**Emotional Experience**

Emotions are a combination of:

1. physiological arousal
2. expressive behaviors
3. conscious experience

In this lesson we will look at the details involving each of these components.

**Physiology**

**Arousal**

* An autonomic nervous system response.
* Dependant on sympathetic (arousing) and parasympathetic (calming) division of the autonomic system.
* Prolonged arousal (stress, for example) taxes the body and eventually depresses the immune system thereby increasing ones susceptibility to disease.
* Note: A persons performance in sports, on exams, etc., is usually enhanced with moderate arousal. (depending on confidence/ability).

Research shows that the following physiological states accompany emotional change:

* fear and rage is sometimes accompanied by differing finger temperatures and hormone secretions.
* The brains right hemisphere appears to be more active when one is experiencing negative emotions while activity in the left hemisphere is shown as one experiences positive emotions.
* Polygraph tests, sometimes used for lie detection, are prone to error because even physiological changes linked to nervousness (due to a tough line of questioning for example) may cause the polygraph to show that a person is lying even if they are not. See the "Thinking Critically About Lie Detection " section in the Myers text.

**Expressing Emotion**

Research on **nonverbal communication** shows these findings:

* We are good at detecting nonverbal cues especially threats.
* We read anger and fear from the eyes and we read happiness from the mouth.
* Introverted people are better readers of emotion than extraverted people.
* Women are better readers of expression and conveyers of happiness while men tend to be slightly better at conveying anger.
* It is difficult to spot deceit unless you are trained. Raised voice pitch sometimes indicates that someone is lying and facial muscles often reveal signs of emotions that we are trying to conceal.
* Some experts believe that body language has links to attraction, deceit, etc. For example, it is thought that if two people mirror each others actions then this is a sign of mutual attraction.

**Cultural factors** affect the expression of emotion. The following points should be noted:

* People of different cultures vary in how much they express emotions. For example, North Americans are openly emotional whereas Japanese tend to hide their emotions.
* Gestures vary from culture to culture. For example, "thumbs up" may mean "way to go" in North America but it means "up yours" in Australia. Hand gesture knowledge is a must when traveling abroad!!!

Research has shown that there are physiological effects of changing facial expressions. Note the following findings:

* James Laird found that changing your facial expression caused you to actually feel that emotion. Carry a fake smile long enough and you will begin to feel better"put on a happy face"!
* Paul Eckmans research uncovered a link between the use of certain facial muscles and our autonomic nervous system. For example, when actors made an angry expression their heart rate increased.
* Burns Vaughns research on imitation and physiological response showed that by observing another persons pain and imitating the pained expression, we respond physiologically as well. It is thought that this ability allows us to empathize with others.

**Experiencing Emotion**

The three main emotions discussed in this lesson will be *fear, anger,*and*happiness.*

1. Fear
   * An adaptive response; it prepares us to flee.
   * It is also a conditional response and learned by observation. For example, wild monkeys have a fear of snakes while lab-reared monkeys lack this fear.
   * The key to fear learning lies in the **amygdala**(at the center of the limbic system). A damaged amygdala results in a loss of emotional response to something otherwise feared.
   * Identical twins reared apart tend to have similar levels of fearfulness indicating a possible genetic component to fear learning.
2. Anger
   * Levels of anger and its causes vary by individual.
   * Anger as a response is more common when another persons act seemed willful, unjustified, and avoidable.
   * There are cultural differences in the expression of anger. Individualized countries encourage the venting of anger while in group-centered cultures such as Japan anger is less common.
   * Some feel that venting anger is a good thing.This**catharsis,**orinpsychological terms therelease of aggressive energy, is shown to be temporarily calming but may increase underlying hostility. There is also the possibility that the relief may be reinforcing.
   * There are benefits to anger if it expresses a grievance in a way that promotes reconciliation rather than retaliation. It is suggested that one use non-accusing statements of feeling to help resolve conflict. For instance, saying "I feel hurt when..." versus "You hurt me when..."
3. Happiness
   * **"Feel-good, do-good phenomenon":**research shows that the better we feel, the more willing we are to help others.
   * **Subjective well-being**: researchers try to assess this self-perceived happiness/satisfaction sometimes by calculating the ratio of positive to negative feelings that one might have.
   * **Most people are never permanently depressed**. Even following difficult times and tragedy, most people recover to normal levels of day-to day happiness.
   * **Opponent Process Theory of Emotion**: suggests that emotional ups and downs tend to balance. Also may explain drug addiction in that you crave more of a drug to turn off the pain of withdrawal.
   * The effect of dramatically negative or positive events is temporary; Since the 50s, Americans reported happiness has remained unchanged. For instance, research shows that after the excitement of winning the lottery wears off, winners report back to normal levels of happiness.

Two psychological principles explain why:

1. **Adaptation-level Principle:**we judge things relative to things that we have experienced before. For example, if you are not used to getting As in Psychology and you finally receive one you may be ecstatictemporarily. If you continue to get As, it no longer has the same effect.
2. **Relative deprivation Principle:**suggests that when we compare ourselves with more fortunate people we are disappointed. If everyone in your class has their own car, you would possibly feel jealous, frustrated with your own situation. Yet, if no one had a car and you were the only person allowed to drive your parents car, you would feel better. Having a car is relative to what others have around you.

Ultimately,you will always find people worse off than you and better off than you, we can increase our levels of self-satisfaction by focusing on what we have (health, good relationships, material goods,) in comparison to those who have not.

Research has shown that there is a positive correlation between happiness and those who are optimistic and outgoing, those who have high self-esteem, close relationships with others, rewarding work and/or leisure, meaningful religious faith, and those who get enough sleep and exercise.