

Introduction

Emotion is central to our experience of what it is to be human. Even little emotional events often stay in our memories - for example, arguments about planning where to go on holiday.

Do psychological 'facts' about emotions exist or do our accounts of events always present what occurred selectively for a particular purpose?

The subjective nature of how we experience emotion leads some psychologists to look for an internal site for them; others argue they are a product of our culture and society.

The reality is most likely to be between these two extremes as even though they are subjective and influenced by our cultural setting, they always occur in the context of relationships and institutions (Parkinson et al.)

They often occur as a part of the interaction we have with others and what is appropriate to display and how such displays are interpreted are regulated by societal norms.

Averill and Nunley - suggest emotion is like an artichoke - you can pick the surface off it and reach their heart - a personal experience that can be expressed using language.

But emotion could be seen like an onion instead - the layers can be peeled off until there is nothing left - in other words, it is not possible to separate the emotion from the way we respond.

Three common approaches to emotion:

1. Biological - a set of 'basic' emotions, pre-programmed into the brain. More complex emotions emerge later as a result of learning from our social environment.

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2. All emotions are learnt as we develop.

3. Emotions do not exist as well defined and distinct psychological objects - instead, their appearance of structure is an artefact resulting from imposing particular cultural concepts onto what we experience.

What makes emotion emotional?

James's feedback theory

James - used introspection (through a thought experiment that if you take away physical body parts and sensations nothing remains of emotion) to come to the conclusion that we only feel emotional if we sense that a bodily change has happened in response to an event we have experienced.

James therefore argues that our bodies react to an event before we experience an emotion - this is the opposite way round to the 'commonsense' view that it is the emotion which causes the bodily change.

Problem: How does perceiving something that is emotional lead to a specific set of changes in our body? We have to know that something is frightening before we can react to it as such!

Cannon's theory

Cannon - used quantitative measurement of bodily changes. Found physiological changes occurred in emotional states but that contrasting emotions produced similar changes. This would imply (for example) fear and anger should not feel different.

Concluded a common pattern of activation of the ANS associated with many different emotions and that they were experienced in the brain, rather than the lower body.

Schachter's theory

Neither of the preceding theories were social psychological in nature - but **Schachter's** (original interest was in psychology of affiliation) is.

His research found participants preferred to wait with people expecting the same outcome - e.g. to be given electric shocks as part of an experiment. Argued people make sense of their emotions through comparison with others in similar circumstances.

Emotion is dependent on two factors - physiological (autonomic activation) = intensity of the emotion and a person's cognitions = quality of the emotion.

Schachter and Singer - 'Suproxin' experiment.

Adrenaline injected and placebo injected conditions; some participants informed of effects; others not.

Euphoria and anger conditions induced by stooges

Schachter's theory implies emotion should only be experienced if physiological stimulation is present and the individual believes it is being caused by their situation.

Further, emotional experiences should correspond to that of the stooge.

Results not clear-cut - e.g. participants experiencing unexplained arousal from the adrenaline injection did not report more emotion than placebo participants.

... and some participants experiencing unexplained arousal in "anger" condition reported feeling mildly happy.

Criticisms of this experiment:

1. Situations may have been enough to induce emotion without the need for 'suproxin' anyway

2. One measure was a self-report of how the participant felt (e.g. 'how happy did you feel?') - but how does that correspond to the experienced emotion? **Schachter** acknowledged anger tended to be under-reported too - social acceptability of anger in an experimental setting perhaps affects what participants report?

3. Ethical issues - deception, use of drugs, personally insulting questions asked in one condition. Later replications were refused the 'anger' condition for example - **Marshall and Zimbardo**.

Despite these issues and the inconclusive results, **Reisenzein** argues the idea that our emotional reactions are shaped by our interpretation of events and calibrated in turn against how other react to them has been influential.

Appraisal theory (social cognitive approach)

Arnold - asks how we see what is happening in our current environment as an emotional or non-emotional perception (- and not asking how we can tell our internal state is an emotional one.)

Argues we perceive events as being relevant or irrelevant to things we want or don't want. Emotion requires we perceive things as being relevant. It is this action tendency, not a subjective feeling that is at the core of emotion. If you experience an emotion, if an action tendency is at its centre then your body is prepared to react through autonomic activity - such as a facial expression.

The large contrast between **James's** and **Arnold's** distinctions between non-emotion / emotion come from the different ideas that had about what emotion is and as a consequence, they ask different questions.

James: evidence from introspection, therefore explanation is targeted at understanding the subjective experience that results. Addressing "how can we tell we are experiencing an emotion?" and

"how do we know which emotion it is?"

Schachter asks the same questions, but uses experimentation to address them rather than introspection.

However, **Arnold** investigates emotion from a functional perspective and so is interested in its impact on behaviour - how it changes how we position ourselves in relation to external factors.

Arnold's approach allows for the possibility we might be emotional without recognising it for ourselves.

Frijda - suggests what we are aware of when we are angry is that someone or something else has an irritating quality - often, we are not aware of anger itself as we direct ourselves outwards, not inwards.

Instead of bodily changes (**James**), it is appraisals which determine whether something is emotional or not and also the differences between different emotions - e.g. anger vs euphoria.

Smith and Lazarus - to experience emotion you need to appraise a situation as impacting your current goals - there needs to be motivational relevance. We experience a pleasant or unpleasant emotion as we appraise motivational congruence - does the situation help or hinder what I want to achieve?

The specific nature of the emotion then depends on a secondary appraisal of how the event is to be explained - accountability - and how it can be dealt with - coping potential.

Appraisal and emotion seem to be absolutely dependent on each other - they are not separable. E.g. if our emotional state was arrived at unconsciously, how do we know that we have decided that someone else is to blame (accountability) without inferring it from our anger?

It could be that emotion is understood in terms of implied appraisals, rather than emotions resulting from an appraisal itself.

Appraisal theory:

- i. Argues emotion is a result of perceiving and interpreting external events and is not a result of internal symptoms
- ii. Defines relational meanings for emotion terms like anger, guilt etc.
- iii. But it is not certain how such relational meanings consistently map onto any particular emotion.

Emotion and social identity

Group identification in appraisal theory

Emphasis of appraisal theory is personal relevance.

Doosje et al - investigated events appraised as relevant to group identity in 1990s. Argued evidence showed people can feel guilt for acts that they have had no part in, but where they identify themselves as part of a group that has acted badly. e.g. Germans in Nazi Germany.

Smith - such identification makes group events personally relevant, so are able to provoke an emotional response in us. But, a very high level of identification may cause the rejection of ambiguous evidence of group wrong-doing to protect a personally valuable identity.

(Investigation into collective guilt is often performed by manipulating a participant's appraisal to induce the desired effect)

Emotional labour

Definition: people deliberately working on their own or others' appraisals to meet an employer's need

e.g. **Hochschild** - a qualitative study of flight attendants found they would cope with outrageous behaviour such as drunkenness by attributing causes in ways that promoted customer service above their own feelings (e.g. that person is frightened of flying, that's why they're drunk).

Eventually, this process becomes second nature and sincere.

Basic emotions

Ekman - sets out different roles for biological and social factors in his neurocultural theory of emotion.

Emotions are adaptive responses related to evolutionary challenges. Biology therefore provides us with 'autoappraisers' - that respond to adaptively important information and trigger pre-programmed emotional responses.

Such responses include distinctive, per emotion changes in:

- The ANS
- Subjective feelings
- Facial expressions

However, learning has a role to play - and according to **Ekman** explains why not all cues across all societies result in the same emotion being triggered - as socialisation is different. e.g. the treatment of success in the USA often results in more exaggerated congratulatory expressions and displays than in the UK.

"Display rules" = societal rules about how the expression of emotion should be controlled - allows us to regulate the expression of biologically triggered responses.

Facial expression of basic emotions

Cross-cultural experimental studies into the recognition of facial expressions (**Ekman et al**) found:

- Matching of NA facial expressions of anger, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust happens at above chance levels in all societies tested - even in places such as Borneo with limited Westerner contact.
- Concludes this implies a universal connection between basic emotions and characteristic facial expressions.

However, **Russell** questions, as:

- Overall agreement over the correct label for the emotion was much lower than 100% (except for smiles)
- If facial expressions really are diagnostic, why don't non-Westerner's perform much better at what is a simple multi-choice task - and especially those who have had no contact with Western cultures?
- Participants may have been able to work out what the correct answer was by piecing together other clues - e.g. fixed stare and down turned mouth may signal disapproval and so "anger" is the closest fit.
- But his account recognises some aspects of expression are universal (e.g. upturned lips = happy) but not that these expressions reveal fixed, basic emotion categories.

(Own speculation - maybe problems with static 2D images can account for some of this??)
Instead, **Russell** argues an expression can tell us something about another's emotional experience but does not reveal what that experience is.

Fridlund goes further - "anger face" is actually a non verbal threat that may not be associated with "real" anger!

Facial expressions correlated with emotions, but no reason why they would be directly connected.

The nature of emotion categories

Further limitation of **Ekman's** research is that participants had to respond to words. Not a 1-1 correspondence between languages and cultures for English terminology and vice-versa - e.g. schadenfreude.

Apparent structure of emotions is therefore perception rather than psychological reality. **Russell** - emotion categories are cultural artefacts imposed on our experience, not a reflection of reality.

If we accept this argument, then it is not possible to distinguish (basic) emotions from how they are represented.

Emotion discourse

Another limitation of the experimental approach to emotion is the use of self-reports and that the answers given could tell us more about someone's interpretation than the emotion itself (**Russell's** work implies this).

Russell - self-reports use concepts that are not perfectly defined. Argues valid scientific concepts must match with the defining features of the phenomenon being described. A self-report of an emotion is not an objective representation of a person's internal state - it is a communication to another person made for a specific purpose.

Russell concludes that this issue is not tackled by the vast majority of researchers - i.e. how well a representation of an emotion matches with the actual phenomenon.

Edwards - takes a discursive approach which does not make assumptions about either whether emotions 'exist' or what they might be.

Instead, **Edwards** looks at how talk about our emotions function in our interactions with others - a conceptual resource used in conversations - not a psychological phenomena which requires classification.

Russell objects to cognitive representations of emotions as the categories used (e.g. anger) seem to have fuzziness - no rigidly defining features. In his view, scientific categories do not allow this.

Edwards views the way in which we use talk about emotions as being flexible (not fuzzy) enough to be used for a variety of different purposes.

An example - saying someone acts out of rage or jealousy is used by the speaker to imply irrationality on the part of another (an undermining strategy) or to demonstrate how serious the provocation was (a supportive strategy).

Connie and Jimmy example:

Connie uses talk to claim that Jimmy's reaction to her flirting was caused by something in him (his jealousy) rather than as a response to a provocation by her.

Jimmy's account was that the events of that evening led him to become very angry. He presents it as being uncontrollable but with a rational cause - not something about him, but about something that happened. His anger is a justifiable appraisal of other-blame. In addition, he attempts to neutralise the violence directed towards Connie by referring to internally directed aggression.

Edwards' point is that it is not possible to say which account is most accurate - so it perhaps doesn't make sense to ask if the emotion was jealousy or anger and if it was justifiable or not.

For **Edwards**, the 'emotion' doesn't exist as a separate psychological entity but it is always a construct which is specifically formulated for a particular purpose.

Doesn't stop the consideration of cause and effects of non-linguistic phenomena (e.g. expressions) that are more or less related to what the general public think of as emotion. A discursive approach can work here too.

Prelinguistic 'emotion'

Infants unable to speak can be explored discursively by:

(a) Exploring how their caregivers explain their conduct in emotional terms.

(b) Treating expressions and gestures as conversational moves (e.g. **Selby and Bradley**).

Reddy - vt of 5 infants, 2-3 m.o. Monitored 'gaze withdrawal' when child began to smile in response to an adult's visual attention.

Interpretation is always present - what is a 'smile' and 'gaze withdrawal' for example. Observers also use their own words - e.g. 'shy', 'coy' etc. Infants' behaviour could therefore be said to be similar to embarrassment.

Indeed, others such as **Keltner** have developed criteria for detecting non-verbal emotion in adults.

However:

Might be a way of shutting off unwanted stimulation rather than expressing embarrassment. **Fridlund** - such displays could instead be a way of informing the other that attentional contact is not wanted.

In other words, we are observing a relational function rather than a distinct emotion - even if the relational function is seen emotionally (**Parkinson**).

Perhaps the role of this type of interaction is about how we regulate our relationship with others, even if it is reflecting real embarrassment too.

Emotion as relation alignment

Discursive approach shows how emotion talk can be used to justify, undermine, draw attention to a particular version of events etc.

Like **Russell**, suggests no simple object = 'an emotion' exists => no causal theory of emotion.

So what about the social psychology of emotions?

One possibility - emotion can be presented in verbal and non-verbal terms - e.g. if someone is happy they can simply smile. The function of the signal can be determined (e.g. by a non-verbal form of CA); symptoms of the signal can therefore be seen on others in terms of emotions.

Or, emotion discourse is a more developed form of non-verbal communications which precede it - e.g. **Mead's** "conversation of gestures".

Relation-alignment perspective can also be related to appraisal theory - we align relations with others in a particular way because of how we have appraised a situation. However, it is also possible we may use 'anger' to achieve a social effect - in other words, even if we haven't appraised a situation in this way we can still display it if we want or need to.

Conclusion

Subjective experiences, cognitive appraisals, autonomic changes and facial expressions all relate to emotions - but there is little agreement beyond this.

Arguments between pre-programmed, learned and if they are really connected to reality rather than perception. Discursive approach is helpful if we accept they are part of a flexible interpretive repertoire.