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A Relational Recasting of the Principles of Emotional Competence

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Abstract

Carolyn Saarni’s theory of emotional competence has made a central contribution by directing attention to some important functions of emotion in social interaction. Her work is permeated with examples of how emotions function within both successful and unsuccessful social interactions and relationships. An examination of her stated principles of emotional competence suggest in places a perspective that is primarily intrapsychic in nature, harking back to the early roots of emotion theory and research. In this piece, we note where Saarni has advanced implications of a relational theory of emotion for understanding emotional competence. In addition, we reframe some of Saarni’s principles to make them more consistent with current relational approaches to emotion. Finally, we offer additions and extensions that we believe are compatible with the general direction of her thinking before her untimely death.

Keywords: relational theories, self, negotiation, internalization, contagion

33 **A Relational Recasting of the Principles of Emotional Competence**

34 **Preamble**

35 **Saarni's work in historical context**

36 Carolyn Saarni's work on emotional competence played a pivotal role in the history of
37 the 'Emotion Revolution,' a period of proliferating research on emotion following periods in
38 which first behaviourism and then information processing and cognitive psychology dominated.
39 The parting shot of that revolution began in 1969, with cross-cultural evidence of consensus
40 between Westerners and pre-literate New Guinea and Borneo tribal peoples in judging of facial
41 displays (Ekman, Sorenson, & Friesen, 1969). Occupying much of the 1970s, that line of work
42 spawned a large number of studies on facial expression of emotion (e.g., Hiatt, Campos, &
43 Emde, 1979). The studies of the 1970s, however, were conducted nearly exclusively without
44 consideration of context – the displays given for judgement included only the head and neck of
45 the actor – and revealed nothing about what event was faced by the actor (see Ekman & Friesen,
46 1975; Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983). There was good reason for such context-free studies:
47 Before the Emotion Revolution, it was thought that emotion could not be identified from
48 behavioural manifestations alone, but only from the setting – that is, the context in which the
49 emotion occurred. The work of the 1970s thus was important in changing that thinking and
50 instead showing that emotions could be measured by quantifying the movement of facial muscles
51 or the acoustic qualities of the voice of an actor or an emoter (e.g., Scherer, 1986). In short, the
52 contribution of the 1970s was to show that internal feeling state could be assessed by objective
53 manifestations of external reactions (i.e., emotional expressions). In sum, the first stage of the
54 Emotion Revolution centred on intrapsychic or intrapersonal processes.

55 At the beginning of the next decade (1980s), the conceptual focus of emotion research
56 remained intrapersonal and intrapsychic but shifted to individual differences in discrete
57 emotions. A primary illustration is the study of temperament (e.g., Goldsmith & Campos, 1982;
58 Rothbart, 1981). Temperament refers to the disposition to react with one emotion more readily
59 than another emotion. For instance, some children react to strangers more with fear than with
60 other emotions, hence are called inhibited. Others show more frustration to a variety of events
61 than other emotions, hence are called difficult children. Still others are more prone to show
62 happiness than other emotions, and these babies are called cheerful babies (Kagan, 2010). The
63 study of temperament soon evolved into the study of the effect of the infant on the caregiver,
64 thereby reversing the usual focus of development, which had stressed the effect of parents on the
65 infant. Two seminal studies in this direction (Crockenberg, 1981; Miyake, Chen, & Campos,
66 1985) reported that individual differences in neonatal irritability affected parents' behaviours that
67 ultimately led to categorizing the child as ambivalently attached at 12 months of age. This shift
68 in the study of temperament soon opened up a rather new attempt at studying individual
69 differences. The intrapsychic had started to become relational; that is, the same emotional
70 reaction or expression was shown to have different effects depending upon the receiver of those
71 reactions.

72 It was at this time that Carolyn Saarni's work became influential as she helped broaden
73 the domains of emotion to be conceptualized relationally. Her aim was to characterize and
74 understand effective, interpersonal interaction in ways that would benefit clinical interventions
75 and training in family processes (see Cole, this issue). She first presented this work in 1988 at the
76 Nebraska Symposium on Motivation (Saarni, 1990) and later published it in a major book titled
77 *The Development of Emotional Competence* (Saarni, 1999). Her ideas were further developed in

78 chapters for the Handbook of Child Psychology by Saarni, Mumme, and Campos (1998) and
79 Saarni, Campos, Camras, and Witherington (2006), and a condensed version of the Handbook by
80 Saarni, Campos, Camras, and Witherington (2008). Her work stressed relational strategies. For
81 example, Saarni studied how the emotion of one person could powerfully impact the emotion of
82 a second person and thus emotions did not end at the periphery of one's body as William James
83 (1890, p. 331) and his followers stressed. Instead, emotions were broadcast with considerable
84 effect on other people. Demonstrating the relational effects of emotional expressions, a classic
85 study by Saarni (1984) investigated how children modulated their emotional expressions to a gift
86 giver when they received a broken or undesirable gift, conveying appreciation of the receipt of
87 the gift while masking disappointment at the gift's undesirable nature (see Cole & Jacobs, this
88 issue). Another relational strategy emphasized by Saarni was the acquisition of emotion
89 language, which enabled children to better understand how to communicate their emotions. Her
90 relational approach was captured in part by the eight skills relevant to emotional competence,
91 summarized in Table 1, some of which we address in subsequent sections of this article (see also
92 Denham, this issue).

93 -----Insert Table 1 here-----

Table 1. Carolyn Saarni's Principles of Emotional Competence

Skill 1	Awareness of one's emotions
Skill 2	The Ability to Discern and Understand Others' Emotions
Skill 3	The Ability to Use the Vocabulary of Emotion and Expression
Skill 4	The Capacity for Empathic Involvement
Skill 5	The Ability to Differentiate Internal Subjective Emotional Experience from External Emotional Expression
Skill 6	The Capacity for Adaptive Coping with Aversive Emotions and Distressing Circumstances
Skill 7	Awareness of Emotional Communication within Relationships
Skill 8	The Capacity for Emotional Self-Efficacy

94 *Note: Adapted from Saarni (1999)*

95 In this brief paper, we elucidate the conceptual advances resulting from Saarni's seminal
96 writing while further developing a relational approach to emotion and emotion competence. We
97 emphasize how this approach differs substantially from previous intrapsychic thinking about
98 emotion. Regrettably, Saarni's own development of a relational approach was cut short by her
99 untimely death. To avoid misinterpretation or erroneous recommendations for clinical and social
100 intervention based on Saarni's work, we attempt in part to recast her principles with appropriate
101 relational supplementation. In so doing, we emphasize how these principles are linked to
102 adequate emotional competence.

103

104 **Some Major Principles of a Relational Approach to Emotion**

105 The relational approach stresses what the poet John Donne (1624/1999) wrote, 'No man
106 is an Island, entire of itself.' Similarly, no emotion can be understood if it is not put into the
107 context of the person's social situation or encounters with important objects. A relational
108 approach recruits some or all of the principles that follow.

109

110 **1. *The fundamental principle is that emotions have an object.*** In an intrapersonal view of
111 emotion, emotion is often described without describing what emotions are about. A relational
112 approach takes what emotions are about into account. Strictly speaking, we should not speak of
113 'FEAR' without speaking about the fear of some object in the world, (e.g., fear of 'snakes' or
114 'losing a job').

115

116 **2. *The vast majority of emotions occurs in interpersonal contexts.*** We share our emotions with
117 our friends. We object to emotions from others with our own emotions. We attempt to persuade
118 individuals by deploying emotional strategies in our interactions.

119

120 **3. *Emotion manifestation follows the principles of equipotentiality and equifinality.*** The
121 principle of equipotentiality means that different responses can be in the service of the same
122 emotion. For example, fear elicited by a gunshot can be manifested by running away or freezing,
123 and anger at a frustrating person by preparation for aggressive action or by doing nothing as in
124 passive aggressiveness. In contrast to the intrapersonal approach, prototypical facial or vocal
125 expressions need not mark specific emotions. The principle of equifinality means that the same
126 emotional expression can be in the service of multiple emotions. For example, ‘the smile serves
127 many masters’ (Kagan, 1971). One can smile to indicate affiliation and communicate pleasure or
128 one can smile to indicate derision or contempt. Following these principles, identifying the
129 meaning of a particular expression requires a clear understanding of the context of its
130 manifestation (e.g., the temporal flow of behaviour within which the smile is embedded).

131

132 **4. *Emotional manifestations such as expressions and action tendencies are in the service of***
133 ***motives and, apparently, they perform that task very well*** (Frijda, 1986). The intrapersonal
134 approach rarely talks about what elicited the emotion in the first place. That elicitation is central
135 to a relational approach. Emotion is generated by the interaction of an event occurring outside
136 the self and a motive inside the self. So, neither the event nor the self, *per se*, elicits the emotion.

137

138 **5. *Emotions have two relational manifestations.*** One is expression or social signaling, and the
139 other is action tendency or readiness to change, maintain, or terminate something in the world.
140 Expressions are social signals transmitted so as to influence the behaviors of others which they
141 do indirectly. Action tendencies, on the other hand, influence the world directly by physically
142 affecting the person-environment interaction.

143

144 **6. *Emotions can be contagious, but only in context.*** Joy begets joy, fear begets fear, disgust
145 begets disgust, and anger initially begets fear, but then begets oppositionality. Contagion does
146 not always occur but depends on circumstances. These circumstances are not well studied or
147 understood (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994).

148

149 *Corollary to Principle 6:* The emotional arousal in person A can generate a related level of
150 emotional arousal in person B. This aspect of contagion is important because person A's arousal
151 transmitted to person B can affect the performance of the perceiver (person B) as well as to
152 intensify the emotion currently being experienced by person B.

153

154 **7. *Emotions can be constitutive of new psychological states.*** One example is that the self can be
155 constructed from the reflected *emotional* appraisals of others, so the self is not merely
156 intrapsychic. The second example is when a parent disapproves of a child's action and directs
157 sadness towards the child thereby generating an emotion of shame over that action. The first
158 example is the organization of a person's self-concept by the reflected appraisals of others
159 (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). A second example is how an action can

160 shift from affectively neutral to shameful by the type of emotional feedback that action generates
161 in another (Barrett, 1996).

162

163 **8. Making the relational intrapsychic: emotions can become internalized (i.e., become not**
164 **directly observable yet felt by the individual).** What is initially evident in overt behavior now
165 becomes part of thought, memory, imagination, and planfulness. That is, the intrapsychic reflects
166 a previous history of interactions in the world. This principle is powerful but has not received
167 much attention with the exception of work by Manfred Holodyski (2013).

168

169 **Definition and conceptualization of Emotional Competence**

170 ***Saarni's Definition/Conceptualization***

171 We now turn to an examination of Saarni's definitional treatment of emotional
172 competence. Saarni defines emotional competence as 'the demonstration of self-efficacy in
173 emotion-eliciting social transactions' (Saarni, 1990, 1999; Saarni, Campos, Camras, &
174 Witherington, 2006; 2008). There are some corollaries embedded in her capstone skill (Skill 8),
175 in which she expands on the meaning of emotional self-efficacy: 'The individual views him – or
176 herself as feeling, overall, the way he or she wants to feel...In essence, we are living in accord
177 with our personal theory of emotion, when we demonstrate emotional self-efficacy as well as in
178 accord with our moral sense.' (see Skill 8; Saarni, 1999, p. 278). From a relational perspective,
179 there are three features to note about this definition of emotional competence: (1) it emphasizes
180 the importance of self-efficacy rather than the relation between self and the environment; (2) it
181 'involves feeling the way one wants to feel'; and (3) it involves adherence to one's own moral
182 stance. Each of these can be recast in a relational manner.

183 First, although Saarni's view of the self is permeated with relational thinking, the use of
184 the word 'self' creates an intrapsychic connotation. The Oxford Online Dictionary's definition of
185 self reflects its common usage: 'a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others,
186 especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action.' This popular
187 conceptualization does not capture our view that we have as many 'selves' as there are roles we
188 play (see also Neisser, 1988; and Sarbin, 1964). We have one 'self' when behaving with parents,
189 a different 'self' when behaving with friends, and other 'selves' depending upon our roles in the
190 work environment and so on. These examples suffice to show that the use of the term 'self' is
191 vague in what it designates. Instead of the term self-efficacy, we suggest the term 'relational
192 efficacy.' Relational efficacy occurs when the person takes into account, not only what his or her
193 feelings are, but also the feelings and strivings of the other. This revision in terminology would
194 make Saarni's writings more theoretically consistent with her overarching framework of emotion
195 and emotional competence.

196 Second, consider the view that an emotionally self-efficacious person feels the way he or
197 she wants to feel. This statement focuses on the interior self rather than the self in relation to
198 others. It also implies hedonic primacy (i.e., humans strive to maximize pleasure and minimize
199 pain intrapersonally). In fairness to Saarni, she thought about this aspect of self-efficacy in
200 relational terms although the statement of the principle obscures that emphasis. Her overarching
201 model emphasized communion with others. Emotional self-efficacy in her framework involves
202 acceptance that, at the onset of a transaction, person A has goals and plights that differ from
203 those of person B. It is not the imposition of one person's emotions and goals on another.
204 Emotional competence can involve complete agreement, partial congruence, or total
205 disagreement; however, there is an attitude of respect for the other person's position, or at least

206 acceptance (i.e., an agreement to disagree). In our view, at no time is person A necessarily
207 ‘feeling the way he or she wants to feel.’

208 Third, Saarni’s definition of emotional competence implies that one feels a sense of self-
209 efficacy when one’s morality is upheld. How can we view this emphasis on morality in relational
210 terms? Conflicts about moral positions can be very difficult to reconcile. Consider the conflict
211 between pro-life activists and pro-choice proponents. Both groups appeal to principles of
212 morality, but their principles lead to opposite conclusions. We believe it a mistake to evaluate the
213 success of a transaction by appealing to the extent to which an outcome is consistent with one’s
214 own moral principles. From a relational perspective, we seek an alternative way to understand
215 and frame this principle. Saarni’s position that emotional competence involves living up to one’s
216 own moral principles irrespective of whether they are upheld by others does not address the
217 relational consequences of such a position (e.g., the dissolution of family relationships due to
218 strict adherence to different moral principles). We suggest acknowledging that emotional self-
219 efficacy and moral self-efficacy are not always reconcilable. Certainly, the relation between them
220 can be very complex and bears further reflection.

221

222 *A Proposed Relational Criterion: Negotiation*

223 A relational approach to emotional competence must emphasize the role of negotiation.
224 Indeed, negotiation is intimately related to many of the skills Saarni discusses. Negotiation
225 requires communicating emotions appropriately to ensure that one’s message is conveyed in an
226 appropriate and non-threatening way (Skill 7). Negotiation also means discussing one’s goals
227 and one’s strategies for attaining the goals when coping with aversive emotions and distressing
228 circumstances (Skill 6). This may often include the proposal of alternative courses of action that

229 might allow for both parties to come to an agreement. In other words, effective emotional
230 competence means, among other things, realizing that there may be multiple means to an end.
231 This sets the stage for a relational approach to the problem of generating an interpersonal
232 transaction.

233 In a relational approach, a skillful person deploys emotions in such a way that both one's
234 own and other's goals are met (as far as possible) without causing resentment or oppositionality.
235 As noted, negotiation may involve relinquishing, in part, what one wants when the transaction
236 began, or it may involve partial withdrawal of one's goals and may involve an agreement to
237 disagree. We thus propose that any set of emotional competence skills should include the
238 specifically relational skill of negotiation: the ability to effectively settle interactions that involve
239 differences in goals and opinions.

240

241 *Language as a Tool for Emotional Communication, Socialization, and Negotiation*

242 Saarni emphasizes the point that one must be aware of one's emotional state when
243 engaging in interactions. However, from a relational perspective, what is important about this
244 awareness is how it affects one's communication of emotion to others and one's ability to
245 understand others' emotions. While researchers often emphasize communication via facial
246 expression, language can be an equally important tool. This point is reflected in several of
247 Saarni's skills of emotion competence (e.g., Skill 3: Ability to Use the Vocabulary of Emotion
248 and Expression and Skill 7: Awareness of Emotion Communication in Relationships). Here, we
249 add to these skills by highlighting additional semantic, pragmatic, prosodic, and semiotic
250 avenues by which the child can be socialized into communicating emotion more clearly.

251

252 Consider awareness of communication. If one understands with superior clarity the
253 difference between fear and anger in one's mind but does not differentiate how one comes across
254 when communicating fear as opposed to anger, then one's own intrapsychic understanding may
255 be for naught. In other words, what matters in competent interaction with another is how one's
256 intentions are received by the other person. Emotions can be communicated in many different
257 ways and these many ways are captured in the relational principles of equipotentiality and
258 equifinality. Exemplifying equipotentiality, anger can be conveyed by a loud, staccato tone of
259 voice, but can also be conveyed by a stern fixed gaze and lowering the intensity of the voice
260 while retaining a staccato tempo of commands (e.g., mother to child: I would. . . not. . . touch. . .
261 that cookie. . .if I were you). Equifinality means that the same expressive pattern can convey
262 vastly different emotional meanings in different contexts. The same smile can convey enjoyment
263 in one context while in another context it can convey derision.

264 Saarni described how parents or other socializing agents can teach children to
265 differentiate among emotions by linking emotion terms to children's reactions. For example, a
266 parent might say, 'How sad your toy broke; The dog's bark is scary; How frustrating to build a
267 tower and have it fall.' However, we believe that another aspect of language (also touched upon
268 by Saarni, see Skill 7) may have more pervasive impact on emotional competence than semantics
269 alone. We here refer to an aspect of linguistic pragmatics embodied in the mood of a sentence:
270 the interrogative, the imperative, or the declarative. The interrogative mood most often allows
271 the listener to have the maximum ability to control his or her behaviour over a transaction. From
272 a relational perspective, it implies a relationship of equality or deference on the part of the
273 speaker. The imperative implies a hierarchical relationship between speaker and listener and thus
274 distinctly does not allow for the receiver of the message to have control. Under Skill 7

275 (Awareness of Emotion Communication within Relationships), Saarni discussed how different
276 types of relationships mandate different types of language. To this we add the particular
277 importance of sentence mood and the implications of violating norms of mood usage. Within the
278 context of a relational transaction, one is more likely to feel efficacious when responding to an
279 interrogative statement than in responding to an imperative or even a declarative mood. We
280 would further supplement what Saarni says about the semantics of speech by further
281 emphasizing the pragmatics of speech that enable the other to maintain agency, efficacy, and
282 control of the situation they find themselves in. In sum, there are semantic, pragmatic, and
283 semiotic avenues by which the child can be socialized into communicating emotion more clearly.
284

285 *Empathy, Sympathy, Contagion, and Arousal*

286 For Saarni, a crucial aspect of emotional competence is empathy (see Skill 5: The
287 Capacity for Empathic Involvement). Empathy is a surprisingly complex issue and defies simple
288 definition (Hoffman, 2000). It involves one person, designated a witness, observing the
289 emotional reactions of another person, typically someone in a state of suffering, with the witness
290 reacting either to the emotional expressions of the sufferer or to the plight, the situation that the
291 suffering person is in.

292 As Hoffman acknowledged, empathy can lead to prosocial action (called sympathy), but
293 it can also lead to avoidance if the perceiver is so aroused by the plight and the expressions of the
294 other that they choose to avoid further interaction with the other. When the arousal level is
295 appropriate, the perceiver can be motivated to engage in sympathetic behaviours to relieve the
296 emotional distress of the other. Ironically, such sympathetic behaviours may backfire. That is,
297 one may accurately perceive another's emotional distress but have an inaccurate understanding

298 of what caused the distress or what may effectively relieve it. The problem arises because
299 emotional expressions and plights can be in the service of multiple goals or motivational states.
300 An example is sadness. Sadness can potentially result from a number of losses, such as loss of
301 physical health, loss of a great opportunity, or loss of a close friend or family member.
302 Therefore, the perceiver can make a correct empathic detection of ‘sadness’ but perform the
303 wrong sympathetic action because he or she does not correctly understand the source of the
304 sadness. A perceiver’s sympathetic intention may also ‘go wrong’ for other reasons. Consider
305 another example depicted in the following vignette.

306 The scenario involves a husband witnessing his wife’s downcast face, body, gesture, and
307 his knowledge of her being in need to complete a task, yet not having enough time to do so with
308 excellence. In an act that, *prima facie*, seems sympathetic, the husband offered to take the
309 children to and from school and to music and athletic lessons with the goal of relieving the
310 wife’s time pressure. When the husband made this apparent sympathetic proposal, the wife flew
311 into a rage and stated that the husband was taking away from her an opportunity she had to relate
312 to her children and to show them her love. Clearly, the husband’s sensible proposed course of
313 action gravely missed the mark. Although the registration of the emotional signals was correct,
314 the attribution of the cause of the plight proved inappropriate. The husband mistakenly inferred
315 the wrong plight and the wrong motivational state in his wife. This example gives a new
316 meaning to what Paul Bloom (2016) called ‘the dark side of empathy.’ In engaging in
317 sympathetic intent, one may inadvertently choose the wrong action to engage in. How would a
318 relational approach help avoid the fury of the wife?

319 This difficulty in linking sympathetic action to empathy is generally not recognized in the
320 literature. A previously discussed relational strategy – the use of the interrogative – may be

321 helpful in making sympathetic intent more effective. For instance, the husband might ask ‘Would
322 it be helpful if I took the children to school and their music lessons, so as to save you time?’ or
323 ‘Is there something else I could do to help give you more time to get your work done?’ Notice, as
324 stated earlier, that the interrogative gives the recipient of the words a sense of control over the
325 actions of the other.

326 These ideas extend Saarni’s thinking to acknowledge the ambiguity that may occur when
327 one performs any prosocial action devoted to the relief of suffering in the other. We also propose
328 a second revision of empathy as discussed by Saarni. Although Saarni and most others treat
329 empathy exclusively in the context of the witness observing the suffering of another, we believe
330 empathy should be extended to witnessing the positive reactions of another as well (see
331 Aronfreed, 1968). For example, we also may experience empathy when we observe a young
332 couple being married or a grandson getting a trophy for achievement or an athlete winning with a
333 record-attaining performance.

334 Although not explicitly discussed by Saarni, emotional contagion is closely related to
335 empathy and is one of the most relational concepts relevant to the study of emotional
336 competence, and yet it is one of the least studied. Emotional contagion refers to the generation of
337 a like emotional state (but not necessarily an exact motor mimicry) in the perceiver of an
338 emotional state by an actor. Emotional contagion involves a closer degree of similarity between
339 the expression of the observers and that of the model or the emoter than is observed in empathic
340 reactions. Emotional contagion may contribute to emotional competence because it allows for
341 the interpersonal sharing of emotion related goals and facilitates the development of shared
342 strategies for achieving those goals (e.g., fleeing in a particular direction from a danger identified
343 by another person). At the same time, it may be detrimental to emotional competence if

344 contagion is limited (e.g., to in-group members) and facilitates emotion-related goals and
345 strategies that do not sufficiently take into account other relevant stakeholders in a situation.

346 Emotional contagion has been studied in some depth by Hatfield et al. (1994) as well as
347 by Provine (1997). As with all emotional phenomena, it is contextually bound. One context that
348 appears to be important is the intensity of the emotion reaction that elicits the contagion.

349 Negative emotions appear to be more ‘contagious’ than positive emotions (Barsade, 2002). Some
350 research suggests emotional contagion can be observed in the neonatal nursery (see Sagi &
351 Hoffman, 1976; Simner, 1971), although that effect appears to drop out by five months (Campos
352 et al., 2008). Others have claimed that emotional reactions other than crying can be elicited in the
353 neonate and young infant through imitation (Field, Woodson, Greenberg, & Cohen, 1982;
354 Haviland & Lelwica 1987). However, additional research is needed to substantiate these findings
355 of imitation of discrete emotions in young infants.

356 Another important concept related to empathy that is touched upon in Saarni’s writing is
357 arousal. Transfer of arousal between persons is a well-known phenomenon that may often occur
358 via the process of contagion. A person’s arousal level is likely to affect performance and the
359 development and implementation of strategies related to achieving emotion-related goals. Note
360 that typically a middle level of arousal brings about the best performance, not only in the self but
361 also when the arousal is communicated through contagion in another. Disorganized performance
362 can be elicited by either low levels of arousal or extremely high levels of arousal. How well a
363 person’s skill is organized to begin with – another contextual parameter – interacts with the level
364 of arousal, such that a weakly organized skill is improved maximally by relatively low levels of
365 arousal and a strongly organized skill is improved maximally by high levels of arousal. A well-

366 organized skill profits more from high levels of arousal, whereas a weakly organized skill profits
367 more from lower levels of arousal (Cofer & Appley, 1964).

368

369 ***Emotional Internalization***

370 Throughout this article, we have contrasted the intrapsychic approach with the relational
371 one. In this section, we try to bring the two approaches together while maintaining our emphasis
372 on relational thinking. In short, we will argue that the tools of emotional competence may first
373 emerge in the context of social interaction and then be gradually internalized to become
374 intrapsychic representations (e.g., emotional experiences). However, even in their intrapsychic
375 form, emotion processes reflect their relational origins.

376 Our argument has parallels in Vygotsky's well-known (1937/1987) social relational
377 theory of language and cognitive development and is similar to proposals made by Holodynski
378 and Friedlmeier (2006) with respect to emotion. Internalization is a phenomenon readily seen in
379 five to seven-year-old children in cognitive settings. Whereas the young child verbalizes aloud
380 the steps he or she is taking in solving a problem, the older child uses private speech not
381 accessible to an observer when solving the same or similar problems. In sum, public speech
382 evident in problem solving becomes unobservable, but is still functional when dealing with a
383 cognitive task. The process of internalization of public speech into private has not been entirely
384 specified. (In this connection, the term minimization has been proposed, but that term seems to
385 beg the question of mechanism). Nevertheless, internalization is seen as an advance in cognitive
386 development.

387 The process of internalization of emotion, according to Holodynski (2013) and
388 Holodynski and Friedlmeier (2006), involves a similar developmental shift from the external

389 manifestation of emotion (e.g., what is publicly observable) to one where the emotion is playing
390 a role that is purely internal and cannot be observed by any other person. Just as the
391 internalization of cognition facilitates cognitive processing, internalization of emotion facilitates
392 the regulation of emotion. It does so by enabling greater flexibility in the manifestation of
393 emotion. Internalization also doubtlessly speeds up the manifestation of emotion. The process of
394 miniaturization of emotional expression deemed essential to internalization results in responses
395 that are more easily and rapidly manipulated. Damasio (2005) makes a similar point about
396 internalization of physiological feedback accounting for why there has been no success in
397 relating overt physiological feedback in adults to feeling states. The feedback from the periphery
398 of the body is no longer needed after internalization has taken place because the representation of
399 such internal physiological feedback has been organized in the brain.

400 There is still another advantage to the internalization of emotion. Consider that for the
401 human being, emotion is manifested in a multiplicity of response domains (e.g., facial
402 expression, vocal expression, gesture, instrumental activity, the use of words, physiological
403 responses, and emotional mirroring among others). These domains have little or nothing in
404 common with each other, but they all fall under the rubric of emotion (e.g., fear, anger, joy,
405 disgust, etc.). This creates an epistemological puzzle: How can one create a single category such
406 as emotion from domains that have little or nothing in common? Internalization may facilitate
407 the integration of emotion responses from different domains, such that it allows for replacing
408 facial and vocal expressions with words or physiological reactions. This integration facilitates
409 the regulation of emotion by enabling responses from one domain of emotion (e.g.,
410 verbalizations) to substitute for responses from another domain (e.g., instrumental actions).

411 This function of integrating domains that have little or nothing in common with each
412 other and substituting components of one domain with components from another domain may be
413 facilitated by the cognitive processes of classification described by Eleanor Rosch (Rosch &
414 Mervis, 1975), based on the thinking of the Ludvig Wittgenstein (1953/ 2002). Rosch and
415 Wittgenstein proposed the concept of ‘family relation’ to explain how phenomena that have few
416 or no features in common can yet be unified into single categories. This thinking has become a
417 staple in cognitive science. The concept of family relation enables someone to understand that a
418 long rope that has no strand in common from beginning to the end still constitutes a single rope.
419 Lack of commonality does not preclude unitary categorization. By analogy, facial, vocal,
420 gestural, verbal, and physiological reactions can be integrated across time and space, even
421 though they have little or nothing in common from beginning to end. To summarize,
422 internalization can make possible the manifestation of emotion in a multiplicity of ways much
423 more than had been possible prior to internalization. Thus, although we can talk about
424 intrapersonal or intrapsychic emotions ontologically, across development the relational stance we
425 have argued for remains fundamental: the intrapersonal emerges from the interpersonal.

426 Saarni’s writings do not discuss the process of internalization, but throughout her
427 writings she comes close to proposing something analogous to what we have just described. We
428 propose that the process of internalization should emerge from its current state of oblivion: it
429 merits descriptive observation and experimental investigation. We believe internalization to be
430 perhaps one of the most central processes by which the child becomes ‘emotionally adult-like’
431 and more flexible in manifesting emotion. Ultimately, the internalization process helps make
432 children and adults more emotionally competent. Without doubt, internalization is extremely

433 relevant for understanding emotional competence and strikes us as eminently consistent with the
434 scope of Carolyn Saarni's writings.

435

436 **Coda**

437 Carolyn Saarni's theory of emotional competence has made a central contribution by
438 directing attention to some important functions of emotion in social interaction. We have tried to
439 point out in what aspects Saarni's approach can be further developed and made more relational
440 as she attempted before her untimely death. This article has been intended to supplement and
441 bring up to date her thinking and enable the field to make greater strides in inculcating in
442 children appropriate modes of behaviour and implementing smoother courses of emotion-related
443 action in adults. In so doing, we hope to extend the scope of Saarni's important contributions and
444 encourage the generation of new ideas and new procedures for achieving emotional competence.

445

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