Motivation and Emotion Regulation: A Grounded Theory Analysis

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
2004
ABSTRACT

The present research examines the field of research in Emotion Regulation (ER) – in particular, theoretical matters. Problems affecting this type of research pertain to matters such as definition, measurement, and a lack of unifying theory. A grounded theory investigation was used to attempt to generate a theory with substantive and predictive value. Thirty-five participants were interviewed and questioned about their ER patterns. Analysis of this data showed that the motivations individuals have form a broad unifying construct through which to look at ER. As such, a theory is posited which looks at ER in terms of twin motivations – one primarily present for the self, and the other primarily occurring for social reasons. Such an approach is new to the field of ER. The theory is evaluated in terms of current research and future research directions. Overall, the presented theory is found to be able to unify current research on ER, as well as having the potential to push research efforts in new, more meaningful directions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Prof. Ken Strongman for his unwavering encouragement and support. His willingness to engage with my work and provide a critical ear when needed is much appreciated. Thanks for all the help Ken.

To my parents for their support over the last two years - and the help keeping me fed and housed when needed was great! Thanks a lot.

To Rhiannon, for being ever supportive and interested. Your help in encouraging me and helping me realise my potential was a much needed tonic.
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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCHING EMOTION REGULATION

Modern emotion theory regards the emotions as vital tools for guiding us through our day to day lives (Lazarus, 1991; Strongman, 2003). For instance, when we are threatened, we feel fear; when we are thwarted, we feel anger. These emotions help us deal with the situation at hand (for example, defending ourselves or fleeing), and safely negotiate our way through our lives. This type of system also exists for the more complex, socially motivating emotions like embarrassment and shame. For instance, when we contravene an accepted social norm, we may feel guilt and possibly shame. This feeling motivates us to right the wrongs and to avoid such behaviour in the future.

There is, however, a hole in these adaptive accounts of emotion. That is, from time to time it is necessary to exercise control over our emotions. For instance, it is not socially acceptable to lash out in all anger eliciting situations, nor is it desirable to feel guilt or shame about all the mistakes we make. The process of controlling or modifying our emotions has therefore become a discrete area of investigation. These processes are collectively referred to as Emotion Regulation (ER).

Despite the wide scope and intuitive appeal of such a field of study, this area of investigation is, in many respects, a fledgling one. It is, however, gaining a wider audience all the time. The modern research psychologist is more aware of its importance, not only to our understanding of emotion processes as a discrete area of study, but to its wider implications to other areas of psychological endeavour. These areas include Developmental, Clinical, Social, Health and Personality Psychology; the implications of which are discussed later.
Issues of Definition

A great hurdle in the study of Emotion Regulation is defining the phenomenon in question so that the generation of useful research questions is possible (Walden & Smith, 1997). It is possible to define, and thus investigate, ER in a myriad of ways. This is both a boon and a disadvantage. At present, the numerous ways in which ER is defined (and thus investigated), has led to a broad and fascinating literature. This same issue has, however, led to a lack of unification in the literature, and subsequent problems in synthesising findings into a coherent form. It is therefore vital to examine the definitions to determine their utility in the current and future research.

Approaches to Definition

One facet of the literature has defined ER in terms of its literal meaning; that is, any process in which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they are experienced and displayed (Gross, 1998a). This definition, while encompassing all the facets of emotion regulation, really leaves us far away from nailing down the phenomenon in reality. Its ability to encompass the entire breadth of ER strategies is also its downfall, as greater specificity is required.

Another approach that has been adopted is to look at specific emotions, and see how they are regulated (Gross, 1998a). This is a promising idea, but it lacks a clear research goal, rendering it somewhat impotent. The huge range of situations that lead to a particular emotional response and its subsequent regulation need to be conceptually linked in some way, before an approach like this is hugely useful.
Gross (1998a) has identified the presence of these issues, and as such, proposes various ways in which the study of Emotion Regulation can take place.

One can categorise emotion regulatory efforts on the basis of the emotion component being targeted, such as experience, expression, or physiology. In order to do this, however, there is a need for knowledge of two things. Firstly, the component being targeted may not be immediately apparent. For instance, in relaxing one's back muscles, it would appear that the physiological component of the emotion is being targeted, however, the regulation of expression, or perhaps the experience of the entire emotion may be the real target of regulation. The second requirement of a component-style is that individuals actually have knowledge of, and can target, specific components of an emotion - this may not always be the case.

Another approach to the study of ER could be to undertake a “conceptual analysis of the processes underlying diverse emotion regulatory acts” (Gross, 1998a, p. 281). This approach has the best potential to describe how the emotion generation process is interlinked with emotion regulation strategies. It does, however, lack clarity, in that it seeks to investigate ‘underlying processes’ which is a vague term, not really committing to a position. Underlying processes could mean anything from the physiological substrate of the emotion involved, the individual’s personality characteristics, to the situation they find themselves in, and so on. For this to be a useful idea, it needs further clarification and focus. The current research seeks, through the generation of a theory of emotion regulation, to circumvent these definitional issues. It will do this by clarifying what the ‘underlying processes’ actually are, and basing a theory around them.
Current Theories of Emotion Regulation

Currently only two 'theories' of Emotion Regulation exist. The approaches taken are, however, best described as models. Gross's (1998a) model of ER describes how Emotion Regulation acts impinge at different points along the emotion generation process. For instance, Situation Selection (such as avoiding a party where someone present may elicit anger) takes place early in the emotion generation process while Response Modulation (perhaps controlling anger feelings through using deep breathing patterns) occurs late in the emotion generation process. Table 1 outlines the five types of ER acts identified by Gross. While having the great advantage of being able to categorise all types of emotion regulation acts, there are however various deficiencies in Gross's ideas, if they are to be viewed as a moving towards a theory of emotion regulation.

Firstly, I believe the theory has little or no predictive value. It is impossible, using these ideas to answer questions like 'what ER process will be used in circumstance X as opposed to Y?' or 'how will ER strategies change if the situation changes?'. Secondly, there is no mention of how individual differences could affect the choice, and success of ER strategies. This relates to questions like "how does personality and goals affect ER?" and "how do demographics affect which type of ER is used and when?" These are the main challenges that the field is faced with.
Table 1.  

*The Five Types of Emotion Regulatory Strategies as Outlined by Gross (1998a)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion Regulation Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Position within emotion generation process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situation Selection</td>
<td>Approaching or avoiding people, places or objects.</td>
<td>Seeking out a friend who can help you feel happy.</td>
<td>Before or early in the process. Anticipatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation Modification</td>
<td>Modification of a situation to change the emotional result.</td>
<td>Asking a neighbour to keep music down at party.</td>
<td>Early in the process. Somewhat anticipatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention Deployment</td>
<td>Moving attention towards or away from an emotion eliciting stimuli.</td>
<td>Concentrating on sports performance to distract from an unhappy experience.</td>
<td>Occurs at the point of emotion onset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Change</td>
<td>Changing evaluation of stimuli.</td>
<td>Re-evaluating a persons death as a relief from suffering.</td>
<td>Occurs at the point of emotion onset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Modulation</td>
<td>Influencing physiological, experiential and behavioural responding.</td>
<td>Deep breathing to relieve anxiety.</td>
<td>After emotion onset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bonanno (2001) offers a different perspective. He looks at ER using a wider framework of self-regulation in general, specifically, the use of the idea of emotional homeostasis. This approach borrows heavily from Carver and Scheier’s (1990) perspective on the role of emotions in affect. Bonanno essentially extends their idea, and instead of looking at emotions as occurring in relation towards our perceived speed of progress towards a goal (Carver & Scheier, 1990), he adds emotion regulation strategies into the mix. Bonanno’s basic thesis is that emotional homeostasis is governed by
schematised goals and ER may occur when these goals are perceived as being not met. No mention is made of what these goals might be, except for the statement that they may be “…situation specific, culture specific and personality specific” (Bonanno, 2001, p. 277).

Bonanno’s (2001) approach has many caveats, and is presently underdeveloped. He essentially reclassifies ER as being a broader part of our emotional lives, and then applies an emotion-specific theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990) to this idea. No mention is given to the fact that an emotion and an ER strategy very often conflict (Lazarus, 1991), and thus, the question of which goal is working at which level remains a conundrum. For instance, when in an anger eliciting situation, an individual is faced with the choice of whether to fully regulate or fully express this emotion (and a myriad of choices in between these extremes). Complete regulation may have one goal or set of goals - for example, the maintenance of social bonds. Conversely, complete expression of anger may satisfy other wants, like successful competition for resources. The possible competition between these goals is unable to be covered adequately by Bonanno’s approach as its unidimensional nature and consequent ability to deal with only one goal, or congruent set of goals, is a problem.

The remainder of the research on ER is not so much lacking in theoretical content, as lacking a clear theoretical framework. Thus it is more useful to look at these theoretical contributions in the context of the research they accompany. As mentioned above, the research into emotion regulation is broad and scattered. A look at the main areas of psychology that have utilised the concept is useful to this discussion.
The Developmental Literature

Developmental Psychology was the first area of Psychology to pick up the ball with regard to Emotion Regulation. Developmental Psychology's interest in Emotion Regulation stems from the observed development of emotions in infants. In this developmental progression, the primary emotions (like anger, fear, and joy) appear first, and then, from about age two, the secondary or self-conscious emotions appear. These include among others, pride, embarrassment, and shame. However, developmental researchers observed further development of individual's emotional life beyond this - namely, the appearance of the management of emotions. This area of research into ER is the most developed, and as such, the findings it has produced tend to be more widely applicable, both theoretically and empirically. Reviewing this body of research in a traditional sense is difficult due to its scattered nature. Instead, I will explore the major themes present in this field.

The Development of Self-regulation

There appears to be a relatively clear path of development of ER, beginning in infancy when caregivers are most responsible for any regulation present. Findings have shown that caregivers assist infants in controlling their emotions by limiting their exposure to emotion eliciting events, especially early in life (Gianino & Tronick, 1988; Thompson, 1991). As the infant matures into a toddler, he/she becomes capable of seeking assistance (Eisenberg & Sheffield Morris, 2002; Thompson, 1991), and thus all the impetus for ER is not left to the caregiver. This denotes the beginning of a transfer of responsibility for ER. With the acquisition of language, the child is able to share feelings
and get feedback from others in the regulation of emotion (Kopp, 1989). These changes are additional steps in the move from an infant relying solely on others to regulate their emotion, to the beginnings of emotion self-regulation. This change may be due not only to the developing social awareness in the child, and his or her developing cognitive faculties, but also due to expectations on the child. Campos, Kermoian, and Zumbahlen (1992) found that parental expectations towards a child changed once crawling had commenced. It seems that with this developmental milestone comes a social expectation that emotional control will be more internal in nature. Kopp (1982) argues that this is essential to children developing their own self-regulatory skills.

Children’s self-regulation increases greatly in the third year of life, both in frequency and in the range of strategies used. (Eisenberg, 2002). Older children are better able to use cognitive strategies like distraction (Eisenberg, 2002), and are better able to delay gratification (Thompson, 1991). Moreover, these strategies are more likely to be rewarded by caregivers (Thompson, 1991). A major cognitive leap that occurs in middle childhood is the realisation that emotional experience and emotional expression need not go hand in hand (Thompson, 1990). Thus a whole range of strategies to change the outward appearance of emotion occurs. This is where the developmental literature melds into the more general, adult literature.

Parent’s Regulation of Children’s Emotion

When a parent soothes a distressed infant, chastises a child for showing anger towards a friend, or sends a defiant child to time-out, they are engaging in behaviour designed to regulate the emotion of their child. While the current research seeks to
concentrate on emotion self-regulation, a look at the research into these parentally-driven processes is useful. There is a large body of research around these processes, and they all have a similar launching point – that the successful socialisation of a child into any particular culture involves the socialisation of that child’s emotional responses and experiences (Eisenberg, 2002; Thompson, 1990, 1991). Moreover, the development of emotion regulation strategies is regarded as essential for the development of a socially competent child (Lochman & Lenhart, 1993; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002). This essentially speaks to the importance of ER, and more specifically, the appropriate use of ER in the developing individual.

*Emotion Regulation and Socialisation*

The disciplines of Psychology and Sociology (among others) have long been concerned with the study of the effective socialisation of individuals into particular cultures. It is not surprising the developmental ER literature regards ER’s primary function as being to do with the socialisation of the child (Eisenberg, 2002). In fact it is this starting point that led to the first ER studies as we know them today. The move from extraorganismic ER to intraorganismic ER is seen as vital to a child becoming a functional member of his or her culture, which echoes Vygotsky’s (1978) thesis. Thus, it follows that developmentalists have sought to chart and develop ways of enhancing this process. Interested readers are directed to Nancy Eisenberg’s excellent review of this perspective (Eisenberg, 2002).
The Clinical Literature

Despite emotion and its control being implicated in a wide range of psychopathologies (especially in the DSM-IVA Axis Two disorders), a pertinent area in which Emotion Regulation research has direct clinical implications is in Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) (Newcombe, 2003; Personal Communication). BPD manifests as an inability to have meaningful relationships and hold social bonds. In addition to this, self-harm behaviour is common. The researcher at the forefront of this research is Marsha Linehan. Linehan and colleagues (Linehan, 1993; Linehan, Cochran, & Kehrer, 2001) assert that BPD is a disorder of Emotion Regulation specifically, and as such, it is vital that the processes of ER be better understood. Current research (which has predominantly relied on case-studies) shows that individuals with BPD have little or no control over their emotions (particularly, but not exclusively, negative emotions). This specific problem leads to the observed social problems common in these people.

Linehan’s research concentrates on her particular style of therapy – Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). This therapy takes as its starting point the fact that those with BPD come from background in which their emotional reactions are invalidated by their environment (Linehan, 1993). This may take the shape of a family that does not allow emotional expression to histrionic reactions to negative emotional expression. These environments do not allow appropriate emotional growth in the individual, and as such, prompt the fostering of maladaptive emotional lives. By addressing the emotional regulation of these individuals, DBT has shown excellent results in this population - one that has been notoriously resistant to more traditional approaches (Linehan, 1993). This emphasises the importance of Emotion Regulation in BPD.
Stress and Coping

While not strictly a part of the clinical literature, the stress and coping tradition in Psychology is intimately related with both ER, and psychopathology. The founder and trailblazer in this field was until his recent death, Richard Lazarus (Lazarus, 1991, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The central tenet of Lazarus’s theory of general emotion is that emotion arises out of an encounter between the person and their environment. These encounters are not always favourable, however, and as such lead to stress. The stress elicited prompts a motivation to change this unfavourable interaction – this is referred to as coping. While Lazarus never uses the term ‘Emotion Regulation’ in his work, the concept of stress and coping captures it nicely. Emotions would never need to be regulated (coping) if there was not a good reason for it (stress). This conceptualisation allows for a different perspective to be taken in looking at ER. The central area of investigation here is the appraisal of the situation, and the subsequent reaction of the person to it. Lazarus alludes to two types of coping: emotion-focused and problem-focused (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping involves looking at the interpretation of the relationship, while problem-focused strategies aim to change the relationship in question. These two categories indeed capture all of Gross’s (1998a) ER strategies, and as such, their ideas may be easily conceptually linked. Lazarus’s complete theoretical treatise of his ideas (Lazarus, 1991) gives the ER field numerous points of entry to investigate phenomena. The reason it has not happened to date remains a mystery, however, empirical and definitional issues already alluded to may have a part to play. With such issues in mind, a look at the recent research, in non-clinical adults is appropriate.
The General Literature

There is now, concurrent with the development of the field, an emphasis on emotion regulation in non-clinical adult populations. This could be thought of as ‘everyday’ Emotion Regulation. This area of research has been spearheaded by James Gross (Barrett, Gross, Christiensen, & Benvenuto, 2001; Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). The research follows the themes present in his process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998a: see above) and elaborates on several cogent issues.

The Types of Emotion Regulation

According to Gross (1998a) there are two main categories of Emotion Regulation: antecedent-focused and response-focused (closely linked to, but differing from Lazarus’s ideas). The former generally occurs before the onset of the experience of emotion, and seeks to ameliorate its effects before they occur. For example, one can alter the situation they are in to avoid emotion eliciting stimuli - not watching horror films for instance. Conversely, response-focused occurs after the onset of emotion. A common example would be individuals justifying their actions to ‘rid’ themselves of guilt. Gross’s research is focused on the exploration of this dichotomy, concentrating particularly on the ‘best’ techniques of ER. This research has generally looked at the opportunity cost of these differing types of ER.

The Costs of Regulation

A number of well-controlled, empirical studies have looked at the benefits and costs of ER techniques. Gross and Levenson (1997) looked at suppression (a response-
focused technique) in participants while watching sad, neutral and happy films. In all but the neutral films, they found that suppression had acute negative effects on cardiovascular activation, and self-reports of enjoyment. Gross (1998b) extended this idea and looked at whether these two types of emotion regulation have different consequences for the individual. Showing participants a disgust-eliciting film, he asked them either to think about the film so they would feel nothing (an antecedent technique) or suppress the emotional response (a response-focused technique). Participants in a control condition had no such instructions. Physiological and self-report measures showed that the antecedent group experienced less emotion than the suppression group. The emotional expression was similar, however, in both experimental groups - notably less than the control condition. This research shows that the techniques used to control emotion are qualitatively distinct, and as such may have different adaptive consequences. In an extension of this work, Gross and John (2003) found that suppressors experience greater negative emotion and less positive emotion than reappraisers. Thus it appears that there are consequences inherent in the techniques we use to regulate emotion.

Similar research has borne out this finding, but in a more real world context. Gross and colleagues (Butler et al., 2003) reported similar findings when women were randomly selected to discuss an upsetting topic (the aftermath of the nuclear attack on Nagasaki). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions where they were to either suppress their emotional response, reappraise it or respond naturally in a one-on-one conversation. Suppression increased blood pressure, and more interestingly, inhibited communication. Suppression also reduced reports of rapport and inhibited relationship formation, as opposed to the reappraisal or no change condition. Richards, Butler, and
Gross (2003) looked at these differing techniques in an area that surely sees frequent Emotion Regulation: dating couples discussing relationship conflict. They manipulated reappraisal and suppression and found that suppressors had worse memory for conversation content, but better memory for emotions experienced. The converse was found in the reappraisal condition. However, low self-monitors (those that do little to maintain a social image: Snyder, 1979) in the suppression condition were less likely than high self-monitors to remember their emotional reactions. Thus, it seems clear that there are social as well as health and emotional consequences tied to the type of ER selected. There also appears to be personality variables that can affect this process.

There exists a related area of research that looks exclusively at the cognitive costs of ER: suppression in particular. Richards and Gross (2000) found that memory (for events in a film) was significantly impaired by suppression, whereas in reappraisal and control conditions memory was markedly better.

*Emotional Life and Emotion Regulation*

Related to, but distinct from the above research, Gross (Barrett et al., 2001) looked at the relationship between emotional knowledge and Emotion Regulation. They found that those who differentiate their emotions better (measured using daily diary entries) are more able to regulate those emotions. Thus it seems that ER, its selection and execution, as well as general emotional competence are all related.

These particular areas of research look set to develop over the next few years, and their direct relevance to everyday functioning makes it all the more valuable.
The Literature as it Stands

Emotion Regulation research is a burgeoning field. As the above research attests, its findings have far reaching consequences in our social and emotional lives, as well as for our physical well-being. The rather narrow focus, however, of this research suggests that there remains a wealth of knowledge to tap. The now well-documented link between ER strategy and well-being, for instance, suggests that there may be many more phenomena that may be as yet uninvestigated, but have far-reaching consequences. The question is then: how can we progress the field theoretically, in order to give it a firm theoretical basis to work from? A good starting point may be general emotion theory.

What about Emotion Theory – Does it Cover Emotion Regulation?

As stated earlier, current theories of ER are, at best, incomplete, and thus we must look elsewhere. A look at general emotion theory is suitable, here, looking at two diverse types of emotion theory – the Evolutionary perspective and the Social Constructionist perspective.

Evolutionary Theory

Evolutionary theory was the basis from which investigators were first able to look at emotion in a favourable light. The reasoning was as follows: firstly, for emotions to exist at all, they had to have evolved. Secondly, for something to have evolved, it must have adaptive advantages. This outlook was championed by such authors as Plutchik (1962, 1980), and further refined by the likes of Nesse (1990). Such an approach has one
distinct advantage - it allows a clear argument for why emotions exist at all. As Plutchik states:

"Emotions serve an adaptive role in helping organisms deal with key survival issues posed by the environment." (Plutchik, 1980, p. 8).

It is not difficult to follow Plutchik’s basic thesis here - one can easily think of instances of emotion that assist our survival. A fear response (fight or flight) is the most often cited, however, anger (in the face of competition for resources) or disgust (in the case of a noxious stimulus) both assist an organisms survival. This basic adaptive premise is still present in more recent theories of emotion (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), and these theories are all the better for it.

Evolutionary psychology makes a clean argument regarding the function of emotions. However, the very need to regulate those same emotions ensures these same explanations cannot wash with regard to ER. For instance, fear allows an adaptive fight or flight response to occur, yet, at times, we seek to control this fear. Does this render the evolutionary explanation of the fear useless? Perhaps, but only when we look at these evolutionary explanations with regard to ER. Evolutionary approaches have much to offer general emotion theory, but their very nature renders them somewhat impotent when looking at ER. Nesse (1990) essentially admits this may be the case. His thesis is essentially that emotions must have evolved, because they generally increased fitness in certain situations. He does not extend this idea to the level of emotions always being adaptive in each particular situation.
The Evolutionary approach, however, fails in two further respects when looking at it from the perspective of ER. The first problem is that of explanation. Let's look at a hypothetical situation:

*You are at a party when an acquaintance starts making you the butt of his jokes.*

*This makes you feel angry.*

There are several possible courses of action here - we will look at only two. The first option is to display your anger at this person, showing all those in the room how you feel also. Alternatively, you could laugh it off - downplay your emotional response in order to appear socially 'acceptable'. Taking the Evolutionary perspective, it is easy to conceive of positive adaptive consequences for both courses of action. This is the key here - an Evolutionary approach to ER suffers in that it can explain any action, and therefore is somewhat flawed. It is possible to conceive of positive outcomes if anger is not regulated in the above situation. However, it is just as easy to think of positive outcomes if anger *is* regulated in the same situation. Thus, by being able to 'justify' both courses of action, the evolutionary perspective explains little.

The second problem with pure evolutionary accounts of emotion is strongly related to, and in many ways, an outcome of the first. It is the fact that the socialisation of emotion is almost completely ignored. In a theory such as Plutchik's (1962), the culture in which the 'organism' (the term he is wont to use) exists in takes a back seat. Plutchik's use of terms like socialisation are scant, and always related to rather behaviouristic concepts such as reward and drive. For instance, Plutchik's early (1962) work states:
"In general, in both man and animals, feeding represents a basis for socialisation of the individual." (Plutchik, 1962, p. 96)

Such an approach means that the 'social' emotions such as guilt, shame and embarrassment are all driven by the need to maintain social bonds, and as such ensure survival of the species. In itself, this is not such a bad idea, but when compared to more 'social' theories of emotion, such as social constructivism (see below), it lacks a certain credibility and preciseness. Recall that ER is a phenomenon most often observed in social situations.

The above examples, despite being somewhat unforgiving to the Evolutionary perspective, do show that the strict evolutionary approach is not a complete framework through which to study ER.

**Social Constructivism**

A spectrum distant from evolutionary theory, Social Constructivists regard emotions as socioculturally determined phenomena. For Social Constructivists, emotions cannot be divorced from the culture in which they exist, and are not so much 'natural' as 'acquired' (Armon-Jones, 1986). Constructivist theories of emotion (see Harre, 1986) look at emotion as a social adaptation that serves functions on an interpersonal, group, and cultural level. As Schott (1979) states:

"Certain types of emotions are so central to social control, that society as we know it could not function without them" (p. 1317).
While Social Constructivists do not attempt to explain away the adaptation and survival aspects of emotion (Averill, 1982), they do regard emotion as a phenomenon understood only within the culture in which it occurs. Armon-Jones (1986) looks at emotion as being determined by "cultural beliefs, values, and morals of particular communities" (p. 33). Averill (1980, cited in Armon-Jones, 1986) would have us think the same. He looks at emotional response as a function of shared beliefs and expectations regarding socially appropriate behaviour. He states:

"The meaning of an emotion – its functional significance – is to be found primarily within the sociocultural system" (Averill, 1980; cited in Armon-Jones, 1986, p. 57).

It must be stressed that there is both a strong and weak thesis of social constructivism; the latter admitting that only some emotions are socially constructed. As such, it is not a complete perspective on emotion in and of itself. There are, however, as many caveats for this approach as there are problems with it. For instance, it is able to account for large cross-cultural differences in the situations that elicit emotion, and deal with the conceptual difficulties faced by evolutionary theory regarding such findings. However, social constructivism is unable to account for the early appearance (both phylogenetically and ontogenetically) of the 'core' emotions such as anger, disgust, and fear. Despite this problem, the ability of this approach to encompass ER strategies and the goals they serve is good. The use of this approach in isolation, however, may well be flawed, especially considering its apparent inability to encompass all emotions.
Leading Emotion Theories

The best emotion theories of today include aspects of both the social constructivist and the evolutionary perspectives. Perhaps the most comprehensive of these is that of Lazarus (1991), which could best be described as cognitive, motivational and adaptational (Strongman, 1995). An entire volume and several other publications are devoted to the exposition of this theory, so an adequate explanation here is difficult. However, I will look at two aspects of Lazarus's theory, especially relevant to the study of ER.

Firstly, any situation involving emotions must first be appraised. To Lazarus, appraisal is at the heart of emotion generation. Secondly, appraisal is affected by a number of processes including previous experience, coping techniques, personality, and environmental factors. This appraisal process is the key to understanding why people have different emotional reactions in similar situations. This same idea can easily be expanded to encompass ER. For an individual to exercise control over their emotions, appraisal of some sort must surely be occurring. Therefore, ER processes may be intimately intertwined with this appraisal process. A related theme raised by this point is whether emotion generation and ER are truly separate - a question that any theory of Emotion Regulation must address.

So, how well do Lazarus's ideas deal with the phenomenon of ER? Put simply, his theory has the potential to encompass all ER techniques, but looks at only a few, such as problem-focused coping. Thus, the theory is incomplete from the standpoint of ER, yet is amenable to 'mini-theories' fitting alongside it. In fact, the incomplete model proposed by Gross (1998a) conceptually meshes nicely with Lazarus's ideas.
CHAPTER TWO: THE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF
EMOTION REGULATION

The Current Research

Rationale

A thorough literature search reveals no studies which specifically address the qualitative (or quantitative for that matter) description of emotion regulation processes in everyday life. Some studies (Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994; Totterdell, Parkinson, Briner, & Reynolds, 1997) looked at mood regulation strategies, but the two areas are distinctly different (mood being more protracted, and as such, subject to different regulation techniques). In addition to this, there has been no investigation that specifically looks at the individual differences in ER selection and execution. No knowledge is available based on asking how personality differences affect ER strategies. There is also a dearth of research into what goals motivate and predict ER techniques.

It is my belief that the study of ER could continue to stay at this level indefinitely, and not move forward. What the field requires is a full theory of Emotion Regulation that had predictive and substantive value. This is the overarching goal of the current research. Thus, the rationale for the current study is to identify the differences across individuals that exist in ER techniques, selection, goals and patterns, and the features of personality and emotionality that may predict them.
The following research questions are posed:

1) What are the techniques of ER used in common social situations. How are they selected and executed. Why do individuals select one strategy over another?

2) What are the goals of these techniques?

3) How can these be explained by current ideas of emotion in general?

4) How do personality factors influence an emotional encounter? Is there any predictability?

5) Do current “theories” of ER adequately explain the interaction of personality and situation? How well do wider theories of emotion do this and how can ideas of ER be incorporated into the best theories of emotion?

6) Can ER be regarded as the latest part of our emotional makeup to develop (either ontogenetically or phylogenetically)?

These questions are addressed in the present study, however, the breadth of these questions lead to the possibility of this research being highly exploratory in nature. The current research focuses on an interview-based Grounded Theory investigation, and as such, the differential emphasis on each of these research questions largely relies upon the data gleaned. Recall that the overarching goal is to generate theory - not to taxonomise or describe ER, although this may well occur as part of the process.
Method

Methodological Issues

Looking at the research questions above, one is faced with what appears to be a big task. However, the current study is not so much concerned with answering each of these questions in complete detail, but to generate an overarching theory of Emotion Regulation. The research questions will be addressed in full, but not discreetly. It is for this reason that qualitative methods are used in the current study.

Why Qualitative Methods?

To begin to answer this question the reader is referred to the following quote by Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, and Tindall (1994):

"Quantification all too often fuels the fantasy of prediction and control, but qualitative research in psychology takes as its starting point an awareness of the gap between an object of study and the way we represent it..." (p. 3).

Indeed, at present, there are very few ways to quantitatively measure the phenomenon of Emotion Regulation, and none broad enough to adequately answer the proposed research questions. One must therefore start at the phenomenon itself. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to do this – by looking at the phenomena (or in this case, first hand accounts of) the researcher is dealing with the object in question directly, rather than a removed quantification of such. Given the exploratory nature of
this research, such an approach is warranted, especially given the fledgling nature of the field. The particular flavour of qualitative methods employed in the current study is Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Why Grounded Theory?

At present Psychology concerns itself little with the mechanisms involved in the generation of theory. In general, two common methods exist for the generation of theory (Cattell, 1966). The first is basing a theory on previously gathered empirical data. This is the method that drives a great deal of psychological research. In short, one study shows findings that suggest a pattern. This pattern is formed into a theory and the theory is subsequently tested. Thus, the pattern of scientific enquiry is a spiral - one study drives the next. This approach is sound in many ways, but it does not allow for the generation of completely novel theories, especially in areas previously not subjected to empirical research. Emotion Regulation research is an example of such an area. The second approach to formulating theory is simple observation. As Cattell (1966) states:

"...in its true life setting, a finished hypothesis is rarely the real germinal point of research action. It can begin when noticing a curious and intriguing regularity."

(p. 13).

Such an approach reflects a greater value held in the psychological research community. That is, it is acceptable to construct a theory through any method. The emphasis that standard research methods place on new theory is in their testing - the so-called ‘hypothetico-deductive’ approach (Cattell, 1966; Haig, 1995). Thus, theory itself
in this sense can make bold claims to truth that may or may not resemble reality, for a theory is judged in its testing phase only.

Grounded Theory takes a different stance – it looks to create theory that is actually based in data (or more accurately, phenomena). Its procedures thus lead to a theory that more accurately resembles what is happening in the observed group. Grounded Theory involves systematically coding information (in this case interview tapes and transcripts) and drawing links between the variety of information gleaned. As such, the findings from the present study are ‘grounded’ in the data. No hypothesis, as such, is therefore tested (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The Grounded Theory Process

The method of Grounded Theory utilised in the present study is that outlined by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990). Following recording of the data, this method divides the coding of data into three discreet processes - Open coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding. Each of these will be discussed in turn, beginning with a generic explanation, followed by the specific procedure used in the present study.

Recording. Recording of the coding process in Grounded Theory occurs through the process of memo writing. These memos can take any number of forms, but the important aspect of them is that all categories, dimensions of categories and relationships are recorded throughout the coding process. Thus, all conceptualisations of the data are recorded, and as such, are incorporated into the emerging theory. In this way, the

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1 There are two recognised techniques for Grounded Theory Analysis. The original (Glaser & Strauss, 1968) was, until recent times, the only one. However, a second albeit similar method has been developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Interested readers are referred to these texts for a comparison.
emerging theory is a direct result of interaction with the data. This emerging theory also drives subsequent data collection.

*Open coding.* Open coding is the process whereby the researcher generates labels to describe the data. The data are broken down into discrete packages, and labelled according to the concepts present in them. These concepts or labels are referred to as categories. Categories are then defined in terms of the dimensions they possess, and how those dimensions may manifest. This process generally occurs early in the coding process, but may occur at any time as more categories are ‘discovered’.

*Axial coding.* This is the process of linking categories together through classifying them in terms of the relationships they have to other categories. Constant revisiting of the data confirms that these relationships do not in themselves form a new category (and as such, existing categories are confirmed). This process is particularly important in the current research when looking at goals, techniques, and motivations for ER. This second process is really a refinement of the first – the categorisation of data into meaning-rich categories.

*Selective coding.* This is an extension of Axial Coding, closely related to both of the above procedures. It seeks to formalise a hierarchy of categories, and the particular relationship that higher-level categories have to sub-categories. A central category is named, and all other categories related to it through relationships. From this, the theory can be formulated and explicated.

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2 Although these processes are indeed divisible, in practice, coding is a seamless process where all three processes are used simultaneously.
Procedure

The present study conducted in depth interviews of 35 participants in total. These were conducted in stages so as to allow for the researcher to develop theory and then generate further relevant data. These data drove changes in the interview format in order to elicit the most meaningful data from participants. The interviews were of a semi-structured format, and their format stayed static within each stage of questioning. The emphases of the questions were changed after interacting with the data from the previous stage of interviews. There were four stages of interviewing in total. The research described here was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

Participants

Thirty-five participants were recruited through the local student employment agency. Mostly Tertiary students, participants ranged in age from 18 to 43 years (median age was 20). Twenty were female and 15 were male. No participants had hearing or speech difficulties, and all had good conversational English skills. No participants had a background in emotion research. Participants were all given $15 cash incentive for participating in the research.

Interview Process

Interviews were conducted by the author. Participants were interviewed in a private laboratory in the Department of Psychology at the University of Canterbury. Interviews were audiotaped to allow for subsequent transcription. Salient notes were also
taken at this time by the interviewer. Participants filled out a demographic form, and were briefed on what the study involved. Participants were then presented with a list of emotions (Appendix 1) and were asked to think of an instance when they felt this emotion. The interviews centred on these emotional interactions.

The first series of interviews was purposely designed to cover as wide a range as possible, to try and embrace as many of the research questions as possible. It was envisaged that the later interviews would become more focussed as the theory developed.

The interviewing guide for the first set of interviews was as follows:

"Think of a salient time you experienced (emotion) and tell me about it."

"Who was present?"

"What happened and what was the sequence of events?"

"What emotions did you feel at the time?"

"Did you exercise any control over these emotions? How did you do this?"

"Why did you do it this way?"

"Was the regulation successful? How did you judge this?"

"Who was present that may have influenced your regulation?"

"Now, thinking back, what do you think your goals were in regulating emotions in this instance?"

"Was this technique typical of you in such situations. How might it have been different?"

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1 The structure of the later interviews differed markedly from the one described above, due to theoretical developments. Thus, it is deemed more appropriate to look at this development of interview structure in the analysis section.
Despite these rather structured questions, it must be emphasised that the interviews were not just a series of question and answer interactions. Interviews were allowed to diverge somewhat at the discretion of the interviewer, but only if this tactic appeared to offer some interesting data. Interviews took place for approximately 30 minutes each (range 15-62 minutes). After the interview, participants were debriefed, thanked and given their cash incentive.
CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

PREFACE

The following analysis follows the same path as the grounded theory process - namely, the gradual honing and refining of the data into a predictive and substantive theory of Emotion Regulation.

As such, the analysis begins by broadly addressing the research questions as outlined in the introduction, but then focuses on those aspects of the data most pertinent to the developing theory.

Each direct quote from interviewees⁴ is referenced using the following format: The number denotes the participant's assigned number in the sample. Next listed is the participants gender, and lastly, the emotion they were referring to. Thus, after a quote, the following may appear: (5, Male, Joy). This denotes the fifth interviewee was a male and the quote was in the context of a ‘joy’ experience. Where appropriate, emphasis may be added in bold - this is the author’s own addition. Triple full stops (...) indicate a pause of between 1 and 2 seconds. Any longer pauses are stated in brackets in the following manner: ... (4 sec) ...

When a dialogue exchange occurs, the interviewers dialogue is indicated by the prefix INT, the interviewee being denoted by their participation number. For example:

INT: “How did you do this?”

23: “I just left the room, and tried to calm down outside”

⁴ The terms ‘interviewee’ and ‘participant’ are used interchangeably throughout this and future chapters.
The first research question posed concerned the range of Emotion Regulation strategies used.

SECTION 1: TECHNIQUES OF EMOTION REGULATION

All of the techniques of ER reported by the interviewees are able to be captured within the taxonomy outlined by Gross (1998a). As such, the following section is organised using this taxonomy, for clarity, rather than its theoretical benefits.

As outlined in Chapter One, Gross (1988a) divides the range of ER strategies available to the individual into five discrete categories. They are Situation Selection, Situation Modification, Attentional Deployment, Cognitive Change and Response Modulation. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

**Situation Selection**

Probably the most overt and conscious of all ER strategies, Situation Selection involves choosing to be present or absent from a certain situation in order to modify an emotional experience.

This was largely reported to occur to avoid the effects of negative emotional experience. Typically, this involves gravitating away from an emotional situation.

One participant avoided seeing an acquaintance:

"I thought to myself, 'I couldn't really be bothered seeing her today' - it would get me wound up." (3, Female, Anger)
Another, after experiencing stage fright, removed herself:

"I just had to get out of there - to be away from the class and be by myself." (8, Female, Fear)

The same interviewee realised she was acting inappropriately at a party:

"It just hit home... I got out of there and went to the bathroom." (8, Female, Embarrassment)

Situation selection appears not to be for only emotion regulation purposes, but may serve a dual role; in this case, personal safety.

"I was walking home and some guys drove up beside me. I started running... it [the running] got me out of there, and it made me feel better as well." (15, Female, Fear)

Also, at a party with a ‘rough’ crowd:

"I knew things weren't gonna be OK, so I got outta there... I was so scared, and that's when I left." (26, Male, Fear)

Situation Selection is used also for social reasons. One interviewee reported his girlfriend being ‘obnoxious’ and his course of action:

"I left the room." (25, Male, Embarrassment)
Situation Selection was also used after the fact to ameliorate the effects of a negative emotional experience. After a car crash, one participant reported:

"I spent time by myself...like, there were heaps of people around and I had to just go into a room and space out." (32, Male, Fear)

Only one instance was reported of using Situation Selection to enhance a positive emotional experience:

"When I feel good about something, but can’t tell anyone, I’ll go and ring a friend or go visiting...It always makes me feel good." (17, Female, Joy)

**Situation Modification**

Situation Modification involves the individual exerting change upon the situation in order to change an emotional experience. This strategy was used exclusively with negative emotions. Techniques designed to reduce emotional experience were thus a common occurrence.

One interviewee was walking home late one night:

"I tried to ring all these people but no one was answering, which made me more panicky - I just wanted to be talking to someone as I walked home." (3, Female, Fear)
Guilt featured heavily as a subject of Situation Modification. In general, individuals took action to ameliorate the guilt feelings they had. Some involved social type actions:

"I couldn't be bothered comforting her [girlfriend], but I felt really guilty afterwards. Next time I was heaps better to her." (25, Male, Guilt)

"I felt really bad a bout not going [friends 21st birthday party], so I bought her a present... It made me feel better...[3 secs]...I felt like the situation was resolved in my head." (6, Female, Guilt)

Other used direct action. One participant gambled away grocery money.

"I replaced the money...I put it back in the kitty" (27, Female, Guilt)

Other emotions targeted by these techniques were embarrassment, and to a lesser extent, sadness:

"I was in my pyjamas when visitors came round...I ran and changed really quickly." (6, female, Embarrassment)

"I didn't make eye contact with him so I wouldn't cry...and I always changed the subject back to boring stuff, instead of how we were feeling." (29, Female, Sadness)
Attentional Deployment

Attentional Deployment involves shifting attention towards or away from an emotion-eliciting stimulus. While individuals used this strategy with regard to both positive and negative emotions, the two uses had very different qualities. When used in relation to positive emotion, the use of Attentional Deployment was for social reasons.

One participant performed well in a sporting encounter:

16 - "I wasn’t going to let it get on top of me. I just concentrated on the game."

INT - "What would be the problem with that?"

16 - "If you are gloating, you will get cut down. No one likes a show pony." (16, Male, Joy)

Similar events occurred when one participant was doing well in a joint job interview:

"You don’t want to rub other peoples face in it…Just concentrate on what you are doing, then you don’t even think of doing that." (28, Female, Joy)

In contrast to the positive emotions, individuals targeted negative emotions for several reasons. However, an overarching theme present here was that individuals used Attentional Deployment in order to change a negative feeling state for their own ends.

"I ignore it most of the time…I’ll go for a jog...otherwise I’ll think about it too much, and it’ll drive me crazy" (19, Female, Guilt)
"I'm afraid of a lot of things, like heights"

INT- "How do you deal with them?"

"Grip the rail and think of other things..." (6, Female, Fear)

This dichotomy of use of Attentional Deployment was echoed throughout the data.

**Cognitive Change**

Cognitive Change involves the use of re-appraisal of situations in order to change the emotional outcome. Cognitive Change was by far the most common form of Emotion Regulation utilised by interviewees. It occurred across every domain of emotion, and was reported at least once by all participants. Its broad definitional nature is perhaps one reason for its ubiquity. The most common emotions targeted by this technique were the socially motivating (Lazarus, 1991) emotions - those that spur us to change our actions. The two socially motivating emotions investigated in the present study were Guilt and Embarrassment.

**Guilt**

Guilt was addressed by interviewees largely through justification and rationalisation:

"I justify it to myself by saying 'I did the right thing eventually'." (18, Female.

**Guilt**)
"In my own head I justified what had happened and what I had done... yea." (20, Male, Guilt)

"What I did was bad, but not to the same extent after she cheated on my friend."

(30, Female, Guilt)

Embarrassment

Embarrassment was subject to the same processes, but, it appears, dealt with without the same urgency:

"I laugh about it now, and think about how it could have been worse." (28, Female, Embarrassment)

On telling a joke and failing to get a good response, one participant reflects:

"Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t... It just depends on whether you take it on board or not." (26, Male, Embarrassment)

Anger also featured. It appears that Cognitive Change is seen as a key way to ‘calm down’ and reduce the experience of this emotion.

"I would just think... 'OK, its not his fault – don’t go off at him." (19, Female, Anger)

"I put myself in the other person’s situation." (16, Male, Anger)
Fear was also a common target of this technique. One participant thought he left his house open my mistake:

"...I think several times I said to myself 'whatever happens happens'." (20, Male, Fear)

Another was faced with a physical challenge at an adventure camp:

"I tried to calm myself by thinking... 'Everybody else did it'." (23, Female, Fear)

The examples reported here reflect a greater theme present in the data. That is, that Cognitive Change is used to help an individual's own feeling state rather than for social means.

Response Modulation

Response Modulation involves changing the physical response to an emotion. This may be the transformation of external signs of emotional experience, such as facial expressions, or changing internal states, such as 'butterflies' in Fear situations. There were two broad constructs present here. One was the hiding of an emotional reaction for social ends, such as not crying in front of others. The other involved transforming the emotional response for the individuals own ends.

Hiding Public Emotion

Hiding the response to an emotion so as to not make it public was a very common strategy. It occurred across both positive and negative emotions, but the unifying factor
was that it occurred for social reasons. One of these reasons was to ‘save face’. One participant felt condescended by a friend’s comments:

INT: “Did you control your response?”

25: “Yes...I didn’t want to talk about it.”

INT: “Why?”

25: “I guess I’m worried that everyone will think that my mate is cooler or stronger than me...or can talk to me that way.” (25, Male, Anger)

Another received some bad feedback from a tutor:

28: “...you have to be so smiley and happy all the time, but on the inside I was boiling.”

INT: “Why do you have to be like this?”

28: “Just so you don’t look like a whiner.” (28, Female, Anger)

Another suffered from stage fright:

INT: “Did you show anything?”

33: “I tried not to...I tried to put on a brave face.”

INT: “Why?”

33: “I don’t want to look like a coward, so I don’t hide from anything.” (33, Male, Embarrassment)

The other form of Response Modulation for social ends was for the benefit of others, rather than the self. One participant was voted in as class president:
"I suppressed how happy I was... I didn’t want to seem too... like I was gloating or anything like that... and not to hurt other peoples feelings." (20, Male, Pride)

Similar values were reflected by other participants:

INT: “Did you express it?”

28: “I think I bottled it up inside... so you don’t look like you are going on about yourself. (3 secs). a sign of arrogance I guess.” (28, Female, Pride)

Besides using Response Modulation for social reasons, participants reported using these techniques to change an internal feeling state they were experiencing:

“I had never been in a deep pool before, and it made me feel sick... I went to the spa to settle down and get rid of the sick feeling.” (6, Female, Fear)

“I stormed around a bit and cleaned everything... to try and just release it [anger] somehow.” (23, Female, Anger)

Summary: The Types of Emotion Regulation Used.

The initial analysis of the data utilising Gross’s (1998a) taxonomy in terms of the ER techniques selected by individuals yielded interesting themes. Several techniques were favoured above others in particular situations, and were seen as more successful as a result. For instance, Cognitive Change was highly used for guilt and embarrassment situations and Response Modulation was seen to be effective in dissipating anger. The
taxonomy of Gross (1998a) was useful. It captured all of the techniques used by individuals and allowed them to be categorised. However, the taxonomy has several drawbacks. These were not so much due to the limitations of this taxonomy, but rather the limitations of taxonomy itself. By this I mean that the use of a pre-defined technique limits the ability to freely identify salient causal constructs in these data. Indeed, it could be seen to be breaking a central tenet of Grounded Theory research - that is, allowing all constructs to derive from the data. Analysing the data in the way described above yielded no central unifying construct. There were patterns, but these were the exception rather than the rule. It was, therefore, felt that these patterns could be better explained by ideas other than Gross's taxonomy. Thus, further analysis was required. The first step of this was to abandon the taxonomy of Gross (1998a) and to proceed with coding as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As will be seen below, this yielded a rich series of themes which form the basis of the theory of Emotion Regulation that was developed from the present study. This theory is described in detail in Chapter Four.
SECTION 2: THE IDENTIFICATION OF A CENTRAL CONSTRUCT

To identify a central construct, the data were examined further. In the first series of interviews, it was observed that the selection of Emotion Regulation techniques by participants was neither random nor exclusive to specific situations or emotions. Instead, the factors surrounding an Emotion Regulation act were highly complex. These factors concerned several aspects of the situation, the emotion and cognitions of the individual. For instance, one participant felt it was acceptable to show emotion in front of her sister:

  *INT*: "Did you control the emotion in any way?"

  *3*: "Nah...I'm pretty relaxed around her." (3, Female, Joy)

Another decided to control their emotion:

  "I did try to control it a little bit...I had to control it a bit in front of him because I felt slightly guilty about going when he wasn't." (6, Female, Joy)

The first quote reveals that there is a value that this individual holds - namely, that it is acceptable to show emotion in front of some people (in this case her sister), but perhaps not in front of others. She also alludes to state of awareness she was experiencing in relation to the said emotion by using the word 'relaxed'. The second quote clearly shows a social motivation for ER: so as not to feel guilty, participant six controls her happiness in front of a friend. On the back of such data, the emphasis for the second set of interviews was these surrounding factors that influence an emotional encounter. The third and fourth stages of interviewing continued down this line of investigation. As such, for the purposes of clarity, all analyses beyond this point refer to data from all stages of
interviewing, rather than an attempt to delineate what idea was gleaned from each particular stage. Re-coding of early interview data also occurred, so data from initial interviews were used with respect to ideas gleaned from later interviews. The differential emphases of the later two interview stages will be referred to in due course. What follows is a discussion of the surrounding factors that influence ER.

The Power of Situation

As suggested above, one theme that quickly became apparent from early data was that ER was highly dependent on the situation in which the emotional encounter occurred. Individuals reported monitoring, assessing and adjusting their emotional responses depending on the setting they were in. Thus, such processes were central to the selection and execution of ER techniques. These surrounding factors, discussed below, are complex and highly intertwined. As such, a linear discussion of these factors is difficult. However, an overarching theme is social and emotional monitoring by individuals.

Social and Emotional Monitoring

A good point of entry into these surrounding situational factors is the idea of social monitoring. Put simply, this is the familiar phenomenon of taking notice of our social world. This occurs in our emotional lives also. All interviewees reported some form of social monitoring in relation to ER. This monitoring occurred at several levels, from the most general observations to highly specific aspects of the emotional encounter.
In general, participants were quick to recall the salient aspects of the emotional encounter, implying that they assessed these aspects at the time of the encounter. These aspects ranged from who was present through to how others present may have been feeling themselves.

"I remember it was my sister and my mum... but she couldn't really hear what we were saying." (16, Male, Pride)

"I wrote a letter and rang, but I think he was too angry to see that I made an effort." (28, Female, Guilt)

The reasons for this monitoring were important to isolate - if such monitoring occurs, then there must be some reason for it. As later analysis will show, monitoring is merely an initial step in a complex series of cognitions and behaviours that give rise to Emotion Regulation. One reason why monitoring occurs is because the presence of others impinges on the ER process.

People and Emotion Regulation

A major theme present in the data is the effect of others on our decisions surrounding ER. These effects were many and varied, but can be grouped into several overarching themes.

Relationship to others. Interviewees reported the relationship they had with others as key in an emotional encounter. In general, if individuals know each other well, then
more emotion is able to be expressed. Conversely, if individuals are not as close, emotion is more likely to be regulated.

"I'd play it down to most people... except my parents I think." (12, Female, Pride)

"If people know me then it's OK for me to tell them what I feel - good or bad..." (18, Female, Pride)

"It didn't really matter what emotions I showed... at other times it might... in front of people who I really didn't want to let know" (21, Female, Pride)

INT: "Is this [not showing emotion] typical for you?"

16: "In a group situation for sure. If I was one-on-one with somebody I knew I could trust, and I was close with, then I'd probably be more out there" (16, Male, Sadness)

Emotion Regulation also occurred in order to keep social bonds strong and maintain friendships.

"I hate being on bad terms with people... so I made it better." (8, Female, Guilt)

30: "I've learnt from going to Christian schools that you have to be gracious all the time... and I think I am."

INT: "What do you think your goal is in doing that?"
30: "I think it is keeping friendships and keeping a common ground." (30, female, Joy)

_Camaraderie._ Individual's used criteria such as closeness of relationship to make decisions around ER. However, some individual's extended this criteria to those with shared perspectives. This was seen as analogous to closeness by some:

"[We can share feelings] because we train together [team] and we know each other when it comes to that." (8, Female, Joy)

"Because she was another female, I felt OK about talking to her about it...it actually made me feel better." (6, Female, Anger)

The closeness or otherwise of a person's relationship with others is not the only person-related variable affecting ER. A person's status and role within the social group also matters:

"You just have to be calm in front of them 'cause they're your tutors..." (28, Female, Anger)

"It was her status as his ex-wife that made me scared - I wasn't hiding it because of her, but because of who she was to him." (30, Female, Fear)

A central tenet of Grounded Theory is the search for a single, unifying construct in the data. Despite the previous analyses revealing several cogent themes, a central
construct is absent. Therefore, a change in focus was required. What is apparent from the 
above discussion is that ER is driven by underlying motivations. In the above examples, 
these motivations can be conceptualised as being socially derived. In order to isolate the 
central construct present in the data, the analysis must therefore look towards such core 
themes. Therefore, the central construct chosen in the analysis from this point on was the 
motives individual’s had surrounding ER.
SECTION 3: THE MOTIVES FOR EMOTION REGULATION

Examining the driving forces behind Emotion Regulation yielded two broad categories of motivations. The first of these is those motives that can be conceptualised as being primarily social. The second, smaller category, looks at motivations primarily for the self. A final section addresses when these two categories of motivation compete.

I: Social Motivation

When further pressed about the reasons for changing ER patterns depending on the people present, participants revealed deeper motivations for behaving in these ways. Many of these motivations are related to the idea of personal relationships, but extend much further. One such construct is social acceptability.

Social Acceptability

All interviewees either directly addressed or alluded to social reasons for regulating (or not regulating) emotion. Many of these reasons related to the individual appearing socially desirable or acceptable.

"I didn’t want to seem to irrational...definitely...I didn’t want to seem too crazy in front of her." (3, Female, Anger)

"I would feel a lot happier about crying in front of someone I knew well - don’t want to make a fool of myself [in front of strangers] I guess." (18, Female, Pride)
“Sometimes I don’t share my pride with people ...(3 secs)... they might think it’s just real dumb.” (6, Female, Pride)

The direct admissions seen above from participants about social acceptability and desirability were, however, relatively rare. More often, getting to the source of such motives involved considerable drawing out on the part of the interviewer. For example:

21: “You just don’t do that.”
INT: “Do what in particular?”
21: “Act like that in front of people.”
INT: “Why not do you think?”
21: “No-one does it...you just don’t do that.”
INT: “Why do you think that is...that people don’t tend to react angrily like that?”
21: “I dunno...you don’t want to look crazy.” (21, Female, Anger)

This is but one example of motives not being spontaneously volunteered by participants. Such examples were commonplace and perhaps reflect a wider construct here - that such motivations are implicit in our society. That is, they do not require conscious effort, and may even occur relatively unconsciously. This could be seen as a reflection of wider cultural values rather than individual opinion. The third and fourth sets of interviews concentrated more on this phenomenon - the social motivations behind such acts. Further evidence for these wider cultural influences was reflected in the values
expressed in interviewee's comments. These themes are grouped into three sections. The first looks at general cultural influences, whereas the second addresses how people react to such influences. The final section looks at whether these cultural influences are universal across cultures.

Wider Cultural Values

Several instances occurred of participants alluding to wider cultural influences. They are grouped here under three themes.

Theme 1 - Don't appear over-confident. Out of all the cultural and societal values referred to by participants, by far the most prevalent was the reticence of individuals to appear confident or arrogant. Such aspects were directly referred to by more than half of interviewees and related most often to the expression of positive emotions to others - particularly pride and joy.

A typical example was a student who got selected to a representative sports team:

INT: “Did you let that pride show?”

5: “A little bit...not **too much**.

INT: “Why?”

5: “Don’t want to seem cocky or full of yourself.”

Such examples were commonplace. In this case the evidence is present in two forms - the direct content of the comment, but also, as the bold typeface indicates, in the language
used. By using this approach, the analysis gleaned much more meaningful constructs than through the use of direct, content-based analysis alone. An example of such evidence is below. One participant recalled feelings of pride following a seminar presentation:

INT: "Why did you not show any emotion...do you think?"

9: "'cause I wanted everyone to remember me for the professional way in which I did it. (9, Male, Pride)

The language use here is interesting. The participant loads value into the comment not immediately apparent in a content analysis with his use of words. His use of 'professional' reveals a value he holds, namely that a display of pride here would be unprofessional. This implicit meaning present in participants' language occurred elsewhere.

"I'd rather humble myself than be a show pony." (16, Male, Pride)

"If you are gloating and you get cut down, then the crash is going to be worse."

(16, Male, Pride)

23: "I felt like I didn't want to rub it in too much."

INT: "Why is that?"

"Arrogance I guess - I didn't want to appear big headed." (23, Female, Pride)
In this last example, the social aspect is salient in the word "appear" but also, a greater value is again seen in the language used: Big headed - a derogatory term for over zealous pride.

On pressing participant's as to why arrogance and over-confidence is problematic, the idea of social consequences emerged.

*INT: "Why is arrogance a problem?"

*25: "maybe because they seem too inwardly centred...almost disregarding of the situation around them." (25, Male, Pride)

*26: "There's a fine line between conceit and confidence." (26, Male, Pride)

*I didn't want to seem too...like I was gloating or anything like that...and not to hurt other people's feelings." (20, Male, Pride)

These comments are interesting in that in part they reflect a commonly held value, namely that over zealous displays of pride are undesirable, but also that there are consequences for not holding such a value. Again, the essential social motivator is present.
Theme 2: *No expression is strong.* A second common cultural value alluded to by interviewees was the idea that emotional displays are somewhat of a problem, and non-expression of emotion indicates ‘character’ in the individual. One individual had some success in organising a social activity:

*INT:* "Did you show that joy?"

25: "No…I think…not to look to **vulnerable** or particularly dependent on my **flatmates**." (25, Male, Joy)

He further elaborates:

"I probably just learnt to do it…maybe it’s me trying to look independent or **strong** or something." (25, Male, Joy)

This direct allusion to this value was mirrored elsewhere in the data, albeit in more subtle ways:

"When I was little, I really used to **expose myself** and I used to get upset about everything…so I just sort of changed…(2.5 secs)...I realised I didn’t **have to be** like that." (14, Female, Sadness)

The language use here ("have to be") implies that she has shed an undesirable aspect of her emotional behaviour - presumably for social reasons as revealed by the use of the word ‘expose’. 
Further evidence of this value being primarily a social phenomenon was offered by another interviewee. While present at a funeral, he feels sadness for an uncle's death:

16: "I tried to hold it down...I didn't want to show it."

INT: "Why...didn't you want to show it?"

16: "I don't know... I guess maybe I was concerned about what other people might think... (3 secs)... it seems pretty shallow." (16, Male, Sadness)

Conversely, in private situations, the same value seems not to be a factor:

"I was by myself, so I just went 'yea'." (9, Male, Joy)

Such evidence would seem to add credence to the idea that social reasons are a motivator for ER in these instances.

Theme 3: Others will judge you. Related to the first two constructs in this section, (and more indirectly to all the social situations thus far mentioned), is the idea that others stand in judgement depending on how we manage our emotions. This theme was particularly strong in the data.

"Sometimes I don't share my pride with some people...they might think it's dumb." (6, Female, Pride)

INT: "Did you control the anger?"

25: "Yep...I didn't want to talk about it"

INT: "Why was that?"
25: “I guess I’m worried that everyone will think that my flatmate is cooler or stronger than me...by not being angry.” (25, Male, Anger)

“I wanted to give her a hug, but because my flatmate was there, I was quite apprehensive.” (32, Male, Joy)

Sometimes, judgement had greater consequences:

INT: “Why didn’t you show your fear?”

31: “Probably because those guys would have made a move on us.” (31, Male, Fear)

“I knew things weren’t going to be OK...I couldn’t hide it so that’s why I left.”

(26, Male, Fear)

Although such judgement was salient to participants at times, on other occasions, the same reticence to show emotion was not present. This was due to the emotion display being sanctioned by others.

“My parents were acting like it was a big deal, so I didn’t care if I looked proud or whatever.” (6, Female, Pride)
The Desirability of Showing Emotion

Several interviewees expressed that the social influences that cause them to regulate emotion were not welcome. Indeed, if it were not for these influences, their style of emotion management would be different:

"I think it's a shame we have to learn to hide our emotions, but we have to because everyone else is doing it." (26, Male, Fear)

"I usually don't show my emotions, but I try to... I want to I mean." (31, Male, Joy)

"I probably didn't show it the way I wanted to... I wanted to give her a hug." (32, Male, Joy)

Universality

The above sections show that there are certain social expectations around social encounters. There remains the question of whether these same social rules exist over cultural boundaries. Several interviewees were from a culture other than New Zealand, and, as such, they provided interesting insights into the universality or otherwise of such social 'rules'. Two main themes have been identified here.
Theme 1: Expression in New Zealand. Several foreign interviewees expressed the idea that in New Zealand, expression of emotion is generally not as common or acceptable as in other cultures.

"In Mexico, people are a lot more open about their feelings...more showing happiness and anger. " (33, Male, Anger)

"In the States, people are a lot more open about these feelings...you are allowed to show them." (20, Male, Joy)

Theme 2: Self-confidence in New Zealand. A second theme was iterated by participants with experience of other cultures - namely, that self-confidence or ‘talking yourself up’ is not as acceptable here as in other cultures.

"There’s a lot more boasting where I come from...it’s ok there. “ (33, Male [Mexico] Pride)

"People are so coy about what they do here...in California, you have to stand out." (22, female, Pride)

This seems to provide evidence that there is not so much universal ‘rules’ in emotion expression, but culture specific ones.
**Personality and Culture**

While it is apparent that culture impinges on ER processes, the data also show significant individual differences in how these influences manifest. In short, the result of an emotional encounter is not solely due to cultural or situational factors, but also the individuals involved, and in particular, their personality. Such individual differences were present in the data, and as such, warrant comment. What follows is a selection of constructs that encompass these individual personality differences.

**Theme 1: The omnipresent personality.** The nature of the interview was such that it was only able to provide a mere ‘snapshot’ of people’s emotional lives. Despite this point, several participants showed clear patterns of ER, even across different emotional situations. These examples will be grouped by individual.

Participant 8 - Female

This Participant showed a pattern of ER that employed high levels of avoidance, or to use a term from Gross’s (1998a) taxonomy, situation selection. Her standard approach to unpleasant emotion was to ‘get out’ of the situation. For instance, a presentation in front of her school class went badly.

8: “I had to get out of there...just be by myself.”

INT: “Is this typical of you?”

8: “I’m more likely to run than confront it.” (8, Female, Fear)

A similar technique was used to control her anger at a sporting loss.
"I can sort of control it during the game, but afterwards I just have to get out of there." (8, Female, Anger)

Again, a similar technique is used in an embarrassing situation when friends confronted her about behaviour at a party.

"This guy said to me 'If only [boyfriend] was here to see you'... it just hit home so I ran to the bathroom." (8, Female, Embarrassment)

Theme 2: Individual values. Distinct from being a pervasive pattern of ER, interviewees also referred to values important to them as individuals. These may, or may not, impinge on ER processes depending on their relevance. Participant 15 is a good example.

Participant 15 - Male

This individual distinguished between genders to a large degree when referring to his emotion management style. In short, it was less appropriate to show emotions in front of males than females. In a situation of pride, he decided to not display his feelings.

"You just sort of keep it to yourself...you wouldn't talk about it with rugby guys really." (15, Male, Pride)

However, he referred to interactions with females as being different.

"With the girls, you can come over a bit happier than with the guys...girls don't worry about that." (15, Male, Joy)
Such a dichotomy must also impinge on ER style, but perhaps not to the level seen in the previous example.

Despite there being obvious social reasons behind the ER seen here, there are quite plainly personality factors that impinge on this process also. Any complete theory of ER must address these individual factors to be a complete explanation of why ER occurs and how it unfolds.

II: Motivation for Self

Several instances of ER mentioned by participants were not socially motivated. This separate category of motivation can be explained in a single construct - regulation for the self, or put another way, efforts to change one’s own feeling state. Several interviewees mentioned this as a motivation and, in all instances, it was in relation to ‘unpleasant’ emotional experiences - primarily guilt and anger.

"I didn’t like it [the feeling] and I made a conscious effort... I knew I had to relax." (6 Female, Anger)

"I wrote them a letter to help myself really... I didn’t want to have negative, unpleasant memories on my mind." (9 Male, Guilt)

21: “I think I avoided it at first...to put it out of my mind. Then I told her after a few weeks."

INT: “Why did you decide to tell her?”
21. “Probably to make me feel better...just ’cause I didn’t want the stress of it.” (21, Female, Guilt)

“I stormed around a bit and cleaned everything...to try and just release it...somehow.” (23, Female, Anger)

Other instances of modifying one’s feeling state that did not involve these two emotions were also present in the data. However, these instances on closer inspection reveal a social motivation for emotion management (for instance, trying not to feel happy in the presence of others), and as such, are covered in preceding sections.

III: When Motivations Compete

So far, two broad categories of motivations have been identified: those that are primarily to do with social influences, and those to do with the desire to change an internal feeling state. The question of how these motivations may interact is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, but the data do hold some evidence of these two motivations competing. For instance, an individual may be feeling angry, and wanting to get rid of that state, but the social situation does not ‘allow’ it. Several instances involved this trade-off between self and social worlds.

“I thought to myself that I should go...to see her and stuff, but I wasn’t in the mood for a full on intense conversation that day.” (3, Female, Guilt)
On one hand, participant three feels compelled to visit a friend, and as such experiences an emotion eliciting situation, as revealed by the comment “I wasn’t in the mood for...” (an example of Situation Selection). However, her own feeling state takes precedence, and as such, she decides to avoid the situation altogether.

Another interviewee made a similar decision.

“I knew I was being rude by not going, but I just hate those things. In the end I sent her a present instead.” (6, Female, Guilt)

Several instances were reported where individuals let their social motivations win out over the want to change their own feeling state.

“I was really angry, and wanted to show them that...I knew it would make me feel better. But I didn’t want to look like a freak...I hardly knew them.” (11, Female, Anger)

“You feel better if you show it...but you can’t always do that which is a pity.” (17, Female, Joy)

There are surely several factors that control this competition of motivations, but of those mentioned, cultural and personality factors seem likely to be important.
SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

The analysis in the present study comprised three sections. Section One grouped the techniques used by individuals according to the taxonomy outlined by Gross (1998a). All of the techniques reported by interviewees could be classified under this taxonomy. Despite this, patterns of ER were not overly apparent using this taxonomy, and instead, were the exception rather than the rule. It was, however, essential to group the data in this way, as this was the only existing taxonomy available. Any additional data analysis must therefore be more effective than the Gross technique to be of use in theory building. The Gross taxonomy thus provided a useful yardstick in this analysis.

Initial interviews pointed to more obvious patterns in the data, not with regard to the specific techniques used, but rather the situation that gave rise to them. Subsequent analysis thus focused on these situational factors.

In Section Two, social monitoring was found to occur in most ER situations, and reasons for this were important to isolate. A convenient way of looking at these reasons were to look at the motivations of individuals in these situations. This was indeed a rich vein of data to analyse, and several new themes became apparent. This was the focus of Section Three.

The most obvious theme was that the presence of others affected the ER process. Specific factors here were such things as the closeness of personal relationships, social bonds, camaraderie and social status. The motivation behind such acts can universally be covered by concepts such as social acceptability and social desirability.

Despite there being obvious and somewhat individual motivations behind many such acts, the idea that wider cultural values also play a role in ER was also present in
the data. Interviewees reported numerous cultural ‘rules’ that affected their ER selection and execution. Examples of these rules from the current sample were such things as not appearing over-confident and not showing emotion where possible. However, rather than these rules being universal, they appeared to be defined quite specifically by the culture in which the individual was functioning. This was evidenced by several interviewees from other cultures explicating a different set of cultural values from the largely native New Zealand sample.

Cultural values were not the only extra-situational factor affecting ER. There was also evidence in these data that an individual’s personality affects ER patterns. This was seen in both individuals whose entire emotional lives appeared to be shaped by specific individual traits, to those who held very specific values pertaining to only a small percentage of emotional encounters. Strongly related to personality is the non-social motivation for ER – namely, Emotion Regulation for the self. Several individuals reported modifying an emotional experience to make themselves feel better. This motivation however, was rarely seen to outweigh the more omnipresent social motivations, although competition did occur in some instances.

The data in this section drove the analysis to a very different place from the beginning of the analysis. Instead of looking at ER in a taxonomic fashion, the concept of motivations was found to hold much more power in explaining ER processes. It is thus possible, on the strength of this analysis to build a theory of Emotion Regulation based on individuals’ motives.
CHAPTER FOUR: MOTIVATIONAL EMOTION REGULATION

THEORY

Preface

What follows is a brief explication of the theory of Emotion Regulation derived from the above analysis. An in depth critique of the theory and how it relates to other ideas of Emotion, ER and Psychology in general, occurs in Chapter Five. As such, the current section is not designed to be a complete treatise, but rather an economical way to outline the theory and its basic aims and premises.

Despite the theory being derived in large from the above Grounded Theory analysis, it also incorporates extant literature and research within the field of emotion. The complete theory should therefore be regarded as the result of the interaction of the current data with emotion research in general, rather than a completely autonomous work born only of the current data. Where other research or writings are relevant, they will be referred to in due course.

Tenets of the Theory

Motivational Emotion Regulation Theory (MERT) takes as its starting point that individuals possess the ability to exercise control over their emotional lives. As such, this control must be driven by motivations. However, emotion research barely touches on motivations as a concept\(^5\), and Emotion Regulation research tends to only allude to motivations or mention them in passing (e.g., Larsen, 2000). I posit that the roots of human behaviour are driven by motivations (not a particularly controversial

\(^5\) Notable exceptions to this are present in the work of Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987), and Stein, Trabasso & Liwag, (1993, cited in Strongman, 2003).
MERT posits that individuals exercise control over their emotional life for two primary reasons:

1) To meet social ends of some description.
2) To regulate their internal feeling state.

Either or both of these motivations may be present in any emotional encounter. Furthermore, these motivations may be in competition, with the outcome being governed by several outside factors such as social situation, status, personality and cultural values. These two motivations are discussed below.

**Meeting Social Ends**

This is by far the more complex motivation that individuals report for practicing ER. In short, it is present to meet some sort of social goal. Thus, this motivation is only observed in individuals when they are in some sort of social encounter. This motivation is seen to be by far the most important by most individuals – their internal feeling state coming a poor second in most situations. Furthermore, this complex motivation is affected by several factors.

**Culture**

Culture may be regarded as the most pervasive factor that affects the emotional encounter. The reason for this is that a cultural setting sets many of the ‘rules’ around an emotional encounter, and as such, it has a huge effect on how any emotional experience pans out. All of the factors below have culture as their primary

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5 Notable exceptions to this are present in the work of Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987), and Stein, Trabasso & Liwag, (1993, cited in Strongman, 2003).
mediator, as the importance of these other factors is largely determined by these intrinsic cultural values. Culture is an overarching influence.

Social setting. The setting that the emotional encounter occurs in also vital. In structured situations, such as a job interview or the teaching of a class, expressions of emotion are generally seen as undesirable. This lack of desirability typically diminishes as a situation becomes less formal or structured. Thus, informal situations such as a party or a rock concert are seen as acceptable places to show emotion, regardless of the individuals present.

Observer makeup. Individuals are more likely to be circumspect with their displays of emotion in settings where they are being observed by those who are unfamiliar. These ‘unfamiliar’ observers can be classified into two categories.

i) True strangers: The observers are truly unknown to the individual, and as such, are ‘emotional unknowns’.

ii) Emotional strangers: The observers may be known to the individual in any capacity, but there is a sufficient lack of knowledge and intimacy in their relationship so as to not allow unrestricted displays of emotion. Thus, these individuals are strangers in the world of emotion.

An important point is that individuals can be true strangers, but not emotional strangers. Thus, at times, it is acceptable to show emotion around these individuals. Witness the fervour at a major sporting event as an example. It seems that certain
social rules surround the display of emotion to strangers. The most important of these is shared emotional experience. Thus, it would not be seen as normal to show a lot of emotion around true strangers unless an emotion-eliciting stimulus is present that has been experienced by all.

*Observer importance.* Despite the closeness or otherwise of individuals in an emotional encounter, there is another factor is present which individuals take into account when they factor in observers. That is, the perceived importance of those who are present. If an individual experiences emotion, the resulting display of that emotion can be modified by the perceived importance of those present. If an individual perceives an audience as being unimportant, many of the rules surrounding emotional display may be abandoned. Conversely, around those who are seen to be highly important, extra attention is paid to the social rules surrounding the encounter.

*Personality.* Rather than being a standalone factor, the effect of personality must regarded as a overarching influence. Personality affects the degree to which factors like culture and observer makeup affect the emotional encounter. Therefore, personality ‘filters’ the effect of the other factors, and as such, can affect the outcome of an emotional encounter greatly. For instance, a socially anxious person may regard most people as being important in an emotional encounter, whereas a less socially anxious individual may only rarely regard observers as being important.

Regulating Internal Feeling State

The second category of ER related motivation is the regulation of internal feeling state. This is the reason most individuals refer to when first questioned about
their ER patterns. This occurs under various circumstances, but all share one common point. That is, the individual does not feel how they wish to, either through the presence or lack of an emotion, and as such, they attempt to change this feeling.

This particular motivation is targeted primarily at the experience of the emotion – the outward appearance of the emotion being secondary in importance.

**Motivations In Competition**

Like many motivations in everyday life, the two motivations outlined can often conflict with each other, and as such, need to be prioritised. Think of the following example:

"I was really angry at him – I just wanted to let it rip and let him know how he was acting towards my Mother. I knew it would feel great, but I didn't want to look like ... irrational. I knew I had to keep my head if he was going to listen to me at all."

This is a prime example of how the two motivations for ER can co-exist in an emotional encounter. On one hand, the interviewee reports wanting to show the emotion he is feeling inside, so as to change his obviously upset feeling state. Yet on the other hand, he thinks that this would affect his chances of having a successful interaction – his primary social goal in this instance. He has weighed up the options and decided to not show the emotion he is experiencing, and as such, the social motivation wins over. This is typical of the many decisions we make about our Emotion Regulation on a daily basis. This competition among motivations is the key to understanding the ER behaviour of individuals.
A Model of Emotion Regulation

Using MERT, I have conceptualised the Emotion Regulation process. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic model of ER according to MERT. The model shows two axes representing the two categories of motivation affecting ER.

The Social Motivation

The upper axis of figure 1 represents the 'Social' motivation. When an emotion-eliciting event occurs in the presence of others or in any other social setting, the social motivation is activated. Feeding into this motivation is the culture in which the emotional exchange is taking place. This in turn affects the variables of social setting and observer variables. These feed into the main axis, providing the individual with the information required to make an informed decision on the appropriate type of ER to use, if any. The 'personality filter' in turn gets this information, and based upon an individual's own characteristics and values, the social motivation may or may not be modified. From here, the decision to modify emotion may or may not occur, and if it does, the strategy to use is selected.

The 'Self' Motivation

In any emotional event, the 'Self' motivation may be present. It is simply a thermostat-like mechanism whereby the individual assesses if he or she is in their desired emotional state. The personality filter again gets this information and a decision to regulate or not occurs. This idea borrows heavily from Bonnano's (2001) approach to ER.
Competition and Decision

When two motivations are present, there exists a need to choose one over the other. This occurs late in the ER process, and is a function of all the previous processes. This point must be viewed as a final ‘weighing up’ of the outputs of the two motivations, and as such, is a reflection of the previous processes than a distinct phase in and of itself. To use a democratic analogy; the votes have already been cast, but the winner is about to be announced.
Figure 1. A diagrammatic model of Motivational Emotion Regulation Theory (MERT). Following an emotion-eliciting event, cultural, social and observer variables impinge on an individual’s ‘social’ motivation. Personality also ‘filters’ any of these effects. There may also be a concurrent motivation for the self, depending on whether an individual is in his or her desired state. Competition may result between these two motivations, and depending on the outcome, a strategy of Emotion Regulation results.
CHAPTER FIVE: A CRITIQUE OF MOTIVATIONAL EMOTION REGULATION THEORY

Like any theory, it is desirable for MERT to be evaluated and tested to assess its worth. However, a further programme of empirical research is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in the present context, a thorough critique of MERT is only possible by looking at it in two ways. Firstly, evaluating it with regard to the research currently available; and secondly, assessing its ability to expand on the current literature.

The following discussion is organised into five sections. Firstly, the initial aims of the research are re-examined and MERT is evaluated alongside these aims. Secondly, MERT is analysed with regard to the requirements that Lazarus (1991) postulated that a theory of emotion should have. Thirdly, MERT is evaluated against the existing literature as reviewed in Chapter One. In Section Four, the theory is examined for its ability to generate new and useful research questions, in a manner not currently achieved by existing models. The final section summarises the work as a whole, and concludes as to its worth.

Section One: Revisiting the Research Aims.

In Chapter One, I outlined several initial aims of the current research. The theory that has been presented satisfies several of these aims. However, the necessities of Grounded Theory require that themes apparent in the data be followed. As such, some of the original aims were not met as well they might have been in a more structured research programme. What follows is the discussion of how well the
current research satisfied several of these aims, followed by an explanation of why other initial aims were not as well met.

**Definition**

The field of Emotion Regulation research is characterised by several problems - the most immediate being the problem of definition. Gross (1998a) sought to address this problem by investigating the underlying processes that give rise to ER. On page three, I wrote the following:

"The current research seeks, through the generation of a theory of Emotion Regulation, to circumvent these definitional issues. It will do this by clarifying what these ‘underlying processes’ actually are, and basing a theory around them."

The question then must be, ‘does MERT clarify these processes, and does this in turn lead to addressing definitional issues?’ I posit that it does.

The central idea of MERT is that ER is caused by motivation (which must, in itself, be seen as being an underlying process). MERT does however go further. It states that these motivations are in turn predicated on deeper underlying processes - these processes being social, cultural, personality and setting dependant. In this respect, MERT goes further than any other current conceptualisation of ER in identifying these processes and stating their role in ER. Despite MERT not being able to be more specific about how these processes differentially affect the ER process, it does allow for the generation of research hypotheses that can begin to investigate the impact of these surrounding factors. This greatly improves on the historical problems
of definition within this field. A deeper discussion of MERT's potential to do this is presented in section four.

**Theoretical Framework**

Previously, I made the point that ER research lacks a clear unifying theoretical framework (see p.6). Does MERT help remedy this? I believe again that it does. In order to adequately explain my position here, further accounts of several related themes is required. I shall thus address this question in the final section of this chapter.

**How Well does MERT Predict ER?**

MERT is the first model or theory of ER that goes some of the way to actually predicting how and why ER may occur in any particular circumstance. By introducing variables such as personality and social influence (albeit only conceptually at present), it is possible to begin to delineate the individual situational factors that give rise to ER. As such, MERT goes a long way to predicting ER patterns. However, more importantly, it opens the gate to further investigation of these surrounding factors – an aspect of ER research that the current literature sadly lacks.

**Summary of the Research Aims**

It must be noted that, while the three research aims addressed above have been achieved with excellent clarity by the current theory, there were other initial research questions that were not as well answered. These are primarily to do with the 'how' of ER. They include the identification of the techniques of ER that individuals use, and the reason individuals select particular strategies over others (see p.22, research
question one). The reasons for the development of the current research away from such questions are twofold.

Firstly, after initial data analysis, it became apparent that the ‘how’ of Emotion Regulation did not appear to be greatly important to interviewees. The main issue for them was to get to their desired endpoint – the means of doing this were largely incidental. As such, it was deemed important to investigate these goals, rather than the course taken to achieve them. The development of this slant culminates in the theory currently being presented.

Secondly, the movement away from taxonomy was further driven by necessity. While Gross (1998a) managed to classify ER techniques under discrete headings, such as situation modification, the current research found that in using such a classification, a loss of value occurred. The unifying principle behind the data was not the technique used, but instead the goals that drove the behaviour.

It was for these reasons there was a movement away from this initial research aim. The development of a far reaching and unifying theory required this.

A second research question that was not well addressed by the current literature is that of the phylogenetic development of ER (see page 22, question six). While it would be easy to make speculations about the phylogenesis of ER using the current model, the need to answer such a question adequately needs an in depth look at the evolutionary psychology literature - in particular pertaining to motivation and emotion in particular. Such a complete treatise is outside the scope of this thesis.
Section Two: Comparing MERT against Lazarus's Requirements for Good Emotion Theory

Lazarus (1991) outlines 12 requirements that a theory of emotion should do. Because there is no such list available for ER, and the obvious close link between Emotion theory and ER, an adaptation of this list is appropriate to use to evaluate MERT.

The first two requirements Lazarus (1991) outlines are the issues of definition, and distinguishing emotion from non-emotion. With regard to definition, I have addressed this issue in the section above, when revisiting the research aims. The second issue - distinguishing emotion from non-emotion, however, is of particular importance for the current work. For MERT to be an effective theory of Emotion Regulation, it must not confuse emotion generation with ER. Several points are worth mentioning here. Firstly, the beginning of the Emotion Regulation process, as shown in the MERT model, occurs as a reaction to an emotion-eliciting stimulus. Obviously, the genesis of an emotion occurs at a similar point. Thus, linearly, Emotion Generation and ER are possibly inseparable. MERT, however, distinguishes ER as being motivated; specifically to avoid the appearance or experience of emotion. Thus, whether emotion is anticipated or already being experienced, ER occurs as a reaction to an emotional experience. In this way, ER is divorced, at least conceptually, from the emotion generation process. It must be noted, however, that the current models of ER (Gross, 1998a; Bonanno, 2001) are also effective at making such a distinction.

Lazarus's second two requirements look at whether emotions are discrete, and if so, do they lead to specific action tendencies? Adapting this question to ER theory
is difficult. However, it is possible to investigate whether specific emotions lead to specific ER strategies. Such a blanket approach is, however, unlikely to reveal pervasive patterns given the huge range of ER strategies available to an individual, and the myriad of variables present in an emotional encounter. The current study did not look in depth at such issues, but MERT is able to generate hypotheses that allow the investigation of these issues. For instance, a particular culture may encourage a lack of expression of an emotion, like Anger, for instance. As such, specific ER strategies may be common in this culture as opposed to others. By separating constructs like culture and social motivation, research can be conducted that can look at such issues with more clarity. The question then becomes less focused on a simple emotion-to-ER relationship, but instead looks at the wider factors that influence such encounters. This approach is where a theory like MERT has the most potential.

Lazarus (1991) also requires that emotion theory address the links between cognition, emotion and motivation. If not already apparent, I postulate that MERT makes an excellent job of this. In short, the motivation of an individual to engage in ER is born of cognition - thoughts about the environment that surrounds him or her, extending to encompass all the salient aspects of this environment and the other individuals within it. The motivation is born of cognition, in response to an emotion. Thus, these three constructs are intimately intertwined in MERT.

The relationship between the sociocultural and biological geneses of emotion is another requirement for good Emotion Theory according to Lazarus. Despite ER not having a physiological component in the same way emotion does, such a question is still relevant. One instead can ask whether MERT distinguishes between the biological component of an emotion being targeted, or instead the sociocultural aspect. MERT achieves this extremely well. The ‘self’ axis in MERT is able to
explain those occasions when an individual targets the biological component specifically, In short, the individual finds their current physiological state undesirable, and as such, tries to change it. In contrast, the ‘social’ axis does not distinguish between the biological basis and the social display as the primary target for ER, but instead simply states that the modification of the display of emotion is the superordinate goal. In this case, either the biological basis or the outward display of emotion may be targeted, in order to service this goal.

Another issue for Lazarus is that of emotional development, and therefore, for the current work, the issue of ER development is important. With there being a huge literature already present on the development of ER, the question of how MERT fits alongside previous findings in this area is key. Note that a more extensive investigation of this issue occurs in Section Four, but for the present, a brief explanation is offered. In short, MERT, with its twin motivations can account for a huge amount of the findings present in the developmental literature. It does this by allowing for the differential development of these twin motivations. Unsurprisingly, I posit that the ‘self’ motivation appears earlier in a child’s development, and later the ‘social’ motivation develops. As such, predictable temporal patterns of emotion related behaviour are observed. A full explanation of this position occurs in Section Three.

The final two requirements of a good theory of emotion listed by Lazarus (1991) are to do with the effects of emotion on social functioning, health and the role of emotion in therapy. Adapting these questions to the matter of ER is easily done, and to an extent has already been achieved in the literature. The central question here is to do with the consequences of ER on health and social functioning, and the role or ER in mental illness and therapy. In terms of the former issue, the work of Gross and
colleagues provides an excellent insight into this area. For instance, Gross and John (2003) found that individuals those who suppress emotional responses were more likely to experience negative consequences in inter-personal functioning and well-being. This was opposed to re-appraisers who had positive outcomes on these measures. However, the matter of whether MERT provides further insight requires addressing. I argue that the key role of MERT in such a perspective is the phenomenon of atypically competing motivations. By this I mean that a consistent trend to choose one motivation over another may result in certain mental health outcomes. The converse may be true also - an individual who has no consistency in this matter may face rather grave social repercussions. This could in turn lead to adverse effects on mental health and general well being. Take this quote from Linehan et al. (2001) describing the borderline individual:

“Such an individual has never learned to label and regulate emotional arousal...or when to trust his or her own emotional responses. The individual learns to distrust his or her own internal state, and instead, scans the environment for cues on how to act, think or feel” (p. 481).

The problems described here by Linehan can be described within the rubric of MERT. Such a phenomenon could be reconceptualised as that individual consistently being unable to weigh up their competing motivations adequately, due to the inherent mistrust of their own judgement. As such, these individuals often choose an inappropriate course of action. This leads to further invalidation of their own ability to act appropriately and the problem spirals. Such a position is further supported in Linehan’s work. She describes two pervasive patterns of behaviour in individuals with
BPD. One being a problem with the organising of behaviour in the service of goals; the second being a lack of ability to experience emotion without immediately withdrawing or producing an extreme secondary reaction. These problems would impinge heavily on the complex process of weighing up competing motivations, and the consequence of not doing this properly may explain in part the extreme behaviour observed in these individuals. Such a phenomenon could thus be reconceptualised as that individual consistently being unable to weigh up their competing motivations adequately, and as such, choosing an inappropriate course of action.

Summary: Lazarus’s Twelve Postulates and MERT

Adapting Lazarus’s (1991) twelve requirements of good Emotion Theory to Emotion Regulation has given the theory proposed in the present research, MERT, a yardstick to be measured by. As such, MERT comes out of such an analysis well. As a theory of Emotion Regulation, MERT goes a lot further than the current, more descriptive models, and allows research questions regarding predictability and causality in particular to be posed. I now turn to a discussion of MERT’s implications with reference to the current research.

Section Three: MERT and the Existing Research – Further Issues

A theory can only be of use if it extends the field of investigation it purports to explain. With this in mind, this section evaluates MERT and investigates its utility with regard to the current literature, and its ability to further these areas of investigation. As outlined previously, there are two main literatures to which ER has direct applications: the clinical and developmental fields. The most pertinent clinical
implication is the relation of MERT and BPD. The explanation of how MERT fits alongside Linehan’s (1993, 2001) work on BPD has already been outlined above. Thus, the current section concentrates on the links between MERT and the developmental ER literature.

**The Developmental Literature**

Recall that developmentalists have observed a clear path of development of ER. MERT, therefore, must be explained with reference to these findings. Remember that, according to MERT, Emotion Regulation occurs as a result of twin motivations within individuals. It thus follows that the appearance of Emotion Regulation in children must be accompanied by the development of motivations to act in such ways. I believe that this is a highly plausible phenomenon, easily conceptualised using the current literature.

Developmentalists look at ER as being an intimate part of the socialisation of the individual. As such, I argue that the appearance of motivation to engage in ER must also be a part of this socialisation. I posit that the development of ER can be conceptualised as being the development of the twin motivations of MERT, but occurring differentially. In short, the ‘self’ motivation develops first, and the ‘social’ motivation occurs later. Evidence for this position will be presented separately for each motivation.
The Development of ER for the Self

For an individual to regulate emotions, they must first have knowledge of what emotion is, and have strategies to call on to regulate it. There is strong evidence that infants learn to recognise overt emotional expression from an early age. For instance, Kahana-Kalman and Walker-Andrews (2001) found that infants looked longer at their mothers when positive affect was displayed rather than negative affect. This would seem to indicate that infants can recognise at least basic emotions from an early age.

There is strong support in the literature that basic techniques for ER are present from about age two (Eisenberg, 2002). These techniques appear to continue to develop until about age six (Saarni, 1999; Thompson, 1998). Common techniques for avoiding unpleasant emotional experiences involve avoiding emotion-eliciting stimuli, and engaging techniques like turning away or putting hands over ears in order to do this (Cole & Cole, 2000). These attempts at ER seem limited to reducing the experience of unpleasant emotion, although no author makes this distinction clear. It would seem that there is a clearly identifiable presence here of ER, however, it seems limited to the ‘self’ motivation. This situation, while being temporally variable, appears to continue until at least the age of four.

The Development of Socialised Regulation – The Awareness of Others.

Several cognitive and social milestones are reached around the ages of four to six, such as the ability to discriminate appearance from reality (Flavel, Flavel, & Green, 1983). However, the one that is supremely relevant here is the development of a theory of mind (Wimmer & Perner, 1983). That is, the ability of the child to know that they exist, and the related, but somewhat more advanced ability to realise that
other’s mental states may differ from their own. This ability first appears around the age of four to five, and continues to develop throughout middle childhood (Aiston, 1993). Wimmer and Perner (1983) showed that a full-fledged theory of mind doesn’t develop before the age of three to four. They set up a series of experiments in order to check whether children between three and five years of age were able to attribute a false belief to someone else. In one of these experiments, children see a scene in which a character, Maxi, puts chocolate in a drawer and goes away. An object then is moved whilst Maxi is out of view. None of the 3-to-4 year olds, 57% of the 4-to-6 year olds, and 86% of the 6-to-9 year were able to attribute a false belief to Maxi. That is, younger children predicted incorrectly that Maxi could locate an object that had been secretly moved, whereas older children were able to understand that Maxi’s version of events was different to their own.

This finding is mirrored by an observed increased ability of children to understand the emotions of others at around ages 5-to-6 (Fabes et al, 1991). Thus, by understanding that others perspectives may differ from their own, children at this stage have developed the capacity for the ‘social’ motivation. That is, the ability to realise that their perspective in any given situation may differ from other individual’s interpretation of events. This change is often accompanied by a change in parental expectations. It appears that parents expect children to increasingly manage their own emotional arousal and behaviour (Eisenberg & Sheffield Morris, 2002). This could be thought of as being the first step towards socialisation of a child’s emotional control. Two essential requirements for the emergence of the social motivation are apparent here - the capacity for it to occur, and the socialisation of it by parents.

Indeed, the linking of socialisation and Emotion Regulation is not a new idea. Eisenberg (2002) demonstrates how the concept, while not being explicitly addressed
until recently, has long been a subject of enquiry. She cites such concepts as moral development (Kohlberg, 1984), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) as being salient examples of this link. Present in all of these perspectives is the occurrence of parental encouragement towards pro-social behaviour. From a MERT perspective, this could be thought of as the fostering of the ‘social’ motivation.

Current work on Emotion Regulation has focused on the link between ability of children to regulate their emotion, and long term social outcomes, such as social competency. Unsurprisingly, there appears to be a strong link between the two. For instance, Fabes and Eisenberg (1992) found that socially competent children were more able to deal with anger in ways that minimised further conflict. Furthermore, Eisenberg et al., (1993) found that teachers observed better coping and regulation strategies in boys with good social skills and peers status. Thus, it appears that the appearance of the ‘social’ motivation is a key component in the socialisation of the individual.

Differentially Developing Motivations

The above evidence suggests that there is a distinct temporal difference in the types of ER that children use. The early appearing types of ER are primarily focused on the self, while the later appearing types of Emotion Regulation are fostered, apparently as part of the socialisation process. These, later types appear to be primarily socially motivated. This provides support for the assertion that ER is driven by two motivations, and that these develop differentially in children.

Taken together, this evidence shows strong support for a MERT perspective to be taken when looking at the development of ER in children. It also provides a clear theoretical framework through which to look at the development of ER.
Section 4: Generation of Research Questions

A major role of any psychological theory, and an Emotion Theory in particular is the ability of it to generate new and novel research questions. MERT does this very well, and in such a way that it has the potential to offer another direction for Emotion Regulation research. To clarify this point, a look at how the previous models of ER have directed research endeavours is appropriate. Recall that the model of Gross (1998a) looked at Emotion Regulation as a phenomenon best understood by looking at the technique of ER used. For instance, he makes a distinction between anticipatory efforts (occurring before emotion onset), and ER after the onset of the emotional experience. This idea in turn spawned an interesting field of research - namely, investigating the consequences of using these differing techniques. While these contributions allowed a specific set of research questions to be formulated, its linear nature (that is, classifying ER on a temporal continuum), limited the nature of the research hypothesis such a model was able to spawn. For instance, no questions regarding the surrounding factors of the emotional encounter arise from such a model, and as such, its ability to explain ER in anyway approaching a complete manner is limited. MERT on the other hand embraces these surrounding factors, and opens up the presently limited field of research to encompass these wider issues. MERT, therefore, allows for the investigation of ER to include the wide expanse of issues surrounding the emotional encounter to be taken into account. With this point in mind, we can look at how MERT in particular can be used in the future
Possible Future Research.

With the theory of ER presented in the current research born from qualitative methods, it is desirable to seek some sort of further, more quantitative empirical support for MERT. As such, a look at how this may be achieved follows.

The "Why' of Emotion Regulation.

Currently, there is only one scale that exists that purports to measure Emotion Regulation. This scale by Gross (Gross & John, 2003), however, is born from his model, and thus attempts to look at the techniques that individuals use to regulate emotion. There is no empirical scale of the reasons or motivation - the 'why' - behind such acts. The generation of such a scale is thus the first step in the empirical study of MERT. Once this is achieved, the possibilities of comparing the reasons behind ER with the other situational factors (such as personality and culture) are boundless. What follows are two examples of possible research using such an approach.

Cross-Cultural Studies

Cross-cultural research has long been an important part of emotion research in general (Strongman, 2003). Differences in culture are reflected in the emotions that characterise that culture, and as such, an insight to the factors that give rise to emotion is a result. For instance, work on the Japanese emotion *amae* has demonstrated the importance of attachment, acceptance and homogeneity in that culture (Sugimoto, 1997).

A similar approach with regard to Emotion Regulation is also useful. By understanding the cultural influences that impinge on a decision regarding ER, we are able to better understand how surrounding process affect these choices in general. For
instance, a cross-cultural study could look at the differences in the ‘social’ motivation of individuals in different societies. By understanding this influence, we can see how the surrounding environment affects the motivation of individuals more generally. This in turn has the potential to spawn even more hypotheses and research questions.

_Personality and Social Motivations_

Another way of looking at how surrounding factors impinge on an ER encounter would be to investigate the role of personality on ER related motivations. For instance, future research utilising a between-groups design could look at how people with different personalities differ in their motivations with regard to ER. For instance, high self monitors (Snyder, 1979) may have a different ‘motivational pattern’ to low self-monitors. This in turn would have implications for the personality field (for instance, some personality types may show more emotion than others, regardless of their actual experience). It is this type of research that would allow a true gateway into understanding how these ‘additional’ factors affect ER, and have wide implications, particularly applicable to the clinical field, as discussed above.

_Summary - Future Research Directions_

The above examples of possible research questions that MERT is able to generate brings into focus the possible direction of ER research using a theory similar to MERT. Regardless of whether this particular theory is adopted, the message remains that a more holistic view of the ER process enables a deeper understanding of the individual within the emotional encounter, and as such, can only shed more light on this fascinating phenomenon.
Section Five: Conclusion

Theoretical Framework

Returning to one of the initial questions posed in this chapter, the matter of the ability of MERT to provide a concise theoretical framework can now be broached. I have demonstrated that MERT brings many concepts to the investigation of ER that previous research has ignored. As such, it has achieved what previous models have not - the possibility of a broad, unifying framework through which to study Emotion Regulation. The theory achieves this in several ways.

Firstly, MERT has the ability to unify several fields of research, and integrate their findings underneath a broad overarching framework. By using the concept of competing motivations, MERT is able to integrate findings from the developmental, clinical and general research fields, in addition to several other ‘non-Emotion Regulation’ perspectives. Thus, it provides a source of coherence, and the ability to understand better what is becoming an overwhelming, and largely unstructured, literature.

Secondly, MERT provides for a dizzying array of novel research hypotheses to be generated. The possibility of looking at the myriad of factors surrounding the ER encounter gives the researcher fertile soil in which to generate ideas, as well as the possibility of major steps forward for the field. While it was always possible to generate such hypotheses in the absence of a theory such as MERT, research questions are now able to be born of a concept that has been methodically constructed and has a great deal of intuitive appeal.

In conclusion, the current study began with wide terms of reference, investigating a pervasive and complex phenomenon. It was successful, using the grounded theory methodology, in reducing a complex set of data to a single unifying construct - that of
competing motivations. The theory presented here allows the field of Emotion Regulation research to be more unified, and as such, presents a more cohesive ‘story’ of what may be actually occurring. In addition to this, it provided researchers several points of entry in which to take this angle of investigation further. Indeed, it may be said that MERT provides much more in this respect than previous models have thus far. For these reasons, MERT provides an extremely valuable contribution to the field - one that has begged such a contribution for some time.
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Appendix 1: List of Emotions as Presented to Interviewees

Joy

Joy is a feeling of happiness towards a certain situation or person.

Think of a time you experienced joy. How did it come about and what happened?

Guilt

Guilt is a feeling you get when you have done something wrong by another person, and have not made it right.

Think of a time you experienced guilt. How did it come about and what happened?

Fear

Fear is a response to a threatening situation.

Think of a time you experienced fear. How did it come about and what happened?

Anger

Anger occurs when our goals are thwarted.

Think of a time you experienced anger. How did it come about and what happened?

Pride:

Pride is a feeling of high global self worth, due to a particular situation or event.

Think of a time you experienced pride. How did it come about and what happened?

Embarrassment

Embarrassment is when we are exposed in some way in front of others.

Think of a time you experienced embarrassment. How did it come about and what happened?

Sadness

We experience sadness when we experience loss of some sort.

Think of a time you experienced sadness. What happened and how did you react?