (e.g., Ekman, 1977; LeDoux, 1989, 1996; Leventhal, 1984; Rinn, 1991). However, we believe linking these forms of expression is important for several reasons.

One reason for addressing these two types of expression together rather than separately is that they are sometimes hard to differentiate. While it is easy to distinguish between extremes such as "I blinked in fear without realizing it" and "I drove over to my friend's house and spent an hour talking over my feelings," many instances of expression are not so easily categorized as controllable or uncontrollable. What about, "I yelled at my daughter when she spilled her oatmeal. I hate doing that, but I couldn't help it. I was tired, and I just lost my cool"? Or how about, "Leslie and I just started laughing in the middle of the meeting. I have no idea why. There wasn't even anything funny. I'm sure everyone thought we were nuts. We just looked at each other, and suddenly we couldn't stop laughing"? Or even, "I wanted to tell him how angry I felt, and what a jerk he had been, but I burst into tears. Inside, I was fuming, but all I did was cry and beg him not to leave"? These examples are instances of expression that occupy some middle ground between completely controllable and completely uncontrollable (cf. Zivin, 1982). In the model, they correspond to the dotted lines coming out of each cognitive-evaluative step. They are more complex expressions than the primitive nonverbal signs accompany-

ing the initial prereflective reaction. Some further degree of cognitive processing has occurred. Yet, none of these is completely volitional, which suggests that the strength of affective responses can sometimes override conscious plans concerning expressive behavior.

Another reason for merging these two types of expression is that they can serve the same functions. For example, one important function of emotional expression is social communication. This function can occur whether expression is verbal or nonverbal, spontaneous or deliberate. A wife might recognize and respond to her husband's anger whether he shows it through narrowed eyes and a tightened jaw or he tells her in words. Another key function of expression is enhancing self-understanding. Again, this function can be served through either form of expression. A man might gain insight into his feelings by noticing that his hands are shaking or by pouring out his heart in a diary.

Furthermore, clinically, it is important to consider both the more and the less deliberate forms of expression. Drawing attention to clients' spontaneous expressive signs might be a way of helping them to become more aware of their feelings or to understand the possible impact of their nonverbal communication on other people. Focusing on the more deliberate forms of expression can be a direct way of enhancing clients' self-understanding or interpersonal communication.

Interplay between Cognition and Emotion

The model also illustrates the interplay between cognition and emotion. Each step in the process of expression represents further cognitive elaboration of affective experience. Emotional experience evolves from raw affect, to specific emotions, to meaning-laden feelings. This cognitive elaboration is guided by felt experience and also transforms that experience, in a dialectical process (J. C. Watson & Greenberg, 1996a).

There has been quite a bit of debate concerning whether affect or cognition are primary in emotion (e.g., R. S. Lazarus, 1984; Zajonc, 1984). It is clear that affect precedes deliberate, conscious thought (i.e., intentional thought that occurs within awareness). It is less clear whether it precedes preconscious thought (i.e., nondeliberate thought that occurs very rapidly, outside awareness). Davidson and Ekman (1994) argue that the general consensus among emotion theorists is that at least some minimal cognitive processing, involving very basic sensory information processing, is a prerequisite for the elicitation of most, if not all, affect. Less consensus exists about whether cognitive appraisals precede affect. Appraisals are judgments about the significance of a particular event or stimulus. They can be conscious or preconscious. Traditional cognitive theorists (e.g., R. S. Lazarus, 1995) see appraisals as necessary for eliciting emotion, with particular appraisals corresponding to particular emotions. For example, the ap-

praisal of threat is associated with the experience of fear; the appraisal of loss is associated with the experience of sadness. However, some changes in affective state are difficult to explain in terms of appraisal. For example, what kind of appraisal would be involved when an affective state is induced through music (Ellsworth, 1994)? S. Epstein (1990, 1994) argues that affect can arise through either of two systems: The experiential system processes information rapidly and wholistically. The rational system processes information more slowly, in a more differentiated way. Both systems can operate simultaneously and can influence the other. (See LeDoux, 1994, 1996, for a description of the anatomy underlying cognitive versus emotional information processing and their interconnections.)

In terms of understanding the relationship between expression and well-being, the interplay between affect and cognition is far more important than which component is primary. The model breaks down this interplay into successive stages so that therapists can understand and facilitate combined cognitive-emotional processing.

Importance of the Social Context

The model also points to the importance of the social context of emotional behavior. Interpersonal considerations come into play at three points in the process of expression. First, social interactions may precipitate expression by evoking an emotional reaction. Emotional experiences usually arise in a social context, especially within intimate relationships (M. S. Clark & Reis, 1988; J. C. Schwartz & Shaver, 1987). Second, the social context can determine opportunities for expression (Step 5 of the model). As we described earlier, the availability and quality of interpersonal relationships influences the extent to which people are able to communicate their feelings. Third, responses of other people can be an important consequence of expression. This may involve overt support or rejection of the expresser by other people. Additionally, Fridlund (1992) argues that even emotional expression that takes place in solitude involves implicit or imagined audiences. He sees the self as a role-player in an internalized society, and solitary expression as a means of controlling images projected during imagined social interactions. Clinically, social influences on expression, involving elicitation, opportunity, and consequences, need to be considered in order to get a full understanding of a client's emotional behavior.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In this chapter, we argued that emotional expression and nonexpression can take many different forms and have many different consequences. We presented our process model as a conceptual framework for understanding

the varieties of emotional behavior. We also outlined a number of key themes concerning expression. Our goals for the remainder of the book are to clarify the circumstances under which expression and nonexpression are adaptive or maladaptive, to delineate key mechanisms linking expression or nonexpression to adaptational outcomes, and to spell out the implications of these distinctions for clinical assessment and treatment. The book is divided into three main sections: Intrapersonal Processes, Interpersonal Processes, and Treatment Implications. Each section explains and develops aspects of the process model of emotional expression.

The chapters in the Intrapersonal Processes section trace the beginning stages of the process of emotional expression, as emotional experience is initially evoked, recognized, understood, and evaluated. These chapters point to important functions of expression and nonexpression for an individual. Emotional behavior plays a key role in modulating arousal, providing information about the impact of one's environment, and creating a coherent sense of self. These chapters examine both adaptive and maladaptive instances of emotional behavior.

The chapters in the Interpersonal Processes section concern the social context of emotional expression and nonexpression. They describe patterns of emotional behavior involving reciprocal influence between parent and child and within adult couples. These chapters emphasize the interpersonal functions of emotional behavior, which include developing intimacy and eliciting social support. They also describe ways that emotional behavior can lead to problems in interpersonal relationships.

Chapters in the Treatment Implications section spell out the relationships between emotional behavior, psychopathology, and psychotherapy process. Drawing upon the individual and interpersonal issues concerning emotional behavior identified in the earlier sections, the Treatment Implications chapters examine the role of expression and nonexpression in the development and remediation of several clinical problems: depression, trauma, marital distress, and psychosomatic illness. These particular problems are discussed because difficulties involving emotional behavior are often central to their symptomatology. The Treatment Implications chapters conceptualize these clinical problems in terms of our model, and they point to ways that therapists can facilitate clients' emotional functioning. The overarching theme in this section of the book is cultivating authentic expression of emotion in a way that promotes self-understanding and enhances interpersonal relationships.

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