Conclusions and Perspectives

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Our goal in this book has been to highlight the importance of emotion regulation in the context of parenting. This book, the first on emotion regulation and parenting, both highlights the importance of emotion regulation in the specific context of parenting and shows how promising research at the intersection of these two fields is. With the help of the many wonderful experts who contributed to the chapters, this book allows us to (1) take stock of findings and trends in the field, (2) identify the main challenges to be addressed, and (3) pinpoint exciting directions and methods for future research. We address each of these in turn.

C.1 Emotion Regulation and Parenting

Research at the intersection of emotion regulation and parenting often seems to be studying different facets of this complex phenomenon. Some researchers focus on the parent's emotion regulation, others on the parent's regulation of the child's emotions, and still others on the role played by the parent's and/or the child's emotion regulation in the child's development. One of the first challenges is to bring these different perspectives together.

At the outset of the book, the author of Chapter 1 offers an overview of the complexity of the field of research devoted to parenting cognitions and behaviors in relation to child development. Then, the authors of Chapter 2 point out the different facets of emotion regulation, the complexity of the process, and especially the fact that all its facets are worth studying in the field of parenting. It is clear from these two chapters that these two fields have developed independently, with their own complexity and issues. It will be of great interest and value to link them together. So how can we summarize what emotion regulation in parenting is?

First, emotion regulation in parenting is concerned with how parents regulate their own emotions as individuals. As highlighted in several chapters of the book, there is considerable interindividual variability in this respect due to genetic, hormonal, and neural factors (see Chapter 12), sociodemographic factors such as age or gender, primiparity, the

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developmental history of the individual including history of maltreatment (see Chapter 4), internal working models, personality, etc. The way in which parents regulate their own emotions as individuals is a key factor in parents' well-being, stress, and behavior in general. In part, this is because the way in which parents regulate their emotions as individuals is an explanatory factor in the child's emotional development via modeling (i.e. observation and imitation) (see Chapters 2, 7, and 9).

Second, emotion regulation in parenting concerns how parents regulate their own emotions within the specific context of parenting. On the one hand, parents must regulate the emotions that parenting brings in general. For example, they may feel fulfillment or pride in the role of mother or father or disappointment and disinterest. On the other hand, parents must also regulate the emotions they feel when interacting with the child. These emotions are specific to each interaction and fluctuate from moment to moment and from one context to another. For example, the parent may want to reduce the expression of anxiety on the teen's first night out. The way in which the parent regulates their own emotions in the specific context of parenting is an explanatory factor in the parent's well-being, stress, and burnout (see Chapter 6) and in their behavior as a parent (see Chapters 3 and 5).

Third, emotion regulation in parenting concerns how parents regulate the child's emotions (i.e. reactions to child emotions, conversations and teaching about emotions) during parent–child interactions (see Chapters 7 and 8). Here too there is considerable interindividual variability. The way in which parents regulate the child's emotions is the result of the two previous points, that is, the parent's regulation of their own emotions in general, and the parent's regulation of their own emotions in the specific context of parenting. It also results from the parent's meta-emotion philosophy (see Chapter 8). This is the parent effect. To this effect is added the child effect. The way the parent regulates the child's emotions is influenced by the child's temperament, behavior in specific situations, age, and other characteristics such as a disability. There also may be interaction effects, meaning that the impact of the parent effects depends on the characteristics of the child. As an additional complexity, there is also an effect of the context in which the interaction occurs. For example, the parent's regulation of the child's emotions may differ depending on whether regulation occurs in the family or in a public setting (see Chapter 1). A parent's regulation of the child's emotions also differs according to culture (see Chapter 10). The way in which the parent regulates the child's emotions through their practices and reactions matters, as it influences the child's social and emotional development (see Chapters 2, 7, and 9).

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C.2 Challenges to Be Addressed

Without diminishing the work already accomplished by researchers in the field, it is clear that there are still many unexplored areas and that the field is struggling to progress in a coherent manner in all three directions (i.e. the parent's regulation of their own emotions in general, the parent's regulation of their own emotions in the specific context of parenting, and the parent's regulation of the child's emotions). Taken together, the chapters that make up this book suggest that our field needs to address several main challenges.

One challenge is that there is a great imbalance between the three elements that the field of emotion regulation in parenting entails. Of the three, the parent's regulation of the child's emotions, and more specifically its effect on the child's development, has been documented the most (see Part III). There are proportionately very few studies in which the parent's emotion regulation is studied for its own sake, without the objective of understanding its effects on the child's development. In other words, researchers are interested in parents because they influence child development, not because the emotion regulation of the parent as a person is of interest in itself or because there is a concern to increase parental well-being and mental health (see Chapters 6 and 11).

It follows from this that parent-driven effects are much more widely considered than child-driven effects. Yet, the parent's regulation of their own emotions and the parent's regulation of the child's emotions occur in a dyadic context of mutual adaptation, based on reciprocal and transactional effects (see Chapters 9 and 11). Despite the bidirectional nature of emotion regulation in parenting, the vast majority of studies document how the parent's emotion regulation influences the child's emotion regulation. Few focus on how the child's emotion regulation influences the parent's emotion regulation. Most of these studies are based on correlational analyses that provide no indication of the direction of the effects, but their results are repeatedly interpreted in the direction of parent to child and rarely in the opposite direction. The child's evocative effect, however, may be a key factor in explaining both interindividual (i.e. from one parent to another) and intraindividual (i.e. from moment to moment or from one context to another) variation in emotion regulation and parenting.

Another challenge stemming from the predominance of correlational studies is the urgent need to go beyond a linear and homogeneous view of the relationships between emotion regulation, parenting, and child development (see Chapter 1). According to this view, the better parents regulate their own emotions, the better they regulate their emotions in the specific context of parenting; the better parents regulate their emotions in

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the specific context of parenting, the better they regulate the child's emotions; and the better parents regulate the child's emotions, the more optimally the child develops (e.g. fewer behavioral symptoms and better peer relationships), and the better the child regulates their own emotions.

This linear and homogeneous view of the relationships between emotion regulation, parenting, and child development may be overly simple. In this book, the authors have drawn attention to the fact that (1) the size of the correlations between these variables is only small to modest at best (see Chapters 1 and 9); (2) the correlations were mostly obtained in samples of normative nuclear families from WEIRD (i.e. Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries (see Chapters 1 and 10); (3) there are shared third factors such as genetic factors or extrafamilial factors like shared ethnicity (see Chapter 10) explaining both the parent's and the child's emotion regulation (see Chapter 6); and (4) the relationships between emotion regulation, parenting, and child development are not limited to bivariate relationships but involve processes of mediation (see Chapters 1 and 6) and moderation by the child's age, temperament, and behavior (see Chapter 1), and the parent's gender (see Chapter 5) and culture (see Chapters 3, 9, and 10).

Beyond being overly simple, a linear and homogeneous view of relationships between emotion regulation, parenting, and child development reinforces the belief in parental determinism, that is, the belief that child development in general, and child emotion regulation in particular, are largely or exclusively the result of parenting. Although the influence of parenting on child development is not negligible, it is clear that child development is the result of a complex equation which, in addition to parental factors, includes factors beyond the control of the parent (e.g. the child's own agency, genetic, physiological and contextual factors). The belief in parental determinism is all the more problematic as it seems to contribute to increasing the cultural pressure to be a good parent (see Chapter 10), parental stress, and burnout (see Chapters 6 and 13). And, ironically, by increasing parental stress and burnout, it also potentially increases the risk of parental neglect and violence (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Another oversimplification is the binary vision according to which there are "good" and "bad" strategies in emotion regulation, "good" and "bad" practices in parenting, and children with "good" and "bad" development. Despite the authors' desire to use less prescriptive terms, our book exemplifies this simplifying binary vision: functional, adaptive, well-suited, better, correct, right, sensitive, optimal, supportive, against dysfunctional, maladaptive, ill-suited, negative, at risk, nonoptimal, and unsupportive. This is entirely understandable. However, the reality is much more complex. As we saw for example in Chapter 3, so-called positive emotions do not always have positive consequences, and negative emotions should not always be minimized. We saw in Chapter 6 that the best is sometimes the

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enemy of the good, because too much parental emotion regulation increases stress and burnout. And we know that in the context of moderations, the effect of a variable (e.g. parental emotion regulation) on another variable (e.g. child emotion regulation) is not true for all parents, for all children, and/or in all contexts (see Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10).

The result of all this is the risk of delivering unhelpful take-home messages to researchers, professionals, and parents themselves. One example of such a take-home message is the promotion of emotion regulation in general and of this or that specific strategy (for instance, always encouraging reappraisal and always discouraging suppression) to ensure optimal child development. However, it has been shown in other domains that it is flexibility in the use of emotion regulation strategies that seems to be most predictive of good outcomes (Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Bonanno et al., 2004). Another example of a potentially unhelpful take-home message is the requirement that parents achieve the desired affective state that corresponds to the model of good parenting relevant in the WEIRD countries (see Chapters 10 and 13).

Yet another challenge pertains to the need for a common language. Authors frequently use different terms to talk about the same things. In particular, we noted the following equivalences or proxies: (1) self-focused and intrinsic versus other-focused and extrinsic emotion regulation (see Chapters 2 and 6); (2) parent's parenting of children's emotions, children's emotional socialization (practices), and parental socialization of child emotions (see Chapters 1, 2, and 9); (3) supportive socialization practices and emotion coaching (see Chapter 9); (4) supportive practices, coaching practices, and adaptive parental extrinsic emotion regulation versus unsupportive, dismissing practices, and maladaptive parental extrinsic emotion regulation (see Chapter 6); (5) "coregulation of and then by child's emotion" and extrinsic emotion regulation (see Chapter 7); and (6) top-down emotion regulation and emotional labor (see Chapters 12 and 13). A dialogue between experts would undoubtedly contribute to greater conceptual clarity. Such a dialogue would make it possible to know whether the proxies are really synonyms, in which case a common language should be favored, or whether these proxies do not refer to exactly the same thing, in which case their specificity and the limits of their overlap should be more explicitly fixed.

C.3 Future Directions

In addition to these challenges, each of the contributors of this book identified in the conclusions of their chapters one or more directions for future research. We summarize and organize these future directions next, distinguishing content from methods.

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C.3.1 Content Issues

One future direction is to document the dimensions of emotion regulation in parenting that have received the least attention, that is, the parent's regulation of their own emotions vis-à-vis parenting in general, and the parent's regulation of their own emotions in the specific context of parenting. If we want to understand emotion regulation in parenting, we can no longer focus in most studies on the parent's regulation of the child's emotions and its effects on the child's development (see Chapter 3). Rather, we must accord the same importance to the parent as we give to the child, as has been emphasized by the authors of several chapters (see Chapters 6, 11, and 12). Greater attention to the parent should lead us to develop and promote interventions that emotionally care for the child and the parent as well. Currently, interventions are very often driven by a strong focus on the best interests of the child and a strong belief in parental determinism. Interventions can therefore increase the demands for emotion regulation on the part of the parent, and thus emotional labor (see Chapters 13 and 14). It is necessary to rethink these interventions with the benefit of both the child and the parent in mind, as the two form an inseparable dyad (i.e. the emotional well-being of one depends on the emotional well-being of the other), and to systematically test the effects of the interventions not only on the child's development, well-being, and emotion regulation but also on the parent's well-being, emotions, and emotion regulation.

Second, given the specificity of the context (i.e. parenting), the contributors to this book draw our attention to four important elements. First, we need to move from the regulation of emotions in general to the regulation of specific emotions (see Chapter 3). Second, we need to focus on the emotion regulation strategies that are relevant to the specific context of parenting, as not all strategies necessarily apply to parent–child interactions (see Chapter 3). In so doing, we need to study all relevant emotion regulation strategies in the context of the parent–child relationship, not just reappraisal or suppression (for a list of relevant emotion regulation strategies, see Chapter 8). Third, we must recognize that parents do not use emotion regulation strategies in isolation. Rather, they use several of them during the same interaction with the child and combine them sequentially. Cluster analysis (see Chapter 7) or ecological momentary assessment (see Chapters 8 and 11) are particularly interesting methods for studying how interpersonal regulatory interactions vary across and within interactions. Fourth, we would benefit from complementing the study of the regulation of negative emotions with studies on the regulation of the parent's and child's positive emotions (see Chapters 3 and 9).

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C.3.2 Methodological Issues

This book has highlighted the complexity of emotion regulation in parenting. In order to account for this complexity, we must rely on methods other than correlational analyses. Although correlational approaches constitute an important and entirely legitimate first step, it is essential to go further in order to (1) disentangle the directions of causality between the variables (see Chapters 7, 8, and 11); (2) integrate into the models the processes of mediation and/or moderation (see Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8); (3) take into account the normative and nonnormative developmental dimension (see Chapters 2, 7, and 11); (4) integrate the specificity of the context and be ecologically valid (see Chapters 10 and 11); (5) consider that the relations between variables may not be linear but curvilinear (see Chapter 6); and (6) take into account the dependence between child and parent data (see Chapter 11). We also need to remember that there is no single gold-standard method (for an excellent synthesis of recommendations for future research, see Chapter 11). The different methods must be seen as complementary because none of them, however sophisticated, can alone capture the whole complexity of emotion regulation in parenting.

The methods employed must also allow us to model the dyadic and bidirectional character and the process of mutual adaptation in the parent–child relationship (see Chapters 1 and 11). Moreover, they should allow us to integrate the asymmetric character of this relationship (i.e. the contribution of the child and the parent in terms of emotion regulation is different because of the different levels of maturity, see Chapters 1 and 7). Finally, because of the large interindividual differences in emotion regulation and parenting, these methods must be able to integrate the singularity of the parent and the child, as well as the singularity of each dyad (see Chapters 1 and 8). The dyadic and bidirectional nature of the parent–child relationship makes the systemic approach particularly well suited to study emotion regulation in the parenting context. This type of approach has the additional advantage of making it possible to consider more than two interacting partners (see Chapters 2 and 11). It also draws our attention to the importance of going beyond the exclusive focus on the mother-child dyad to include fathers in the system, as well as other important socializing agents such as grandparents, siblings, peers, or teachers (see Chapter 9).

C.4 Concluding Comment

Much important work has been done at the intersection of emotion regulation and parenting. However, it is clear that there is still much to do and to discover. It is our hope that this book will stimulate research in this area, benefiting both parents and children.

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