

## Revisiting the past and back to the future: Horizons of cognition and emotion research

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### ABSTRACT

To commemorate that *Cognition & Emotion* was established three decades ago, we asked some distinguished scholars to reflect on past research on the interface of cognition and emotion and prospects for the future. The resulting papers form the Special Issue on *Horizons in Cognition and Emotion Research*. The contributions to *Horizons* cover both the field in general and a diversity of specific topics, including affective neuroscience, appraisal theory, automatic evaluation, embodied emotion, emotional disorders, emotion-linked attentional bias, emotion recognition, emotion regulation, lifespan development, motivation, and social emotions. We hope that *Horizons* will spark constructive debates, while offering guidance for the future growth and development of research on the interface between cognition and emotion. Finally, we provide an update on how *Cognition & Emotion* has fared over the past year, and announce some changes in editorial policies and the editorial board.

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History of emotion research; cognition and emotion; theories of emotion; affective neuroscience; appraisal theory; automatic evaluation; embodied emotion; emotional disorders; affective processing bias; emotion recognition; emotion regulation; emotional development; motivation and emotion; social emotions

*Cognition & Emotion* celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. As the first journal of its kind, *Cognition & Emotion* played a key role in legitimising the scientific study of emotion. Moreover, the journal has been a major catalyst for the field, by offering a platform for the construction of rigorous scientific theories and paradigms, and bringing together within its pages research on emotion from cognitive, social, developmental, and clinical psychology. The success of *Cognition & Emotion* is thus inextricably tied to the success of emotion science as a whole (see Rothermund & Koole, 2018, for a brief review).

The anniversary of *Cognition & Emotion* provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on the state of emotion research over the last three decades. Certainly, the volume of empirical research on emotion and its interface with cognition has increased dramatically since the journal was founded. But has this

resulted in corresponding increases in scientific insight? What are the field's main achievements? Is the field moving in the right direction? Can we identify the main challenges and promises for the future, and if so what are they? To address these issues, we took up the idea of a Special Issue in leading scholars reflect on the field, from its development over the past three decades up to the present, to the directions the field may or should take into the future. This Special Issue is titled *Horizons*, because we envisioned that it would be broad in scope, and open new intellectual horizons for our readership.

### The format of *Horizons*

To set the stage for *Horizons*, we invited a number of distinguished scholars at the start of 2017, to contribute to the Special Issue. We could have asked many

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colleagues, but we had to be selective, given that journal space is limited. Scholars were selected for their scientific excellence, and their complementary expertise, so that the Special Issue could cover all the most important areas of the field.

Contributors were asked to write a short piece of some 2,500 words on the past and future development of cognition and emotion research. To frame the discussion (and taking a cue from Sternberg, 2017), we presented authors with the following five questions:

- (1) What do you regard as the most important developments in research on cognition and emotion over the past three decades?
- (2) What do you regard as the most important developments in your own area of expertise? If relevant, what have been your own contributions here?
- (3) Do you think the field has been moving in the right direction? If so, how? If not, why?
- (4) What do you regard as the most important areas/questions that still need to be resolved? What do you see as the most important areas for growth in the next decade, relating to theory, concepts, measures, and experiments?
- (5) What advice would you give to young researchers in the field?

Contributing authors were free to write their contribution as they saw fit. For instance, they could address the above questions in a different order, or skip or combine questions. Comments on the state of the field at large were welcome, as well as contributions that focused on more specific areas within the field. We were interested to hear about each author's unique perspective, so authors were encouraged to add a personal touch and share the unique insights that they gained from their research. We welcomed any lessons that authors wanted to share with the field, especially as they pertained to future generations of researchers.

The invited contributions to *Horizons* were subjected by peer review by us as the Editors-in-Chief of the journal. In this peer review, we took care to ensure that authors understood the format of the Special Issue and adhered to it. Other than this, our main goal was to help authors to bring out their own ideas and points of view as clearly as possible. This means that contributors were given maximal freedom to express their perspectives. The format of *Horizons* was thus explicitly designed to maximise

the diversity of ideas and perspectives that could be obtained from the contributors. This format is unique in the history of *Cognition & Emotion*, but we are convinced that this was the best way to warrant an open, critical, and unfettered reflection on the field's past achievements and its prospects for the future.

## Contents of Horizons in cognition and emotion research

The contributions do show a great of diversity, highlighting the broad range of topics, research questions, and also theoretical backgrounds that are covered in our journal. When viewed together, however, the contributions to *Horizons* also connect with each other in meaningful ways, thus allowing them to be considered as a more or less coherent whole.

The various contributions to *Horizons* have been grouped into five sets. The first set of contributions relates to broad perspectives that cut across disciplinary boundaries and theoretical traditions. The second set of contribution relates broadly to appraisal theories of emotion. The third set of contributions relates to the representation of emotions in brain, mind, and behaviour. The fourth set of contributions highlights the importance of motivation in emotion. Finally, the fifth set of contributions relates to research on cognition and emotion in clinical and developmental psychology. This parsing of the *Horizons* articles into five sets is convenient but also somewhat arbitrary. We therefore encourage readers to explore the meaningful connections between contributions that were assigned to different categories.

### General perspectives

The first section of *Horizons* is devoted to integrative perspectives that cut across disciplinary boundaries and theoretical traditions in cognition and emotion research. In the opening article, Levenson (2019) discusses the historical developments that led to the emergence and success of modern emotion science. As a pioneer and prominent contributor to the discipline, Levenson offers both a general and a personal account of the field, along with wisdom to pass on to future generations of emotion scientists.

Next, Keltner (2019) describes how he and his students have been studying emotion over the past three decades. Keltner sees an emerging consensus that there are 20–25 states that have emotion-like

properties. According to Keltner, these consensual emotional states may be integrated into a taxonomy that can guide scientists in a systematic fashion.

Along similar lines, Kuppens (2019) suggests that the time is ripe for emotion researchers to build an overarching consensual model of emotions that are generated from a limited number of motivational states. Kuppens further calls for more attention to the measurement of emotional states, including both the improvement of conventional measures of emotional experiences and new techniques to measure more “objective” signals of emotions, such as physiology, muscle movement, and neural activity. Finally, Kuppens sees a moral obligation for emotion researchers to carry their work outside the lab, to study the relations between emotions and real-life phenomena.

In the third and last article of the first section, Lieberman (2019) argues that emotion IS emotional experience. By implication, Lieberman holds, modern emotion researchers have paid far too little attention to the experiential aspects of emotion. In a provocative analysis, Lieberman proceeds by outlining a research agenda for examining emotional experience and how this may be integrated with current theories of emotion.

### **Appraisal theory and beyond**

One of the driving forces behind the modern scientific study of emotion has been appraisal theory, both in its classic formulation and its subsequent elaborations. It therefore comes to no surprise that appraisal theory is widely discussed in *Horizons*. Although appraisal theory is touched upon in many contributions, the theory takes centre stage in the second section of *Horizons*.

In Scherer’s (2019) contribution, he discusses the theoretical and empirical progress of three decades of research on appraisal theory. Scherer briefly reviews how he and his collaborators during the 2000s were able to study experimental manipulations of different appraisal processes so that they could test the multilevel appraisal framework that Leventhal and Scherer proposed in 1987 in the inaugural article of *Cognition & Emotion*. Thus, Scherer and collaborators analyzed the impact of appraisal processes on the brain (using electroencephalography, EEG), facial expressions (using facial electromyography, EMG) and physiological responding. One of Scherer’s main conclusions is that the coherence of different

emotion components requires more research attention. According to Scherer, multi-team collaborations will be vital to this end.

Next, Yih, Uusberg, Taxer, and Gross (2019) propose a novel integration of appraisal theory and emotion regulation theory. Such integrative theoretical work is of great value to the field, given that the rise of emotion regulation research has been one of the most important developments since the 2000s (Rothermund & Koole, 2018). In an elegant framework, Yih and colleagues relate the dynamic interplay parallel, interacting, and iterative systems for emotion generation and emotion regulation. Yih and colleagues further consider how this unified perspective may guide future research at the interface of cognition and emotion.

Third and last, Giner-Sorolla (2019) considers the pivotal importance of appraisal theory, along with challenges to the theory as a comprehensive framework for emotion science. Giner-Sorolla further relates these broad theoretical perspectives to emotions of moral judgment and intergroup processes. Giner-Sorolla advises future researchers to pay special attention to measures, their assumptions, and their context.

### **Representation of emotion in brain, mind, and behavior**

A fundamental scientific question is how emotional processes are represented in brain, mind, and behaviour. This difficult question is addressed by five contributions in the third section of *Horizons*.

Pessoa (2019) provocatively suggests that attempting to define the proper status of emotion may in fact hinder scientific progress. Instead, Pessoa urges emotion researchers to develop a science of complex behaviours, and worry less about their exact nature. Pessoa further advocates a complex systems approach where the interactions between multiple components lead to emergent properties that cannot be isolated or attributed to more elementary parts.

Taking a very different approach, De Houwer and Hughes (2019) argue that emotional phenomena may be more profitably defined in terms of functional-behavioural principles (e.g. operant conditioning, stimulus control, motivating operations) that refer solely to the way in which environment and behaviour interact. Lay intuitions about what is emotional can be used to identify which phenomena

to study, but the phenomena themselves are analyzed without reference to these intuitions. Unlike radical behaviourism, however, the functional perspective of De Houwer and Hughes is compatible with, and may even strengthen cognitive approaches to emotion.

Hoemann and Feldman Barrett (2019) suggest that the boundaries between cognition and emotion break down in new models of brain functioning. Building on these ideas, Hoemann and Feldman Barrett develop a constructionist, predictive coding account of emotion. This account suggests that emotion concepts are embodied, highly variable, and dynamic prediction signals. Furthermore, Hoemann and Feldman Barrett consider the implications of their account for health and well-being, culture and development.

Niedenthal and Wood (2019) further elaborate the idea that emotional processes are intertwined with perceptual processes. In a selective review, Niedenthal and Wood review what research has revealed about the perception—emotion relationship. Niedenthal and Wood further consider ways in which researchers have attempted to test the idea that emotion influences visual perception, and discuss why this research is so difficult. Nevertheless, Niedenthal and Wood foresee a rosy future for research on the perception—emotion interface.

Finally, Wentura (2019) discusses the paradigms and metaphors that have guided scientific theorising about the relation between cognition and emotion. Initially, theorising was guided by symbolic models (e.g. semantic networks), but more recently, theorising has been guided by predominantly sub-symbolic models that involve parallel-distributed processing, which seem better suited to understand emotional processes. Wentura further considers how emotion research has adapted paradigms from cognitive psychology to address its own distinctive questions.

### **Motivation and emotion**

The profound significance of motivation in emotion has long been recognised by emotion theorists (e.g. Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986). This theme takes the centre stage in the three contributions to *Horizons*.

Harmon-Jones (2019) posits that emotion often influences perceptual, cognitive, and neural processes via motivational dimensions. Drawing upon research on anger, Harmon-Jones argues that the field needs to move beyond a focus on affective valence. He also suggests that the field should integrate dimensional and discrete models of emotion.

Moors and Fischer (2019) discuss how emotions have been traditionally conceived as separate from and even contrary to goal-directed processes: Emotions were typically viewed as being maladaptive in that they interfere with rational decisions. Contrary to this perspective, Moors and Fischer propose that emotional behaviour is just a special instance of complex and flexible goal-based behavioural choices. For instance, anger may shift the person from the goal of maximising profit to the goal of enforcing moral norms. This goal-directed process is highly flexible, and may explain adaptive but also maladaptive influences of emotions on behaviour. Moors and Fischer describe a programme of research of how the validity of the goal-directed account of emotions may be tested against the validity of traditional accounts of emotional behaviour.

Finally, Reisenzein (2019) suggests that the main achievement of the past 30 years consists of the empirical reduction of the set of serious contenders for a theory of emotions. According to Reisenzein, empirical research has shown that Jamesian (bodily feedback) theories of emotion, cognition-arousal theories, and “basic emotions” theories have been rendered improbable by empirical findings within emotion research. Reisenzein further proposes that cognitive-motivational theories that discard the concept of evaluative appraisal as conceived of by the pioneers of cognitive emotion theory (i.e. as evaluative beliefs; Arnold & Gasson, 1954; Lazarus, 1966) are more plausible than the standard appraisal theory. Specifically, emotions may be directly caused by factual (nonevaluative) beliefs and desires (motives). Throughout his contribution, Reisenzein calls for more efforts devoted to clarify, compare, and integrate different emotion theories, and to systematize empirical and theoretical arguments for and against particular theories and hypotheses.

### **Emotion research in clinical and developmental contexts**

The fifth and last section of *Horizons* is devoted to contributions that focus on emotion research in the context of clinical psychology and developmental psychology, disciplines that from the outset have been prominently represented within the pages of *Cognition & Emotion*.

Carstensen (2019) discusses how the interaction between cognition and emotion has helped to resolve the paradox of aging: Even though many of

the resources that are assumed to promote happiness (e.g. health, cognitive ability, broad social networks) are reduced with age, older people nevertheless seem happier than their middle-aged and younger counterparts. Research by Carstensen and colleagues has shown that one of the explanations for this paradox may be what they call the positivity effect: A shift from a negativity bias early in life to a positivity bias that emerges in middle and late adulthood. Thus, Carstensen and colleagues have challenged the presumption that aging is synonymous with decline.

Scheibe (2019) reviews how it has become evident that well-being advantages in older age do not generalise to all situations or emotions, nor to all older adults. These findings have led to new theories and research on moderators and boundary conditions of the age-related positivity effect. Scheibe notes that researchers in this area have often assumed that findings in laboratory tasks generalise to real-life settings, but that this assumption has mostly gone untested. Using the example of work functioning, Scheibe shows how researchers may proceed to bridge the gap between laboratory findings and real world settings, which are noisier and rarely afford optimal conditions.

Difficulties with emotion lie at the core of many, if not all, mental disorders. Cognition and emotion research therefore has great relevance for clinical psychology. Indeed, Joormann (2019) discusses how the field of clinical psychology has been revolutionised by modern research on the interplay between cognition and emotion. Instead of conducting lengthy clinical interviews to uncover schemata and maladaptive interpretations, clinical researchers could put patients in front of a computer, show them emotional faces or positive and negative words and assess vulnerability factors for emotional disorders and perhaps even learn how to improve interventions. However, Joormann also confronts the problems that clinical researchers have run into, such as the low reliability of emotional biases in laboratory tasks. According to Joormann, researchers should acknowledge these complexities and try to develop methods that do more justice to the complex and dynamic nature of cognition-emotion interactions.

Finally, MacLeod (2019) briefly reviews three decades of research on anxiety-linked attentional bias. Early work in this field established that vulnerability to anxiety is associated with an increased tendency to attend toward threatening information. MacLeod describes how subsequent research has

delineated different aspects of attentional bias and different dimensions of anxiety, developments that afford a more sophisticated understanding of anxiety vulnerability and more precise hypotheses to be tested. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly with regard to the low levels of internal and test-retest reliability of commonly used attentional bias measures, such as the visual probe task. In recent work, MacLeod and associates have developed new variants of probe tasks that have sufficient reliability, suggesting that the psychometric properties of these tasks can be successfully improved. Moreover, refinement of assessment approaches allows clinicians to more precisely target specific attentional mechanisms in treatment. MacLeod thus sees much potential for growth in upcoming years for research on anxiety-linked attentional bias.

### **Concluding remarks**

Taken together, the Special Issue on *Horizons* offers a wealth of ideas and reflections from leading researchers about the past, present, and future state of research on cognition and emotion. These reflections provide valuable lessons for anyone working on the field, but perhaps especially for the new generation of researchers. We hope that this Special Issue will inform, guide, and inspire all. Let us together look forward to the new heights that we can reach in the next three decades and beyond.

### **Cognition & emotion in 2018**

Over the course of the last year, our editorial team has worked hard to maintain the high standards of *Cognition & Emotion* as one of the world's leading journals for emotion research. The journal has always operated at the crossroads of multiple disciplines, and this remains true in the present day and age. Indeed, a mere glance at the ten most down-loaded articles during 2018 features articles from developmental psychology (Ahmed, Somerville, & Sebastian, 2018; Kret, 2018; Lennarz, Lichtwarck-Aschoff, Timmerman, & Granic, 2018), social psychology (Hopkins et al., 2016; van Osch, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2018), and clinical psychology (Slofstra et al., 2018). In addition, there were trans-disciplinary articles on embodiment of emotion (Bernstein & McNally, 2017; Veenstra, Schneider, & Koole, 2017) and our brief review of the history of *Cognition & Emotion* (Rothermund & Koole, 2018). In the present age of increased fragmentation and hyper-specialization, we believe that a journal

like *Cognition & Emotion* has an important role to play in creating connections between disciplines that otherwise have little shared dialogue.

### **Some facts and figures**

The most recent figures from our publisher, Taylor & Francis, offer credence to the notion that the efforts of our team have been largely successful. The number of institutions with access to *Cognition & Emotion* and the number of article downloads are both at an all-time high. The journal's impact factor, which peaked at 2.688 in 2017, is at 2.563 in 2018. Although the impact factor in 2018 is slightly lower than in 2017, it remains at the second-highest level as it has been during the journal's history. Moreover, *Cognition & Emotion* maintains its ranking in the upper quartile of the top 30 of journals in experimental psychology, being 26th out of a total of 85 journals.

The number of submissions to *Cognition & Emotion* seems to have stabilised in 2018. More than 80% of the submitted articles received editorial feedback within 30–60 days. This ratio is comparable for accepted articles, so it is not inflated by the number of desk rejections. It thus appears that our editorial team has been largely effective in providing quick feedback to authors during 2018. The acceptance rate of *Cognition & Emotion* was around 10% in 2018, a number that is somewhat lower than in preceding years, which was more in the range of 15%. However, the acceptance rate of the journal remained within the old range in 2017, so we suspect that the lower acceptance rate of 2018 is simply due to chance. We will keep a close eye on the journal's acceptance rate, however, and take steps to increase it if necessary.

### **Changes to the editorial board**

Of the current team, four Associate Editors will leave the journal because of other pressing obligations. These are (in alphabetical order): Ernst Koster, Peter Kuppens, Daniël Lakens, and Eric Vanman. We were privileged to work together with these Associate Editors over the past two years, though it should be noted that Koster, Kuppens, and Vanman were part of the previous editorial team as well. On behalf of the journal, we thank these Associate Editors for their many contributions and their commitment to scientific excellence. Though the shoes of these outgoing Associate Editors are very hard to fill, we

found four brave colleagues willing and able to take their place. These are, again, in alphabetical order: Philipp Kanske, Ottmar Lipp, Peter Koval, and Laura Scherer. Of the latter, Laura Scherer will take over the Registered Reports section from Daniël Lakens. On behalf of *Cognition & Emotion*, we welcome these new Associate Editors to the Editorial Board.

### **New developments**

There are two more Special Issues in the pipeline. The first Special Issue, edited by Mandy Hütter and Klaus Rothermund, is devoted to "Automatic processes in evaluating learning". This Special Issue is scheduled to appear in the first issue of 2020. The second Special Issue is on "Alexithymia", and is edited by Olivier Luminet, Nathan Ridout, and Kristy Nielson. The latter Special Issue will likely come out somewhere in 2021. Together with the current Special Issue on *Horizons*, we are on track of our goal of publishing one Special Issue each year. We remain open to new proposals for Special Issues, so interested authors can contact us for more details.

For the upcoming years, we foresee that methods and reproducibility will continue to be important for the journal. However, in keeping with the spirit of many contributions to *Horizons*, we also sense an emerging need for a greater emphasis on theory development. We will thus look into new initiatives that can increase submissions of theoretical and review papers, which have historically always been an important part of *Cognition & Emotion*. It goes without saying that we welcome initiatives in this direction, along with any submissions without data that make a significant novel theoretical contribution.

We want to end this editorial by thanking the hundreds of authors who have contributed to the journal, along with the thousands of readers of *Cognition & Emotion* over the last three decades. It is ultimately you who have made the journal what it is today. This Special Issue on *Horizons in Cognition and Emotion Research* is hence dedicated to you, our authors and readers. We hope that this Special Issue will inspire you, as it has already inspired us. And please join us in looking forward to the many great things that the coming three decades on *Cognition & Emotion* will have in store.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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