There has been considerable scientific interest in the study of emotion regulation. Consequently, several developmental models, conceptualizations, and debates have emerged (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989; Fox, 1994; Kopp, 1989; Thompson, 1994). The concept of emotion regulation has been considered by at least three developmental domains: the emotion domain, the temperament domain, and the cognitive domain. As might be expected, each perspective approaches the development of emotion regulation differently.

Early conceptualizations of emotion regulation by emotion researchers were that emotions needed to be controlled, thus socialization processes (i.e., display rules) were emphasized. The more recent functionalist approach to emotion, however, views emotions as relational processes whereby emotions have both interpersonal and intrapersonal regulatory consequences (Barrett & Campos, 1987). Cognitive perspectives on emotion and emotion regulation suggest that the emergence of emotions and the ability to regulate emotions is dependent on cognitive processes such as means–end behavior, language, and memory (Kopp, 1982). Finally, temperament theorists have included individual differences in emotional responses in their conceptual frameworks. Likewise, individual differences in approach or withdrawal or attentional processes have been conceptualized as
important regulators of emotion (Rothbart, 1989; Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981). Consistent among all of these perspectives, which makes emotion regulation an important topic for *Infancy*, is that the processes that contribute to the emergence of emotion regulation take place early in development.

Although these perspectives may approach the study of emotion regulation differently, each also recognizes that emotion regulation is a complex multifaceted process. Indeed, based on his critical review of the literature, Thompson (1994) concluded that “emotion regulation is a conceptual rubric for a remarkable range of developmental processes, each of which may have its own catalysts and control processes” (p. 51). A developmental analysis of emotion regulation, therefore, would require input from several perspectives and levels to come to a more complete understanding of this construct. The articles in this collection represent current multilevel approaches to the study of emotion regulation.

The empirical study of emotion regulation processes in infancy is a relatively recent phenomenon (Kopp & Neufeld, in press), and several studies have focused on its development (Braungart & Stifter, 1996; Mangelsdorf, Shapiro, & Marzolf, 1995; Rothbart, Ziaie & O’Boyle, 1992; Stifter & Braungart, 1995). More recently and importantly, the regulatory effectiveness of behaviors exhibited during mildly aversive situations has been identified (Buss & Goldsmith, 1998; Diener & Mangelsdorf, 1999; Stifter & Braungart, 1995). Behaviors that had been hypothesized to function as regulatory have been shown to effectively reduce negative reactivity, although the effectiveness of these behaviors appears to vary with age and context. These groundbreaking studies, along with the conceptual frameworks that have guided them (Kopp, 1989; Thompson, 1994), have laid the path for the current collection. However, rather than take a variable-oriented approach to the study of emotion regulation, each of the following studies took a person-oriented approach; that is, emotion regulation and its associated processes were proposed by each investigation to differ among individuals who clustered on a particular characteristic. Calkins and colleagues (this issue) chose to examine infants who were observed and reported to be more easily frustrated and compared them to infants who were observed and reported to be less easily frustrated on behavioral and physiological regulation. Diener, Mangelsdorf, McHale, and Frosch (this issue) not only examined attachment classification as an important factor in understanding the ability to self-regulate emotion, but also created clusters of infants based on their emotion regulation propensity. Both of these studies elucidate the factors and processes associated with emotion regulation. Stifter and Spinrad (this issue), who selected groups based on early crying at 6 weeks of age, took a developmental approach and compared excessive criers to typical criers on the self-regulation of emotion at 5 and 10 months of age. Such an approach, according to Magnusson and Cairns (1996), provides “a method for identifying how configurations of characteristics affect individual functioning over time” (p. 25) and the results of the Stifter and Spinrad study support their point.
Although the articles in this thematic collection come from independent laboratory investigations of emotion regulation, they are relatively consistent in their choice of methods, approach, and results. First, as emphasized by the title, each study took an individual difference approach. Second, all three studies examined similar regulatory behaviors. For example, the emotion self-regulatory strategies of self-comfort and distraction were coded in all three studies, whereas similar forms of avoidance were coded in two studies. Such cross-laboratory continuity not only validates current measurements of emotion regulation but also enhances the interpretation of the findings. Interestingly, both Diener et al. and Stifter and Spinrad found avoidance to be positively related to negative affect, raising important issues of methodological appropriateness and validity.

Central to the many models of emotion regulation development is the role of the caregiver (Calkins, 1994; Kopp, 1982; Thompson, 1994). Two studies in this collection address this factor. Stifter and Spinrad considered maternal interactive behavior as contributing to differences in emotion regulation outcome but found no differences between mothers of excessive criers and mothers of typical criers. The role of infant–parent attachment was examined by Diener and colleagues, and their findings indicate that the quality of the relationship contributes to the use of emotion regulation strategies. Importantly, Diener’s study extends what we know about infant–mother attachment and its relation to the ability to regulate emotions to the infant–father relationship, demonstrating considerable consistency across the two parenting contexts.

The investigations in this thematic collection also varied to the extent that they provided additional evidence that emotion regulation is a complex, multivariate process. Calkins’s study provides confirming physiological evidence that easily frustrated infants have difficulty regulating their emotional arousal. Using a cluster analytic approach, Diener and colleagues demonstrate stability in emotion regulation style exhibited during a competing demands task with mothers and fathers. Finally, the Stifter and Spinrad study reports gender differences in the developmental trajectories for emotion regulation during the first year of life.

Although variously defined and conceptualized, emotion regulation has become a central variable in many models of development. The three independent studies reported in the following articles provide important converging evidence regarding the emotion regulation process and its place in development. In particular, these studies highlight that the individual differences in the ability to self-regulate emotional arousal have their origins in infancy.

REFERENCES


