

# Emotion: its role in human life

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## Abstract

Emotion is associated with mood, temperament, personality, disposition and motivation. Language and culture are often seen as unique characteristics of human beings that use a wide array of emotions evolved long before spoken language. Some emotions occur over a period of seconds (for example, surprise), whereas others can last years (for example, love). The complex emotions could arise from cultural conditioning or association combined with the basic emotions. Non-humans and infants generally do not have the capacity to meaningfully communicate in grammatical word sequences, but they still vocalise and these vocalisations are often limbic and emotional in origin. Theories of emotion can be categorised in terms of the context within which the explanation is developed. Good emotional awareness can provide a solid foundation for other coping skills. Emotional intelligence consists of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Balance to life is maintained by think, act and feel. Happy people are more likely to work toward goals, find the resources they need and attract others with their energy and optimism — key building blocks of success. Recent advances in psychology have greatly improved our understanding of role of affect in communication, perception, decision making, attention and memory. The enduring assumption that human behaviour is governed by innate morality and reason is at odds with the persistence of human deprivation, injustice, brutality, inequality and conflict.

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Emotion is a subjective feeling state which can influence perception, thinking and behaviour; usually accompanied by facial and bodily expressions; often has arousing and motivational properties.[1] Emotion is associated with mood, temperament, personality, disposition and motivation.

## History

Long before humans could speak with words, they communicated through body language their emotional dispositions; and it is the neurological wiring of the brain for these emotional languages that represented the key evolutionary breakthrough for our species.[2] Language and culture are often seen as unique characteristics of human beings that use a wide array of emotions evolved long before spoken language and in fact, constituted a pre-adaptation for the speech and culture that developed among later hominids.

How did natural selection work on the basic ape anatomy and neuroanatomy to create the hominid line? Studies suggest that our ancestors from other apes were the development of an increased capacity for sociality and organisation, crucial for survival on the African savanna. All apes display a propensity for weak ties, individualism, mobility, and autonomy. The challenge for natural selection was to enhance traits in the species that would foster the social ties necessary for survival in the new environment. The findings suggest that the development of certain areas of the primate brain that encouraged strong emotional ties, allowing our ancestors to build higher levels of social solidarity. Our ba-

sic neurological wiring continues to reflect this adaptive development. From a sociological perspective that is informed by evolutionary biology, primatology, and neurology, the current neurological bases of our emotional repertoire and their implications for our social actions.

## Emotive language

Encoding is done by the sender of the message and its decoding by the recipient. A message is first formulated in the mind of the transmitter. This message can be an idea, a piece of information or feelings.

## Taxonomy of emotions

### “Cognitive” versus “non-cognitive” emotions

Instinctual emotions (from the amygdala) versus cognitive emotions (from the prefrontal cortex)

Categorisation based on duration: Some emotions occur over a period of seconds (for example, surprise), whereas others can last years (for example, love). In 1972, Paul Ekman developed the following classifications of basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. [3] Robert Plutchik developed the “wheel of emotions”, suggesting eight primary bipolar emotions: joy versus sadness; anger versus fear; trust versus disgust; and surprise versus anticipation.[4,5] Some basic emotions can be modified to form complex emotions. The complex emotions could arise from cultural conditioning or association combined with the basic emotions. Alternatively, similar to the way primary colours combine, primary emotions could blend to form the

full spectrum of human emotional experience.

### **Limbic language**

Ancient vocal-emotional centres explain why non-human animals also vocalise to convey feeling and emotion. Non-humans and infants generally do not have the capacity to meaningfully communicate in grammatical word sequences, but they still vocalise and these vocalisations are often limbic and emotional in origin.

Limbic vocalisations have been noted among primates. For example, vervet monkeys use three qualitatively different alarm calls to distinguish between leopards, eagles and snakes.[6] Experienced and normally reared monkeys respond to these calls by looking up (“eagle”), looking down (“snake”) or climbing up a tree (“leopard”) depending on which call is produced, even when played from a tape recorder.[7]

Structures of the limbic system: Cingulate cortex, septal area, hypothalamus, hippocampus, amygdala.

### **Theories of emotions**

1. Somatic theories (James-Lange theory)
2. Neurobiological theories (prefrontal cortex, homeostatic/primordial emotion)
3. Cognitive theories (perceptual theory, affective events theory, Canon Bard theory, two factor theory, feeling theory)

Dewey’s[8,9] analysis of emotion extends the James-Lange hypothesis on the source to the feelings of emotional experience, deriving the meaning of an emotion within a line of conduct, from the context provided by the line of conduct. This analysis provides a mechanism for interpreting emotional experience, rendering it part of the rational construction of action. This line of argument differs from that offered by de Sousa in 1987, where emotion supplements rational action.

From Dewey’s[8,9] perspective, rationality is a process – the fitting of means to ends. In an organism guided only by instinct or habit, and that instinct or habit is perfectly suited to the survival of the organism, actions are evoked by external stimuli. Where only one line of conduct will suffice within a situation, there is no rationality. For rationality to provide an advantage, at least two distinct lines of conduct must be evoked, each competing for expression. Dewey[8,9] argues that the experiences that we call “emotions” are the interruptions in the ongoing line of conduct where two tendencies to respond conflict with each other, or are held in tension against each other. This places emotional experience at the very core of rational behaviour. Emotion is the product of rationality, not its antithesis.

Theories of emotion can be categorised in terms of the context within which the explanation is developed. The standard contexts are evolutionary, social and internal. Evolutionary theories attempt to provide an historical analysis of the emotions, usually with a special interest in explaining why humans today have the emotions that they do. Social theories explain emotions as the products of cultures and societies. The internal approach attempts to provide a description of the emotion process itself. Adherents of this

position suggest that each emotion should be understood as a set of programs that guide cognitive, physiological, and behavioural processes when a specific type of problem is encountered.[10-12]

### **Emotional awareness**

It is the consciousness of your moment-to-moment emotional experience and the ability to manage all of your feelings appropriately for effective communication. Emotional awareness helps understand and empathise with what is really troubling other person; understand yourself, including what’s really troubling you and what you really want; stay motivated to understand and empathise with the person you’re interacting with, even if you don’t like them or their message; communicate clearly and effectively, even when delivering negative messages; build strong, trusting, and rewarding relationships, think creatively, solve problems and resolve conflicts.

Are we emotionally literate? Let us know by asking few questions.

Building emotional awareness: Recognise and remain comfortable with all our emotions, to experience greater joy, have more fulfilling relationships and avoid becoming overwhelmed by intense emotions.

Integrating emotional awareness: Talk to a good listener, listen well, power of nonverbal communication and body language, playful communication in relationships—power of laughter, humour and play, conflict resolution skills—managing and resolving.

### **Levels of emotional awareness**

Lane and Schwartz[13] have divided this spectrum into six separate levels of increasing emotional awareness. These five levels of experience are described in the model bodily sensations, action tendencies, single emotions, blends of emotions and combination blends are described below:

1. No emotional awareness: At this level, a person has no idea what they are feeling or that an emotion is even present. For example, a person may say that they “feel like a loser.” However, this is not really an emotional state, but instead, an evaluation or judgement.

2. Awareness of bodily sensations: Here, awareness of the emotions are on bodily sensations that they are experiencing, such as increased heart rate or muscle tension.

3. Awareness of behaviours: At this level of emotional awareness, a person is only aware of how they would like to act as a result of having some kind of emotion. For example, a person may say that they feel like they would like to leave a situation as quickly as possible (which may be an indication of fear or anxiety), or that they feel as though they could yell at someone (an indication of anger).

4. Awareness that an emotional state is present: At this stage, a person is aware that an emotion is present; however, they may have a hard time figuring out exactly what emotion is there. For instance, a person may have enough awareness to know that they feel “bad” or “overwhelmed” but nothing more specific than that. This is sometimes referred to as an undifferentiated emotional state.

5. Differentiated emotional awareness: We are now getting to the top levels of emotional awareness. At this level, a person is aware of discrete emotions that are present. A person is able to identify the emotion that they are experiencing at any given point in time, such as sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, happiness, joy, or excitement.

6. Blended emotional awareness: This is the top level of emotional awareness. At this level, a person is aware of multiple emotions that are present at the same time, including emotions that may on the surface appear to be in opposition to one another (for example, sadness and happiness). For example, a mother seeing her child go off to school for the first time may be very happy to see her child reaching this milestone but also sad to see that her child is growing up so quickly.

#### **Increasing emotional awareness**

There are a number of ways of increasing emotional awareness. First, it can be important to increase knowledge of emotions. For example, what is the purpose of an emotion? What function do they serve? What makes up different emotions? Learn more about how to identify emotions.

Once one feels as though has a good understanding of what emotions are the best way to increase emotional awareness is through monitoring emotions. Here are some ideas on how one can start monitoring emotions.

Remember, as with any skill, increasing emotional awareness may take some time and hard work. However, even if one can't identify everything one is feeling, one can use the information one has to better figure out the emotion one is experiencing. For example, if one knows that one's heart is racing and one has thoughts that something bad might happen, chances are one is experiencing anxiety or fear because these are common experiences associated with anxiety and fear.

The more we know about the all the different experiences and feelings that make up an emotion, the better able we will be in moving up the emotional awareness ladder. Practice monitoring one's emotions to increase one's emotional awareness. Good emotional awareness can provide a solid foundation for other coping skills.

#### **Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. It consists of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.

#### **Personal competence**

These competencies determine how we manage ourselves.

#### **Self-awareness**

Emotional self-awareness: Reading one's own emotions and recognising their impact; using "gut sense" to guide decisions.

Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits.

Self-confidence: A sound sense of one's self-worth and capabilities.

#### **Self-management**

Emotional self-control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control.

Transparency: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness.

Adaptability: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles.

Achievement: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence.

Initiative: Readiness to act and seize opportunities.

Optimism: Seeing the upside in events.

#### **Social competence**

These capabilities determine how we manage relationships.

#### **Social awareness**

Empathy: Sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective and taking an active interest in their concerns.

Organisational awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks and politics at the organisational level.

Service: Recognising and meeting client or customer needs/family needs.

#### **Relationship management**

Inspirational leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision.

Influence: Wielding a range of tactics of persuasion.

Developing others: Bolstering others' ability through feedback and guidance.

#### **Importance of emotional intelligence**

Increases productivity, reduces stress, moderate conflict, promote better understanding relationships, foster stability and continuity, heighten self-awareness.

Balance to life is maintained by think, act and feel. Healthy relationships help keep them meaningful, fulfilling and exciting in both happy and sad times. According to William James, "The emotions aren't always immediately subject to reason, but they are always immediately subject to action."

#### **Emotions and its importance**

Survival: A delicate and sophisticated internal guidance system.

Decision making: A person cannot make even simple decisions. Why? Because he doesn't know how he will feel about his choices.

#### **Predicting behaviour**

Boundary setting: Learn to trust our emotions and feel confident expressing ourselves; we can let the person know we feel uncomfortable as soon as we are aware of our feeling.

Communication: Keep communicating; our facial expressions, for example, can convey a wide range of emo-

tions.

**Happiness:** The better we can identify our emotions, the easier it will be to determine what is needed to be happy.

**Unity:** Our emotions are perhaps the greatest potential source of uniting all members of the human species. The emotions of empathy, compassion, cooperation and forgiveness, for instance, all have the potential to unite us as a species.

Lyubomirsky[14] reviewed emotional health can lead to success in work, relationships and health. In the past, researchers believed that success made people happy. Newer research reveals that it's the other way around. Happy people are more likely to work toward goals, find the resources they need and attract others with their energy and optimism — key building blocks of success.

### Future directions

The importance of emotional expression as part of human communication has been understood since Aristotle and the subject has been explored scientifically since Charles Darwin and others in the 19th century.[15] Advances in computer technology now allow machines to recognise and express emotions, paving the way for improved human-computer and human-human communication.[15]

Frith[16] looks more closely at the role of facial expressions in social interactions, demonstrating how a behaviour such as facial movement, can involve into complex and rich communication system. Frith covers topics such as invitation and emotional contagion to mental state attribution and empathy, as well as human-human communication and human-robot communication. Frith borrows methods from neuroscience and brain imaging. Frith describes two parallel processes through which sensory signals including facial expressions are converted into behaviour, one is associated with consciousness while others are not.

Recent advances in psychology have greatly improved our understanding of role of affect in communication, perception, decision making, attention and memory.[15] At the same time advances in technology mean that it is becoming possible for machines to sense, analyse and express emotions.[15] We can now consider how these advances relate to each other and how they can be brought together to influence future research in perception, attention, learning, memory, communication, decision making and other application.[15] The combination of new results in psychology with new techniques of computation is leading to new technologies and applications in commerce, education, entertainment, security, therapy and everyday life.[15]

To conclude, the enduring assumption that human behaviour is governed by innate morality and reason is at odds with the persistence of human deprivation, injustice, brutality, inequality and conflict. Al-Rodhan[17] offers a fresh look at human nature and universal security by proposing a new general theory of human nature, "emotional amoral egoism", and a specific theory of human motivation that draws on a wide range of philosophical, psychological and evolutionary approaches to human nature as well as neuroscientific research. He argues that human behaviour is governed primarily by emotional self-interest and that the

human mind is a predisposed tabula rasa. Al-Rodhan[17] argues that most human beings are innately neither moral nor immoral but rather amoral. Circumstances will determine the survival value of humankind's moral compass. This insight has profound implications for the re-ordering of governance mechanisms at all levels with a strong emphasis on the role of society and the global system.

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