

Emotions – the basics

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Charles Darwin theorized that emotions were universally experienced. This idea acknowledged that emotions can be experienced similarly and communicated via many different cultures and backgrounds. Evidence supports the concept that emotions are also biologically based therefore, they must in some sense be universal (Ortony, 1990). Emotions are recognized universally in the bases of social and biological interactions. Darwin also recognized emotions as a trait that is continuously evolving. The basic emotions become more complex and build upon each other via experiences and exposure. In the 1960's Paul Ekman was able to combine several studies and identify six basic human emotions. These six basic emotions have been recognized by most psychologists. The six basic emotions are anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. All these factors mature and enhance with age and development.

Emotions play an integral part in daily life and functioning. Emotion help humans learn, prepare, and express themselves. Emotions begin simple and become more complex. The basic emotions become fundamentals of human expression. The classification distinguishing between basic and complex emotions consider cognitive, experiential, physiological and behavioral parameters as significant for establishing an emotion (Zinck, 2008).

Emotions normally have a bidirectional relationship, an interaction with environmental and societal factors. The development of more complex and abstract emotions continues as this interaction between experiences and development is gained over time. The complexity of experiences opens the door for new emotions. The basic emotions have become essentially the

building blocks of more complex emotions. It is upon these basic emotions that more complex ones are built upon. The building blocks help us prepare for more complex emotions such as shame, guilt, and pride.

Emotions also have a biological basis. Evidence shows that the amygdala mediates basic emotions (Schneider, 1997). Humans must balance the biological interpretation of emotion and the external societal needs. Adapting emotions based on environmental and societal factors have helped humans survive. The basic emotions help humans adjust and become aware of particular emotions. Awareness can in turn create necessary changes for survival, whether increasing or decreasing the levels of emotions. The biological view of basic emotions has several empirical consequences, many leading to the role in socialization. This cycle created of socialization and biological factors of emotions all lead to the ability to survive. In children, biological factors will typically play a greater role than in adults.

The basic emotions are systematically multiplied into more complex emotions during emotional development. As discussed, emotional development includes biological changes, societal changes, and environmental changes. Emotion's purpose and role change with the developmental process of human life. For example, children suffice with basic emotions while adults experience more complex emotions. Emotions serve roles and functions in our daily lives with varying different purposes.

The study of emotions is no more dependent on the existence of a subset of basic emotions than is the study of language dependent on the existence of a small subset of elemental languages (Ortony, 1990). Letters are learned before words as basic emotions are experienced before complex emotions. The building blocks create an expressive outlet based on biological, environmental, and societal factors. Human emotions evolve with age and experience however,

the evolution of emotions is universal and made up of anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.

Further Readings

Ortony, A., & Turner, T. J. (1990). What's basic about basic emotions? *Psychological Review*, 97(3), 315-331. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1037/0033-295X.97.3.315>

Schneider F., Grodd W., Weiss U., Klose U., Mayer K. R., Nagele T., Gur R. C. (1997). Functional MRI reveals left amygdala activation during emotion. *Psychiatry Research*, 76, 75–82.

Zinck, A., & Newen, A. (2008). Classifying emotion: A developmental account. *Synthese*, 161(1), 1-25. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1007/s11229-006-9149-2>