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# Module Overview



## Culture, Emotion, and Motivation

This module explores emotion and emotional expression across cultures. Emotion is generally understood to be a combination of physiological arousal, subjective experience, and behavioral expression. However, the experience, interpretation, and display of emotion differ based on cultural experience and expectation.

The course textbook explores the various theories of emotion that have evolved. Early theories, such as the James-Lange theory, held that emotion is linked to bodily experience, meaning that a bodily experience leads directly to arousal or emotion. A stimulus leads to a physiological reaction, which leads to an emotional response. For example, “I am sad because I cry.”

Several decades later, Cannon and Bard proposed an alternative that suggested experiences can produce emotional and physiological arousal simultaneously. This means that the physical response (crying) occurs at the same time as the emotional response (sadness).

Another theory of emotion to remember is the Schachter-Singer theory, developed in the 1960s. A stimulus leads to a physiological reaction as well as an emotional response, which occur concurrently. This theory contended that prior theories had left out a crucial piece: cognitive interpretation of the physiological event. That is, an individual must interpret a particular event as sad before that person is able to emotionally feel sad and physiologically respond with tears. A physiological reaction and thoughts about it lead to an emotional response.

Some emotions are easily recognizable by both verbal intonation and nonverbal expression. Others rarely show up as identified emotions. Try the emotional intelligence quiz linked in

the module Reading and Resources. While the components of the brain are fundamentally the same across cultures (limbic system, amygdala, hypothalamus), how might different levels of exposure as children impact brain development?

After providing a foundation of theory, the course textbook explores how culture is related to emotion. Are there “universal” emotions experienced by all individuals in all cultures? Or does cultural origin impact the development and propensity to experience emotion? The reading materials for this module provide an opportunity to consider not only whether the experience of emotion is the same or different across cultures, but also whether there is cross-cultural agreement about what emotion should be elicited in certain situations. Is death always experienced as sad? Is birth always experienced as happy? Are we expected to feel a particular way based on the cultural meaning ascribed to a situation? As children and young adults, we learn culturally acceptable reactions to situations of success, failure, loss, sexuality, aggression, and so on. Based on this information, it is also proposed that we have the capacity to regulate emotions because we are able to learn how to feel differently in similar situations.

This module also explores behavior and motivation. Motivation allows individuals to initiate, activate, or maintain behavior that is advantageous. From an evolutionary perspective, these behaviors have allowed for survival of the fittest members of a group, as genetic patterns that promote survival become dominant. Drive and arousal are discussed as components of motivation. As you read this material, consider how drive and arousal (see Chapter 6) are influenced by cultural factors.

Several psychological theories are explored in this module in an attempt to reflect on the origin of motivation and behaviors. The focus of each theory is the conceptualization of disorder and motivation.

Cultural expectations can impact psychological disorders as well. One example mentioned in the course textbook is eating disorders, which are more common in Western countries than in non-Western countries. This is largely due to cultural norms that have a significant impact on whether an individual develops a preoccupation with thin-body ideals and acquires an intense fear of gaining weight. Such disorders do not appear to be *solely* present in Western cultures, but they are predominantly found there.

*Note:* The concepts of individualistic and collectivistic societies are revisited in this module to address the motivational discrepancy and interpretation of individual versus collective

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success or failure.



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