
MODULE 41

Expressed Emotion

Module Preview

We decipher people's emotions by "reading" their bodies, voices, and faces. Although some gestures are culturally determined, facial expressions, such as those of happiness and fear, are universal. Facial expressions not only communicate emotion but also amplify the felt emotion.

Module Guide

Detecting Emotion

- ▶ Exercises: The Mood Awareness Scale; Emotional Expressivity Scale; Nonverbal Communication; "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" Test; Sample Items; Difficulty in Detecting Deception
- ▶ Exercise/Project: The Affective Communication Test
- ▶ PsychSim 5: Catching Liars
- ▶ Video: Video Clip 27 of *Digital Media Archive: Psychology*, 1st ed.: *Reading Nonverbal Communication*

41-1. *Describe our ability to perceive and communicate emotions nonverbally.*

All of us communicate nonverbally as well as verbally. For example, a firm handshake immediately conveys an outgoing, expressive personality. With a gaze, an averted glance, or a stare, we can communicate intimacy, submission, or dominance. Most people can detect nonverbal cues, and we are especially sensitive to nonverbal threats. Experience contributes to our sensitivity to cues, as studies of abused children demonstrate.

Our brains are rather amazing detectors of subtle expressions. For example, a mere 10-second clip of a teacher's voice or face enabled viewers to assess whether the teacher liked and admired the child he or she was addressing.

Research indicates that we read fear and anger mostly from the eyes, happiness from the mouth. Introverts are better emotion-detectors than extraverts, although extraverts are easier to read. The absence of gestures, facial expressions, and tones of voice in e-mails deprives us of an important source of information.

Gender, Emotion, and Nonverbal Emotion

41-2. *Discuss gender differences in the ability to perceive and communicate emotions nonverbally.*

Women generally surpass men at reading people's emotional cues. Women's nonverbal sensitivity gives them an edge in detecting deception. Their skill at decoding others' emotions may also contribute to their greater emotional responsiveness in both positive and negative situations. When surveyed, women are far more likely than men to describe themselves as empathic. Women also

tend to experience emotional events more deeply with greater brain activation in areas sensitive to emotion.

Culture and Emotional Expression

- ▶ Lecture: Cultural Differences in Emotional Expression
- ▶ Video: Video Clip 28 of *Digital Media Archive: Psychology*, 1st ed.: *Ekman's Studies on Facial Expressions of Emotion*
- ▶ ActivePsych: *Digital Media Archive*, 2nd ed.: *Ekman's Facial Expression Research: Detecting "Microexpressions"*
- ▶ Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Emotions and Facial Expression*

41-3. *Discuss the culture-specific and culturally universal aspects of emotional expression.*

Although some gestures are culturally determined, facial expressions, such as those of happiness and anger, are common the world over. Cultures also share similarities in display rules (such as expressing more emotion to fellow group members than to outsiders). Children's facial expressions, even those of blind children who have never seen a face, are also universal. Charles Darwin suggested that before our ancient ancestors communicated in words, their ability to convey threats, greetings, and submissions with facial expressions helped them survive. Emotional expressions may also enhance our survival in other ways. For example, surprise widens the eyes, enabling us to take in more information. Disgust wrinkles the nose, closing it from foul odors. Cultures differ in how much they express emotions. For example, cultures that value individuality display mostly visible emotions. In Chinese culture, which encourages people to adjust to others, personal emotions are less visibly displayed. Like most psychological events, emotion is best understood as a biological, cognitive, and social-cultural phenomenon.

The Effects of Facial Expressions

- ▶ Lecture: Freezing Frowns With Botox; "Catch the Feeling"
- ▶ PsychSim 5: Expressing Emotion
- ▶ Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Emotions and Facial Expression*

41-4. *Describe the effects of facial expressions on emotional experience.*

The *facial feedback effect* indicates that expressions amplify our emotions by activating muscles associated with specific states, and the muscles signal the body to respond as though we were experiencing those states. For example, students induced to make a frowning expression reported feeling a little angry. Students induced to smile felt happier and found cartoons funnier. Similarly, the *behavior feedback* phenomenon shows that if we move our body as we would when experiencing some emotion (shuffling along with downcast eyes, as when sad), we are likely to feel that emotion to some degree. Acting as another acts helps us feel what another feels.