

DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS TO SELF-REGULATION: INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Habilitation thesis

- Abstract -

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Self-regulation (SR) is a broad multifaceted construct, defined as “the primarily volitional cognitive and behavioral process through which an individual maintains levels of emotional, motivational, and cognitive arousal that are conducive to positive adjustment and adaptation” (Blair & Diamond, 2008). The studies presented in this thesis, as well as the future lines of development, are built around a conceptualization of self-regulation that encompass control over emotional as well as cognitive contents. Also, given the multitude of operationalizations of the construct, in the present thesis the interest is in assessing self-regulation as: *executive attention* or *attentional control*; *behaviorally expressed inhibitory control*; *emotion regulation*. While assuming a common core, there are also specific differences between the different constructs and their measurements that should be addressed.

Self-regulation has been largely considered from an individual perspective. However, a developmental perspective on self-regulatory abilities has to take into account their progression *per se*, as well as in relationship to other individual variables (temperamental traits, mental health status, behavior problems, school readiness, academic achievement, peer relations, cognitive abilities) but also to external, in particular social and cultural factors.

When considering the development of self-regulation in childhood, in particular in early years (0-5 years), the social impact of others, especially parents, becomes critical. Parental characteristics (like parental self-regulation, temperament of parents, mental health status), parent-child relationship (circumscribed, for example, by attachment security), parenting variables (e.g., parental involvement, parental sensitivity,) as well as the family structure or home environment, are important variables to be considered in junction with the developmental progression of self-regulatory abilities. Moreover, in the last decades, the importance of cultural factors in modulating self-regulation has been increasingly considered.

Such views on self-regulation beyond the individual perspective set the stage for the series of studies already conducted (part 1) or just envisaged (part 2) in the present thesis.

Chapter 1 of the thesis is devoted to *Individual dimensions of self-regulation: from neurobiological underpinnings to psychological variables* and covers theoretical and empirical contributions focused on the developmental progression of neurocognitive systems sustaining self-regulation, and the importance of the anterior cingulate cortex, as a critical structure for self-regulation and intentionality. Also, temperament as a key individual variable is considered, in the light of the multidimensional construct of Mary Rothbart. A third part of the chapter is focused on individual predispositions towards anxiety, from different views: 1) anxiety-related response patterns of attentional set-shifting in preschoolers, 2) attentional biases linked to temperament and anxiety; 3) self regulatory effect of attentional control in modulating the relationship between attentional biases toward threat and anxiety symptoms in children; 4) emotional face processing and executive attention in typical and atypical - children with anxiety and ADHD - populations.

Chapter 2 goes beyond to the individual level, considering the development of self-regulation in the context of familial and parental influences. The theoretical background section on this topic is complemented by a series of studies on: maternal and child self-regulation as predictors of child psychopathology; maternal temperament, child temperamental characteristics and child attentional biases in predicting preschoolers' anxiety symptoms; and, more broadly considered, maternal and child predictors of child psychological functioning and psychopathology.

Chapter 3 approaches the development of self-regulation from a cross-cultural perspective. A consistent theoretical analysis is followed by own studies on temperamental self-regulation and parent-child interaction from the perspective of cross-cultural comparisons; emotion socialization strategies of Romanian mothers as evidenced by self-report data; the analysis of the relation between maternal perception of toddler emotion regulation abilities and emotion regulation abilities displayed by children in a frustration inducing task; the analysis of the relationship between toddler emotion regulation abilities during a delay of gratification task and maternal emotion regulation responses.

The second part of the thesis outlines several directions for future teaching and research, including the exploration of the relationship between parental self-regulation and child self-regulation in early childhood (0-3 years), the analysis of cross-cultural differences in temperament as predictors of behavior problems, and Impact of positive emotion socialization practices on child's self-regulation, from the perspective of cross-cultural differences.