The Sentiment is in the Details: Organizing that Thing Called Emotion

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A Componential Construct

Expressions
Smiles, yelling, clenched fists

Physiological
sweat, tear productions, heart rate

Coping behaviors
running, seeking comfort

Cognitions “I have been insulted.”
A Componential Construct

Expressions
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Cognitions
“I have been insulted.”

These are all proxies for what we really want to measure
Basic Emotions Theory

- Oldest theory, and quite prominent
Basic Emotions Theory

- Oldest theory, and quite prominent
- Six emotion categories

Intuitive, easy to incorporate into testing
Basic Emotions Assumptions

– Expressions are indicative of underlying emotions
– All emotion components are coordinated (affect program)
– Expressions are innately recognized by others
– People of all cultures interpret expressions in the same way
Expressions are not indicative of underlying emotions

Fernandez-Dols & Ruiz-Belda, 1995
Expressions are not indicative of underlying emotions

Ruiz-Belda et al, 1995
Expressions are not indicative of underlying emotions
Expressions are not indicative of underlying emotions

McCaul & Nelson, in prep
Components are not all coordinated

Aviezer et al, 2012
Expressions are not innately recognized

Proportion of 2-year-olds that called each expression **happy**

Facial Expression

- Happiness
- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger
- Disgust

Russell & Widen, 2002
Expressions are not innately recognized.

Proportion of 2-year-olds that called each expression angry.
Expressions are not recognized across cultures

Nelson, 2016
Expressions are not recognized across cultures

Nelson, 2016
Basic Emotions Theory

Emotion components are coordinated and reflect underlying emotions

Event: Bear in the woods

 Experienced Emotion: Fear

Voice
PNS
Action
Alternative Theories

- Izard (2010) surveyed emotion researchers
  - Broad agreement that emotion incorporates multiple components
  - NO agreement on a definition of emotion
  - NO agreement on a working theory of emotion

“There are as many theories of emotions as there are emotion theorists”

-Joseph LeDoux
Emotions are variable, with fuzzy boundaries

Dimensional Theory

Bear in the Woods → Feeling negative and very high energy → “I must be feeling afraid”

Facets: Face, Voice, PNS, Action
• **Benefits:**
  – Structure is amodal - applies to expressions, words, etc.
  – Depends less on language concepts
  – Accounts for affect between episodes of strong emotion
  – Dimensional structure captures most variance in data - reviews of emotion measurements, music, and voice (Eerola, 2010; Mauss & Robinson, 2009).

• **Million Dollar Question:**
  – Which dimensions best capture variance?
Appraisal Theory

Emotions depend on how we interpret the situation

Bear in the Woods

Appraisal: “Ohh, I like bears!”

Emotion

Feeling
Face
Voice
PNS
Action
Appraisal Theory

• Benefits:
  – Accounts for emotions felt when the stimulus isn’t present (past- and future-oriented feelings)
  – Explains why people experience different emotions in the same situation
  – Addresses complex emotions
    • (i.e. jealousy = anger + thinking about what someone else has)

• Million Dollar Question:
  – Which appraisals most inform emotions?
Behavioral Ecology Theory

Expressions tell us about others’ likely behaviors

Stranger scowls at you and grits his teeth

“He is probably going to attack me”

Emotion

Feeling
Face
Voice
PNS
Action
Behavioral Ecology Theory

• Benefits:
  – Evidence that people interpret expressions in this manner (Fridlund et al, 2006)
  – Not reliant on emotion labels
  – Behaviors have greater cross-cultural validity

• Million Dollar Question:
  – Which behaviors best capture human emotion?
Socio-Cultural Theory

Emotions depend on culturally-specific social interactions

Prior experiences watching others wrestle bears

That person reacts calmly

You see a bear

Feeling
Face
Voice
PNS
Action
Socio-Cultural Theory

- **Benefits:**
  - Accounts for cultural variabilities in expression recognition, emotion categories, and situational expectations.
  - Accounts for learning processes.

- **Million Dollar Question:**
  - Which aspects of emotion vary with culture? Which are similar?
Conclusions

- Emotion is a complex, multi-faceted construct
  - Don’t oversimplify models of emotion!
  - Most researchers combine aspects from several of theories

- Accurate models depend on capturing the variability in people’s experiences, expressions, and interpretation
  - Usual suspects: culture, thoughts, mood, situation
THANK YOU
Extra slides: not included in my original talk
Basic Emotions Theory

People to read for more information:

- Historical work: Silvan Tomkins, Darwin (to some extent)

- Highly influential: Paul Ekman, Carrol Izard, Dacher Keltner

- Modern work: Jess Tracy, Disa Sauter, Andrea Scarantino
People to read for more information:

- Historical work: Wilhelm Wundt, Harold Schlosberg
- Highly influential: Jim Russell, Lisa Barrett
- Modern work: Kristen Lindquist, Maria Gendron, Sherri Widen
Appraisal Theory

People to read for more information:

- Historical work: Magda Arnold, Richard Lazarus
- Highly influential: Schacter and Singer, Klaus Scherer, Robert Solomon
- Modern work: Agnes Moors
Socio-Cultural Theory

People to read for more information:

– Historical work: Richard Shweder

– Highly influential: Batja Mesquita, Jeanne Tsai

– Modern work: Takahiko Masuda, Manfred Holodynski
A few papers on cultural variation of emotions:


