

EMOTION. THEORIES OF EMOTIONS.(WEEK 15)

Emotion

What is emotion? A feeling? Then what is a feeling? These terms are difficult to define and even more difficult to understand completely. People have been attempting to understand this phenomenon for thousands of years, and will most likely debate for a thousand more. This section will present the various theories related to the acquisition of emotion.

The mainstream definition of emotion refers to a feeling state involving thoughts, physiological changes, and an outward expression or behavior. But what comes first? The thought? The physiological arousal? The behavior? Or does emotion exist in a vacuum, whether or not these other components are present? There are five theories which attempt to understand why we experience emotion.

James-Lange Theory

The James-Lange theory of emotion argues that an event causes physiological arousal first and then we interpret this arousal. Only after our interpretation of the arousal can we experience emotion. If the arousal is not noticed or is not given any thought, then we will not experience any emotion based on this event.

EXAMPLE: You are walking down a dark alley late at night. You hear footsteps behind you and you begin to tremble, your heart beats faster, and your breathing deepens. You notice these physiological changes and interpret them as your body's preparation for a fearful situation. You then experience fear.

EVENT ----> AROUSAL ----> INTERPRETATION ----> EMOTION

Cannon-Bard Theory

The Cannon-Bard theory argues that we experience physiological arousal and emotional at the same time, but gives no attention to the role of thoughts or outward behavior.

EXAMPLE: You are walking down a dark alley late at night. You hear footsteps behind you and you begin to tremble, your heart beats faster, and your breathing deepens. At the same time as these physiological changes occur you also experience the emotion of fear.

EVENT ----> AROUSAL
EVENT ----> EMOTION

Schachter-Singer Theory

According to this theory, an event causes physiological arousal first. You must then identify a reason for this arousal and then you are able to experience and label the emotion.

EXAMPLE: You are walking down a dark alley late at night. You hear footsteps behind you and you begin to tremble, your heart beats faster, and your breathing deepens. Upon noticing this arousal you realize that it comes from the fact that you are walking down a dark alley by yourself. This behavior is dangerous and therefore you feel the emotion of fear.

EVENT ----> AROUSAL ----> REASONING ----> EMOTION

Lazarus Theory

Lazarus Theory states that a thought must come before any emotion or physiological arousal. In other words, you must first think about your situation before you can experience an emotion.

EXAMPLE: You are walking down a dark alley late at night. You hear footsteps behind you and you think it may be a mugger so you begin to tremble, your heart beats faster, and your breathing deepens and at the same time experience fear.

EVENT ----> THOUGHT ----> EMOTION
 ----> AROUSAL

Facial Feedback Theory

According to the facial feedback theory, emotion is the experience of changes in our facial muscles. In other words, when we smile, we then experience pleasure, or happiness. When we frown, we then experience sadness. It is the changes in our facial muscles that cue our brains and provide the basis of our emotions. Just as there are an unlimited number of muscle configurations in our face, so there are a seemingly unlimited number of emotions.

EXAMPLE: You are walking down a dark alley late at night. You hear footsteps behind you and your eyes widen, your teeth clench and your brain interprets these facial changes as the expression of fear. Therefore you experience the emotion of fear.

EVENT ----> FACIAL CHANGES ----> EMOTION