Nonverbal Behaviours. Emotions and Facial Expressions

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LEAD-IN

1. Where do our **emotions** come from? What is it about the human body and mind that possesses the ability to form emotions in a wide variety of situations? And in the first place, why do we form these emotions? Are they one thing or many things? Are they **learnt** or **innate**? What, if any, **function** do they serve? Are they a **state of mind**, **cognitive judgements**, or **perceptions of physiological changes**? Although these are seemingly current questions, they really are not since they have been debated for hundreds of years. Over time numerous theories have been proposed, but many of them have been defied, rejected, and even ridiculed. Although to date no single definition of emotions has been agreed upon, there is wide consensus that **emotional states** are generated through a combination of **cognitive appraisal** and **bodily perceptions**. Whatever the definition, emotions are considered to be **mechanisms** that set **goals and priorities**, without which life wouldn't be possible.

2. Discuss the questions.

1. Why do people have emotions?
2. Are there any unneeded emotions? Make a list of emotions that you believe aren't really necessary.
3. Facial expressions are linked to certain emotions. Are they learnt or innate?

3. Read the two following short texts about facial expressions. Which opinion in point 2.3 do they seem to support?

In his work "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals", Charles Darwin argued that babies are able to recognise other people's facial expressions. He observed this on the example of his baby son who assumed a melancholy expression in a situation where a maid in the Darwins' home pretended to cry. As the boy hadn't had any previous experience of seeing a crying person before and as such couldn't have associated crying with a feeling of sadness, Darwin claimed that he must have inherited this association.

In "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences", Gili Peleg, a researcher from the University of Haifa, described 21 interviews she recorded with born-blind people and 30 interviews with sighted people that the blind people were genetically related to. She asked them to recount experiences of when they were sad, angry, disgusted and happy. As they did so, their faces assumed the appropriate emotions. Then, she gave them a test to see what they looked like when they were concentrated and surprised. Next, she watched all the recorded interviews and observed that although the blind volunteers had never seen their relatives' faces before, their facial expressions were strikingly alike.

READING

1. Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Then read the text to see if you were right.

1. Without emotions we wouldn't be able to fully function.
2. Emotions can influence our relationships.
3. Different cultures have different basic emotions.
4. Our emotions are contagious.
5. Our thoughts can influence our emotional state.

2. Read the text to learn more about some of the major theories that have been proposed to explain emotions.

The Complete Guide to Understanding Your Emotions

Your emotions are crucial to your ability to adapt to the challenges of your daily life. When you feel good, you're able to shrug off even the most burdensome of tasks, but when you're miserable, you view even an enjoyable activity with a sense of gloom and doom. Emotions also affect our relationships with others. If a friend tells you a tragic story and you react by snickering instead of looking sad or concerned, you'll seem rude and insensitive. On the other hand, if you frown when you should smile at your friend's jokes, you'll cause offense for different reasons.

Flying off the handle to a minor annoyance can make you seem hyper or even unbalanced. Conversely, if you react with undue glee to a relatively minor piece of good news, people will also question your maturity and stability. Babies are allowed to shriek with

pleasure or howl with rage but as adults, we're expected to rein in the outward show of our feelings.

Psychologist Paul Ekman showed that there are six basic emotions that people of all cultures experience and recognize (happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, fear, and disgust). How and when we express these emotions differs radically by the norms of each of our cultures, the so-called display rules.

Our emotions affect not only the way others treat us, but our inner sense of well-being. We tend to believe that whether we are experiencing positive or negative emotions reflects forces outside our control, blaming everything from our genes to the weather. However, what many people do not realize is that emotions aren't strictly controlled by your body's physiology the way that reflexes are. You're not stuck for life with the emotional equipment programmed into your DNA.

To understand the way that you can control your emotions, we first have to take a slight detour through the early history of psychology. Views about what emotions are, and what causes them, have changed radically in the last 100 or so years. To take this journey, who better to start with than William James, the founder of American psychology. According to James, and the closely related views of physiologist Carl Lange, your emotions are completely governed by your body's responses. In fact, they are the emotions. Imagine you're being pursued by a bear. If you're like most of us, fear and panic will take over your entire being, causing your heart to race, your palms to get sweaty, and your stomach to turn somersaults. James and Lange equated these responses of your autonomic nervous system with the actual emotion of fear. According to their theory (known to intro psych students as the infamous "James-Lange Theory"), your bodily reaction doesn't follow the emotion, it is the emotion. As James said, "Common sense says we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike, afraid because we tremble… the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble" (Ellsworth, 1994, p. 222). Quite literally, when James and Lange talked about a "visceral" (or gut) emotional reaction, they meant it.

Many people found the James-Lange theory hard to accept. Common sense seems to just fine, despite James' assertion. Apart from the theory just "feeling" wrong (so to speak), it also failed to meet the test of scientific acceptability and was therefore eventually dropped as an explanation.

One very similar theory that appeared soon after the James-Lange foray into the field was that proposed by physiologist Walter Cannon; a view that is now known as the "Cannon-Bard" theory (reflecting his collaboration with a doctoral student named Philip Bard). This theory proposes that our emotions are regulated by the reaction of a small structure in the brain known as the thalamus. It's the thalamus that would sense, for example, the onrushing bear. This sensation simultaneously causes the visceral reactions in the body and the subjective experience in the brain. The Cannon-Bard theory eventually became discredited too because it did not withstand experimental scrutiny. The thalamus may be involved in some emotional regulation, but it's not the brain's hot spot for our feelings. Instead, the amygdala seems to be the culprit when it comes to such emotions as fear, rage, and jealousy.

The idea that our emotions may be controllable started to emerge in the theory developed by Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer in the early 1960s. In their now classic psychology experiment, they led college students to believe that they were receiving a trial dose of a vitamin. In fact, the experimenters injected the students with epinephrine. The students then watched a "confederate" (another student acting out experimental instructions) who became either angry or euphoric while completing a set of questionnaires. The students exposed to the angry confederate reported that they felt angry; those exposed to the euphoric confederate said they felt happy. The results showed that the combination of arousal (caused by epinephrine) and context (the confederate's behavior) influenced the emotional state of the experimental subject.

To translate, the Schachter-Singer study implies that your emotions are influenced by what's going on in the people around you and which emotions they're expressing. Another term for this is "emotional contagion." If you've ever felt moved to cry at the wedding of people you don't know very well because everyone around you is weeping into their hankies, you know how these feelings can catch on. (Why we cry at weddings is another story.)

Your emotions don't have to fall prey to those being expressed by the people around you, though. The cognitive revolution in emotion theory, led by University of Pennsylvania psychiatrist Aaron Beck, showed that our thoughts alone can produce our emotions. Beck's studies of depressed individuals led him to the discovery that dysfunctional attitudes and negatively-framed automatic thoughts are at the root of people's feelings of sadness. A dysfunctional attitude is a way of viewing the world that focuses on the negative and unrealistic aspects of your experiences. A negatively-framed automatic thought is an unconscious belief that focuses on your weaknesses rather than your strengths. Together, dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts create the "negative triad" consisting of a negative view of yourself, your world, and your future. The extensive research based on Beck's theory has led to acceptance of his cognitive-behavioral method of therapy as the premier treatment of depression.

Even if you're not clinically depressed, you can borrow a page from Beck's playbook to understand your emotions. For instance, sadness is caused by the belief that you've lost or will lose something important to you, anger is caused by the belief that someone has taken something away from you, and anxiety is based on the belief that something bad will happen to you. Unrealistically distorting your experiences produces these thoughts which then lead to your negative emotions.

Rational-emotive psychologist Albert Ellis takes another approach to cognitive theory, accounting more broadly for our tendencies to let our thoughts produce our own self-produced misery. Ellis believed that we allow our emotions to be dominated by the "must's": "I must be successful," "I must be loved," "I must have what I want." Ellis talked about the "A-B-C" model of emotion:

A: Activating event (a friend turns you down for dinner)
+B: Belief (no one likes me)
=C: Consequence (sad mood, feelings of rejection)

To change the consequence (i.e. your emotion), you need to change your beliefs.

To change your beliefs you need to examine them. In this example, you can the belief

that "no one likes me" by looking at the evidence for this belief. Why do you think that no one likes you? Does one person's turning you down mean that no one likes you? Does this mean that no one will ever like you? Does it mean that you must have everyone like you?

It's through challenging your thoughts and beliefs about yourself that you can change your emotional reactions. Once you start to pick apart the illogical basis for your emotions you can free yourself from being dominated by the maladaptive emotions of rage, jealousy, rejection, and dejection and instead boost your adaptive emotions of happiness, contentment, and joy.

Now that you've given your thoughts this readjustment, you've got one more job to do. According to the "facial feedback hypothesis" of emotion, the expression on your face can influence your emotional state. When you activate the muscles that control your facial expressions, you actually trigger internal changes that lead to the corresponding mood. If you frown, you'll feel mad. If you turn the corners of your mouth down, you'll feel sad. And if you turn the corners of your mouth up in a smile you'll feel good. As the song says, to "make gray skies clear up," just "put on a happy face!"

With this emotional repair kit, you'll be able to make more than the gray skies clear up. You don't have to be held hostage to your gut, your thalamus, or even your amygdala. Focus on the thoughts that precede your emotions and you'll find that you can control your mood. And remember to smile!

3. For sentences 1-8, choose the best answer (**a**, **b** or **c**).

1. Getting unduly angry over a trivial issue makes you seem

a) desperate for attention.
b) a little crazy.
c) gleeful.

2. Display rules

a) make us suppress emotions.
b) are the same everywhere.
c) vary from culture to culture.

3. Which of the following is not one of the six basic emotions?

a) fear
b) disgust
c) guilt

4. According to the "James-Lange" theory of emotion,

a) emotions follow our bodily reactions.
b) bodily reactions follow our emotions.
c) emotions and bodily reactions occur simultaneously.

5. According to the "Cannon-Bard" theory of emotion,

a) emotions follow our bodily reactions.
b) bodily reactions follow our emotions.
c) emotions and bodily reactions occur simultaneously.

6. According to Schachter and Singer, you are likely to feel _____ in the presence of an euphoric "confederate" if you were injected with epinephrine beforehand.

a) more excited
b) less excited
c) nothing

7. Aaron Beck believed that our emotional disorders are

a) caused by our suppressed needs.
b) dependent on our negative thoughts.
c) the result of physiological changes.

8. "Facial feedback hypothesis" of emotion states that

a) facial expressions can affect emotions.
b) emotions can affect facial expressions.
c) facial muscles can affect facial expressions.

VOCABULARY IN USE

1. Choose the correct option (**a**, **b** or **c**) to complete each sentence.

1. According to Darwin, all people, irrespective of race or nationality, have the ability to _____ some emotions in the same ways.
a) display b) demonstrate c) manifest

2. The basic premise of the "James-Lange" theory of emotion claims that your emotions are _____ by your bodily responses.
   a) governed b) ordered c) supervised

3. The "James-Lange" theory proposes that seeing a bear _____ in fast heart rate which you interpret to mean that you are scared.
   a) effects b) results c) causes

4. "Emotional contagion" happens where emotions _____ from person to person.
   a) expand b) stretch c) spread

5. The "Cannon-Bard" theory states that emotions are _____ by the thalamus.
   a) regulated b) expressed c) shared

6. The "Schachter-Singer" theory of emotion suggests that your emotions are _____ by what's going on in your immediate environment.
   a) related b) felt c) influenced

7. Aaron Beck claimed that emotions can be _____ by our thoughts alone. For instance, the thought of threat causes anxiety and the thought of loss causes sadness.
   a) followed b) perceived c) produced

8. Albert Ellis believed that our _____ feelings and behaviours can be changed if we are willing to change our thinking.
   a) disrupted b) disturbed c) impaired

2. Rewrite the statements below, replacing the underlined phrases with words and phrases from the box in the right form.

take control of, ignore, control, lose control, be affected by, pessimism, be infectious

1. Adults are expected to rein in the outward show of their feelings, especially while in public or at work.
2. If you fly off the handle over small matters, you are likely to be considered unbalanced.
3. When we feel good, we are able to shrug off every problem that arises around us.
4. Good feelings can catch on just as easily as bad ones.
5. Although our emotions fall prey to other people's emotions, our thoughts alone can create our emotional states.
6. If we feel low, we tend to look even at an enjoyable activity with a sense of gloom and doom.
7. When attacked by an enemy, fear and panic take over you. You begin to tremble and chills run down your spine.