

REFLECTION PAPER

**Summary and Reflection on Kuppen’s Three Domains for the Advancement of Emotion Research**

**Clinical Perspectives on Anxiety, Mood and Stress**

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**Summary and Reflection on Kuppen’s Three Domains to Improve for the Advancement of Emotion Research**

**Summary**

Kuppens (2019) establishes that the three domains of theory, measurement and reality are critical to the advancement of emotion research.

Kuppens postures that the domain of *theory* is integral because as it stands, no consensual agreement exists on the definition of what an emotion is. Kuppens regards appraisal theory, constructionist theory and evolutionary accounts as the preeminent theoretical frameworks for the differentiation of emotion. There is potential upside to multiple theories for the field of emotion research, it allows for large variety in the approach and framing of further study, potentiating furtherment of thinking and understanding, Kuppens is however of the view this same reasoning acts also as an impediment.

Kuppens offers his perspective on a divisive issue in the field of emotion research, the co-occurrence of emotional labels, finding no compelling evidence that they can be differentiated in a consequential manner. Kuppens proposes that the optimal path forward in the theoretical domain of emotional research is through the culmination of existing theories, highlighting points of contention and devising empirical methods to greatly reduce variability in the pursuit of uniformity.

The second domain Kuppens suggests is integral to the furtherment of emotion research is that of *measurement.* Without appropriate, comprehensive and unified methods of measurement, progress is limited. Kuppens highlights two critical considerations with regards to the relatively recent advanced technological development of the objective signals of emotion. The utilisation of technologies to measure physiological changes and neural activity is a boon to the field of emotion research. Kuppens warns against the replacement of other modalities due to the differentiation of the components of emotion. He establishes the requirement to continue utilising the subjective experience as critical to the measurement of emotion. Kuppens does however recognise that existing subjective measurements, such as the ubiquitous Likert-scale, need to be overhauled (Willits, Theodori & Luloff, 2016). His reasoning is that the bias associated with such methods are widely known and form a perennial impediment to the measurement of emotional experience.

The final domain Kuppens recognises as crucial to the growth of emotion research is that of *reality*. Kuppens appreciates that establishing rigorous standards for laboratory experiments and computer simulations are imperative to the advancement of emotion science. He counterpoises this by highlighting the immense importance of ensuring that studies are relevant to the everyday life of people.

Kuppens concludes by re-establishing the success to date and current position of the emotional research field. He follows up by highlighting how the improvements he previously discussed across each domain can cumulatively advance the scientific field and consequently achieve real world utilisation and relevance.

**Category A – Application/Analysis**

I can see that the theoretical domain of this paper relates to emotion classification. Kuppens conducted a literature review of the foremost theories from the predominant theoretical frameworks of emotion science (constructionist, evolutionary and cognitive appraisal). These theories contrast in their differentiation of emotion, contradicting each other in the qualitative categorisation and differentiation of the core emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Some theories consider emotions to be discrete, that is naturally delineated and distinctly categorised (Beck, 2004). Other theories are categorised as dimensional, not recognising absolute distinctions, rather observing emotion across a spectrum (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones & Summerell, 2017).

Kuppen’s paper recognises that a number of these theories overlap, predominantly due to an absence of uniformity in the definition of ‘emotion’.

This overlap is an example of the situational condition of *parsimony theory.* Parsimony theory establishes that where multiple theories exist to explain the same phenomena, the simpler theory is the more likely. The exception to this theory is when multiple theories coexist due to their situational applicability.

**Category B (Evaluation)**

The rationale for the importance of unifying theories in the field of emotion research was not well established by Kuppens. He explains that the existence of multiple theoretical frameworks could be viewed as a luxury for emotion researchers as it offered a multitude of viewpoints for the framing of thought and scientific approaches to expand the understanding of the emotional research field. He follows up by saying that multiple frameworks could also hold back emotion researchers due to a wide object of study increasing the quantity of available literature. The remainder of Kupper’s discussion highlights common divisions in theoretical approaches, his own views on these divisions following a literature review and offering suggestions for the unification of theories. I felt that upon reviewing this section, there was a lack of evidence presented as to the importance of unifying the theories for the advancement of the emotional research field. Unifying theories seems logical and completing empirical studies to resolve areas of disagreement across theories appears rational. Kuppens however needed to provide supporting evidence as to how this unification provides advancement in the field, particularly in regards to the real-world advancement that would result. I believe that Kuppens also needed to further elaborate on the impediments which multiple theories presents. Mentioning that multiple theories present both opportunity and impediment, it becomes unclear whether it is more beneficial to continue working within an expanded field with multiple theoretical frameworks or to tighten the study object and have a single working theory.

**Category C (Self-evaluation)**

I found it relatively difficult to conceptualise the changes which were presented in Kuppen’s paper, specifically in regard to their applicability to real-world improvements. I found that the domains were reasonably well established in terms of their current position and the author’s proposed steps to implement change. Despite this, I felt that considering the paper’s title focused on making improvements to the three identified domains to advance research, a lot more emphasis needed to be placed on said advancement of research. I found that to optimise my own comprehension I was forced to draw a lot of my own conclusions as to how the suggested improvements would advance the field of study. I recognise now, upon reflection, that in doing so I am introducing my own confirmation biases and preconceptions to my learning. To rectify this, I have researched methods to overcome my cognitive biases when reading studies and recognise the importance of extending my knowledge through further reading (King, 2021).

**References;**

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