

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

