

## A Tale of Two Snarks: Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Creativity Compared

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Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:  
That alone should encourage the crew.  
Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:  
What I tell you three times is true.

.....

In the midst of the word he was trying to say,  
In the midst of his laughter and glee,  
He had softly and suddenly vanished away—  
For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.

Lewis Carroll (1876/1981)

Some future historian of psychology may devote a footnote to a rather remarkable phenomenon that occurred during the last decade of the twentieth century. From its introduction by Salovey and Mayer (1990), the concept of emotional intelligence quickly became one of the most discussed topics in both the scientific and popular literature. There are multiple reasons for emotional intelligence's rise to prominence. But surely, one reason is that it has an easily recognizable grain of truth. We all know people who are emotionally adept: Whatever the occasion, they seem to experience the right emotion, in the right way, for the right reason, and with good effect. Moreover, a disconnect sometimes appears between emotional adeptness and intellectual ability. The academically brilliant but emotionally challenged nerd is more than the fictional object of jokes.

Of course, anecdotal observations long predate the appearance of emotional intelligence as a psychological construct; hence, they do not account for the sudden popularity of this new route to potential eminence. Much of the credit for that belongs to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, as epitomized by the research summarized in their target article. Equally important to progress in this or any other area is the kind of informed and constructive criticism offered by Matthews, Roberts, and Zeidner (this issue; for a more complete account, see Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002). These two sets of investigators provide a textbook example of how the dialectic of science should proceed.

Nevertheless, as I read articles by Mayer, Salovey, and their colleagues, searching for the meaning of emotion in emotional intelligence, I sometimes feel like the protagonist in Lewis Carroll's (1876/1981) tale, *The Hunting of the Snark*. One purpose of this article is to hunt the emotional Snark in emotional intelligence. I also review some of my own work on emotional creativity. Although it stems from different

theoretical assumptions, emotional creativity shares with emotional intelligence a Snarkish quality. In a sense, then, this essay is about one Snark chasing another. My hope is not that either Snark should vanish like a Boojum; my hope is, rather, that each may become more substantive through interaction with the other.

### An Emotionally Intelligent Snark

In their four-branch model, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (this issue) conceive of emotional intelligence in terms of four capacities: (a) to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately; (b) to use emotions to facilitate thinking; (c) to understand the temporal course and probable outcome of emotions; and (d) to regulate emotions effectively. The model does not, however, clearly specify the nature of the emotion that is being perceived, used, understood, and regulated. The closest Mayer et al. come to defining emotion in the target article is as a form of information about the way a person appraises a situation and is motivated respond. Emotional information, they suggest, can be conveyed through unique channels (presumably the activation of unspecified central neural mechanisms) and through patterns of proprioceptive and cognitive inputs. If I understand them correctly, this is an updated version of the William James's (1890) famous theory of emotion (see also, Damasio, 1999).

James was not hunting a Snark: He had a different creature in mind, namely, "the goose which lays the golden eggs" (1890, p. 449). James's goose was the "generative principle" that could account for way specific emotions ("eggs") are experienced. Unfortunately, James's goose, no matter how oft repeated by subsequent generations of emotion theorists, has proven as elusive as a Snark. Indeed, when explaining specific emotional experiences, such as falling in love, James seldom made reference to his own famous theory—and for good reason, I believe (Averill, 1992).

When I turn to other articles by Mayer, Salovey, and colleagues, I continue to have difficulty finding the meaning of emotion in emotional intelligence. For example, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2001) defined emotion as "an organized mental response to an event that includes physiological, experiential, and cognitive aspects, among others" (pp. 233-234). This definition is sufficiently broad to in-

clude almost any response, emotional or otherwise. To sharpen its focus, Mayer et al. (2001) added the proviso that "one critical aspect of emotional information, is its consistency across people .... Any apparent differences in human emotional expression from culture to culture could be attributed to the fact that different societies teach different display rules about appropriate moments to express certain feelings" (p. 234). This proviso suggests that underneath cultural variations, necessary and sufficient conditions exist by which emotions can be identified.

In another explication, Mayer and Salovey (1997) referred to the hoary three-fold division of the mind into cognition, affect, and motivation. "Emotions belong to the second, so-called affective sphere of mental functioning, which includes the emotions themselves, moods, evaluations, and other feeling states, including fatigue or energy" (p. 4). And what about the emotions themselves? According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000), emotions convey meanings: "For example, the experience of anger often designates the presence of a real or perceived injustice or blockage of a desired goal. The experience of sadness indicates a real or perceived loss. In addition, there are evolutionary bases for the meanings of basic emotions (Darwin, 1872/1955; Ekman, 1973). Moreover, emotions develop in predictable patterns that are interrelated with developments in complex social situations" (p. 107). This passage is open to various interpretations, depending on how the distinction between basic and nonbasic emotions is drawn and how emotions of either sort develop in "predictable patterns" in interaction with complex social systems. However, like the passages quoted previously, this one seems to suggest that emotions, in contrast to cognitions, are vestiges of our evolutionary past.

Compared to some other exponents of emotional intelligence (e.g., Goleman, 1995), Mayer, Salovey, and colleagues are a model of clarity, at least when it concerns the *intelligence* in emotional intelligence. Their conception of emotion is, however, more ambiguous. Therefore, at the risk of misconstruing their actual position, let me state what I perceive to be three propositions that run through their various formulations, namely, (a) each kind of emotion (anger, fear, etc.) shares certain essential features that are biologically based, (b) simpler emotions may combine to form more complex emotions, and (c) emotions may be regulated but not fundamentally altered by display rules.

Mayer et al. (this issue) may not agree fully with the above statement of their position; admittedly, I may be setting up a straw man to have a foil for argument. Nevertheless, the straw man is not without substance; for example, these propositions have been held by some of the theorists Mayer et al. cite in support of their position (e.g., Ekman, 1973; Plutchik, Izard). More important, I believe the propositions are implicit

in the way Mayer et al. conceive of emotional intelligence. This is for three reasons: First, Mayer et al. make a sharp distinction between emotion and cognition; second, they assume standards of emotional success that are relatively independent of individuals and culture; and, third, their method of scoring by consensus guarantees a uniformity of response. Each of these reasons deserves brief comment.

### Distinguishing Emotion From Cognition

Mayer et al. (this issue) insist that emotional intelligence represents the interaction of two distinct systems, the cognitive and the emotional. This assumption is more important from a theoretical than a practical point of view. Practically, the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), for example, would be a valuable contribution even if it predicted behavior no better than some combination of traditional intelligence and personality tests. After all, the vast majority of personal characteristics that are actually measured in psychological assessment can be considered *surface traits*; that is, characteristics that can be analyzed into more fundamental *source* traits. Limiting assessment to source traits only would be wasteful of time and resources (not to mention the lack of agreement that exists on the number and kind of source traits).

Theoretically, on the other hand, Mayer et al. (this issue) can more effectively argue that emotional intelligence is a unique form of intelligence if a strict distinction is made between emotion and cognition. It is not, however, a distinction among equals. Emotions become the *object* of presumably higher (cognitive) thought processes. But what is the basis for the distinction between emotion and cognition?

The terms *emotion* and *cognition* refer to molar behavior occurring within a context. As such, these terms cannot be applied to subpersonal processes occurring within the mind or brain of an individual. That would be like ascribing music and news to different processes or components within a radio. The output of a radio is the result of the system responding as a whole to different kinds of inputs. Similarly, whether a person responds emotionally or cognitively to a situation depends on the mind/brain operating as a unit.

The point of this admittedly crude analogy is that the same mental and neurological processes may enter into both emotional and cognitive behaviors, albeit with varying degrees of importance or centrality. Matthews et al. (this issue) make a similar point in much greater detail (see Matthews Myth 5).

In the past, going all the way back to the ancient Greeks, when the distinction between emotion and cognition has been extended to underlying processes,

the emotions have traditionally been assigned to more primitive (vegetative and animal-like) processes. In contemporary terms, emotions are a function of phylogenetically older portions of the brain (e.g., the limbic system) whereas cognition is a product of evolutionary more recent structures (e.g., the neocortex). I am simplifying, of course, and I do not know whether Mayer et al. subscribe to such localization, albeit in a more sophisticated version (what Uttal, 2001, has called the "new phrenology"). However, once a firm distinction is drawn between emotion and cognition, the tendency to associate the former with biologically basic processes and the latter with presumably higher thought processes is so ingrained in our language and culture that it is difficult to avoid (Averill, 1974).

### Emotional Standards of Success

Mayer, Salovey, and colleagues correctly insist that if emotional intelligence is to count as an *intelligence*, emotional behavior must meet standards of success. If we take traditional intelligence tests as a model, the standards of success apply across individuals and even cultures (although obtaining a correct answer obviously may depend on prior experience and socialization). Thus, mathematical solutions are either right or wrong, logical inferences are either true or false, and historical events either occurred or not. What is equivalent in the case of emotions?

If an emotional response is to be considered correct, regardless of individuals and cultural variations in expression, it must be based on features common to people everywhere. The most likely place to hunt for such features is in human evolutionary history. Thus, from another angle, we are led to the conclusion that emotional truth is rooted in biology.

I do not doubt that emotional responses can be more or less true in the sense of being more or less effective. However, I believe traditional intelligence tests provide a poor guide in this respect. Art or literary criticism may be a better model for evaluating emotions (Oatley, 1999). More specifically, an emotional episode is more like a rhetorical exercise than it is like a logical inference (Averill, 2001; Sarbin, 1995). As Oatley (1992) has argued, emotions typically occur in situations that call for action but in which logical argument and empirical evidence are not persuasive; that is, precisely the kind of situation in which rhetoric (i.e., "the art of persuasion") has also traditionally found a place.

### Consensus Scoring

Two points are relevant here. First, consensus scoring implies some common basis for judgment, which

again hints at (but does not necessarily entail) a biological conception of emotion. The technique of expert scoring is also by consensus, but on the part of a smaller, culturally more diverse group of judges; hence, it, too, suggests that emotions can be identified by necessary and sufficient conditions, most likely of biological origin.

Second, consensus scoring tends to devalue unusual and idiosyncratic emotional responses. In this respect, a test such as the MSCEIT, like most standard intelligence tests, is a measure of convergent rather than divergent intelligence. Consensus scoring thus leaves little room for emotional creativity, the topic to which I now turn.

### A Different Kind of Snark

Emotions and creativity have long been associated in popular conception. For example, the Roman philosopher Seneca (1958), citing Aristotle as his source, maintained that "no great genius ever existed without some touch of madness" (p. 285). This notion is still found in the caricature of the "mad scientist" or "temperamental artist." Yet, the relation between emotions and creativity remains fraught with ambiguity. Most often, the emotions have been seen as facilitators, inhibitors, or simply as adventitious byproducts of creative endeavors. Less often (e.g., Rank, 1929/1978), emotions have been viewed as creative products in their own right. It is this last conception that I review here. I focus on my own work for the sake of brevity, not out of any claim to originality.

In 1980 I presented a constructivist view of emotion (Averill, 1980). This view was based on three assumptions. First, emotions are complex patterns of responses or syndromes; second, no one component (e.g., facial expression, physiological arousal, or subjective experience) is necessary or sufficient for the attribution of emotion; and, third, social rules, not genetic programming, are the main principles by which emotional syndromes are organized. Building on these assumptions, I also suggested that emotional syndromes are analogous to short-term or transitional social roles. In situations in which normal (i.e., deliberate) responses are insufficient, society provides ways of coping that are interpreted as passions (things that happen to us) rather than as actions (things we do).

Broad theoretical positions cannot be proven in a straightforward fashion; they can only be made more or less reasonable. To demonstrate the reasonableness of a social constructivist view of emotion, two approaches have been taken. The first involves detailed analyses of specific emotions, such as anger (Averill, 1982), grief (Averill, 1979; Averill & Nunley, 1988), love (Averill, 1985), and hope (Averill, Catlin, &

Chon, 1990; Averill & Sundararajan, 2004), exploring how each fits into, and helps reinforce, the social system of which it is a part. In a similar vein but broader in scope, an examination has been made of the often innovative ways that emotions are constituted in everyday life (Averill & Nunley, 1992).

The second approach is more speculative. If we take seriously the metaphor of emotions as transitional social roles, people who are better at playing roles should also be more adept emotionally. To explore this possibility, as part of his master's thesis, Kenneth Fletcher (1982) constructed a scale to measure role-playing ability. Actors scored higher on the scale than did students in general, more experienced actors scored higher than less experienced actors, and actors who practiced "deep" acting scored higher than those who practiced "surface" acting. Also, among a sample of untrained students, scores on the role-playing scale were significantly correlated,  $r = .37$ , with scores on a laboratory test of improvisation. In other words, the scale demonstrated good construct validity (for details, see Fletcher & Averill, 1984; Hensley & Waggenpack, 1986). To serve as a means for testing of a constructivist view of emotion, it was also important that the scale contain no references to emotions *per se*; that is, that the scale measure role-playing ability alone and not be a disguised measure of emotionality.

Only one study has used the role-playing scale for the purposes originally intended. For his master's thesis, Gernot Gollnisch (1988) explored whether persons who score high and low on the scale differ in their ability to become involved in emotional situations. Emotional involvement was assessed through self-reports and physiological responses to imagined scenes of sadness, anger, fear, and happiness. As predicted, good role players showed greater physiological arousal during emotional imagery than did poor role players.

By the time this study was published (Gollnisch & Averill, 1993), we decided to address the constructivist thesis more directly, but on an individual level of analysis. How do cultural differences in emotional syndromes arise? The most likely possibility is through the emotional creativity of persons within a society. If an emotional innovation proves adaptive, it may then be emulated by others and diffused through the society. The cumulative result of many such innovations would be a gradual divergence in emotional syndromes across cultures.

Not everyone in a society should be equally creative in the emotional any more than in the intellectual domain. Hence, one way to test a constructivist view is by exploring individual differences in emotional creativity. An initial attempt to do this was undertaken in a master's thesis by Carol Thomas (1989; see Averill & Thomas-Knowles, 1991).

For a response, emotional or otherwise, to be judged creative, it must meet some variable combination of three criteria: novelty, effectiveness, and authenticity.

That is, the response should be in some fashion different from the norm, it should be of some value to the individual or group, and it should reflect the individual's own self or vision. These criteria are easy to state in the abstract, but they are difficult to apply. Take, for example, the criterion of effectiveness. What is effective in the short term may be ineffective in the long term and vice versa; and what is effective for the individual may be ineffective for the group and vice versa. But such complications need not concern us here, for they have been discussed in detail elsewhere (e.g., Averill, 2000, 2002, 2004).

Creative inspiration typically does not strike suddenly, like a bolt of lightning. Before a person can be creative, a good deal of preparation and knowledge is required (Hayes, 1981; Weisberg, 1986). That is true in the emotional as in the cognitive domain.

Based on these considerations, Thomas (1989) constructed a self-report inventory to assess individual differences in emotional creativity, and she compared responses on the inventory to performance on a variety of tasks, some especially constructed for the purpose and some being emotional adaptations of items from Torrance's (1974) tests of creativity. The Emotional Creativity Inventory (ECI) has subsequently undergone considerable refinement and testing. The current version (Averill, 1999) consists of 7 items to assess emotional preparedness (e.g., knowledge about and interest in one's emotions), 14 items to assess novelty (the tendency to experience unusual and difficult to describe emotions), and 9 items to assess perceived effectiveness and authenticity. (Although logically distinct, the criteria of effectiveness and authenticity are difficult to distinguish using simple self-report items.)

The ECI was constructed for research purposes and is not intended for use in applied settings. It suffers from all the limitations of self-report measures as outlined by Matthews et al. (this issue). Given these qualifications, scores on the ECI have been related to a variety of other variables, including the ability to express one's emotions creatively in words and pictures (Gutbezahl & Averill, 1996), to experience mystic-like states (Averill, 2002), and to enjoy the benefits of solitude (Long, Seburn, Averill, & More, 2003).

In short, what began as an attempt to validate a social-constructivist view of emotion has morphed into research on emotional creativity as a phenomenon of interest in its own right. Moreover, as this brief background sketch suggests, the concept of emotion in emotional creativity is based on very different assumptions than is the concept of emotion in emotional intelligence (at least, if I read Mayer et al., this issue, correctly). This does not mean, however, that one concept is any more elusive than the other, or even that the two are totally incompatible.

### A Meeting of Snarks

On a descriptive level, the overlap between the concepts of emotional intelligence and emotional creativity is considerable; for example, both presume sensitivity to and knowledge about emotions (preparedness), as well as the ability to respond effectively and authentically. The major difference is the potential for novel responses in the case of emotional creativity. Thus, people who are emotionally creative must also be to some degree emotionally intelligent. The reverse, however, is not necessarily true: Persons who are emotionally intelligent, at least as measured by tests such as the MSCEIT, need not be particularly creative. This is because, as noted previously, the MSCEIT is a measure of convergent rather than divergent emotional intelligence.

On a theoretical level, the relation between emotional intelligence and emotional creativity is less clear. This is hardly surprising, considering the fact that the relation between cognitive intelligence (as measured by IQ tests) and cognitive creativity is also poorly understood. Summarizing a large body of research and speculation, Sternberg and O'Hara (2000) described four ways in which theorists have seen the relation between cognitive intelligence and creativity: (a) creativity is a subset of intelligence, (b) intelligence is a subset of creativity, (c) creativity and intelligence are partially or even fully overlapping sets, and (d) creativity and intelligence are independent abilities. These ways pretty well exhaust the logical possibilities. Given this state of affairs with respect to the relation between cognitive intelligence and cognitive creativity, it would be rash to expect theoretical agreement on the relation between emotional intelligence and emotional creativity.

On a different note, one reason for the current interest in emotional intelligence is its potential use in applied settings. Mayer et al. (this issue) caution against the more extravagant claims that have been made in this regard: They are certainly correct in doing so. In fact, I believe that the major contribution of the work of Mayer, Salovey, and colleagues may turn out to be more theoretical than practical. Already, the concept of emotional intelligence has helped to reorient the study of emotion in more positive, functional directions. However, for reasons I have tried to indicate, I believe the nature of emotion in emotional intelligence deserves more attention than it has received.

Analogous considerations apply to emotional creativity. The study of cognitive creativity has a long history, although it has remained largely outside the mainstream of academic psychology. And in spite of many attempts to measure and nurture cognitive creativity in applied settings, our understanding of basic processes remains meager. The difficulty is compounded in the case of emotional creativity, for there is still little agree-

ment on how emotions develop and change fundamentally, not just in their outward manifestations.

### In Praise of Snarks

Snarks have their virtues as well as their faults. In particular, periods of reasoned ambiguity are necessary in the development of any science. For example, after its initial invention by Newton and Leibnitz, approximately 200 years passed before the calculus was placed on a firm logical foundation. In the meantime, scientists used the calculus to great effect, in spite of its Snarkish qualities. More than a century before Carroll (1876/1981) wrote about vanishing Snarks, Bishop Berkeley (1734/1964) described differentials as "ghosts of departed quantities" (p. 89). One of the best ways to shut off potentially fruitful debate is prematurely to demand conceptual closure.

Concepts taken from ordinary language are especially prone to ambiguity when used in abstract, decontextualized ways. This is true of emotion as a generic concept, as well as of individual emotional concepts, such as anger, fear, and so on. From time to time, it has been suggested that everyday concepts of emotion be eliminated from scientific discourse (for an early statement of this position, see Duffy, 1934). In one sense, this is a reasonable suggestion. As discussed previously, everyday emotional concepts can be misleading if applied to underlying physiological or cognitive processes. On the other hand, a great deal of wisdom about molar behavior is embedded in our ordinary language, knowledge that has been accumulated over many generations of interpersonal interactions and communication. We should take advantage of that collective wisdom, not disregard it. In any case, whatever theoretical constructs we ultimately develop must be related back to the phenomena of interest, that is, to the emotions we recognize, experience, and talk about in everyday affairs.

The way to proceed, then, is through open-ended dialogue and research of the kind illustrated well in the articles by Mayer et al. (this issue) and Matthews et al. (this issue). My hope is that this commentary may also contribute in a small way to that dialogue.

### Note

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