
UNIT 1 CONCEPT OF EMOTION*

Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most important and fundamental aspects of the human experience is our capacity to experience emotions. Without this, our existence would be uni-dimensional and nowhere as rich and vibrant as it is. We experience joy and pleasure when we achieve something, become sad when we lose, or get angry or frustrated when things don't turn out the way we want it. But what exactly is this emotion, what does it consist of, how does it affect our thinking and other aspects of our life? Defining emotions and agreeing upon a framework to understand them is a challenging task. Complex concepts such as these lie somewhere at the intersection of philosophy, psychology and neuroscience. Thus, there are numerous theories and frameworks within which emotions can be understood. In this Unit, we will focus on principles that are accepted across disciplines and are based on current evidence from the scientific community.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- understand and describe the concept of emotion;
- explain the components that comprise emotion;
- list the different kinds of emotions;
- understand the linkage and relationship between emotion, thought and behaviour.

1.3 NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONS

What is an emotion? It appears too simplistic to the common people to define it. Common emotions experienced are joy, happiness, anger, sadness, jealousy, love and so on. We eat good food and feel contented. We see a good movie and feel happy. We spend time with loved ones and feel loved. We lose a game and feel sad.

Visualize yourself in the following situations:

- You have been standing in line to collect your admission form for over two hours. Your turn is finally about to arrive after two others ahead of you when the form disbursing staff member announces his lunch break and closes the window.
- You are waiting backstage to begin your presentation to an auditorium full of students and teachers.
- You are on your way to meet a very close friend after a gap of three years during which they were living and studying abroad.
- Your favourite cricket or football team wins the world cup.

The above examples may serve as powerful reminders of intense emotions that you might have experienced routinely. In fact, looking back on your day as you read this Unit, you may be able to recognise that how you might have felt when the day began, is different from how you are feeling now. By the time you finish reading this, your emotion might have changed again. So what are these powerful, shifting states?

Emotion is a complex chain of loosely connected events that begins with a stimulus and includes feelings, psychological changes, impulses to action and specific goal-directed behaviour (Plutchik, 2001).

Woodworth (1945) defines emotion as a stirred-up state of an organism that appears as feelings to the individual himself and as a disturbed muscular and glandular activity to an external observer.

Morris (1979) states that emotion is a complex affective experience that involves diffuse physiological changes and can be expressed overtly in characteristic behavior patterns.

Thus, emotions are experienced in response to a particular internal or external event. A response of this kind involves physical arousal in the body- heart rate, blood pressure, perspiration, release of hormones etc. Secondly, a motivation to take action is activated- seeking things and activities that provide pleasure and avoiding those that give rise to pain or unpleasantness. Thirdly, emotions arise out of our sensations, perceptions and thoughts related to objects, persons and situations. It depends on how do we perceive something, think about it and interpret it. Fourthly, emotions vary in their intensity, for example, happiness can be experienced as pleasant and contented at the lower end of the continuum whereas excited and thrilled at the higher end of the continuum. Similarly being irritated and upset are the milder forms of anger whereas furious and enraged are high intensity anger feelings.

Emotions can be desirable or undesirable to an individual, depending on whether the said event is perceived as 'positive' or 'negative' or performs an adaptive function for an individual. They are responsible for driving a range of human behaviours such as attacking, fleeing, self-defence, forming relationships, reproducing etc. However, some of these functions may translate into negative consequences such as 'freezing' on stage, intense expressions of anger, unwarranted aggression etc. Regardless of whether the consequences are positive or negative, emotions create significant impact when they arise and adapting to our environment demands that we understand and express emotions appropriately.

Emotions are not the same as *feelings*, even though we may use both the terms similarly. The term feeling is used to refer to a person's private emotional experience or self-perception of a specific emotion. When an event occurs, one first responds automatically at a physical level even without awareness (emotion) and then registers or evaluates this (feeling). For example, when one sees a snake nearby, their heartbeat, breathing, perspiration (physiological arousal) might increase immediately, causing the action of running away. Only later might one realise that the feeling they experienced was fear. Feelings are created by emotions. Thus, although we may use the terms emotion and feeling interchangeably in our daily lives, they differ considerably from each other.

Another related concept is *mood*. While emotions last for short periods of time and arise in response to a particular event, moods are of lower intensity, generally last for longer periods of time, even days and may not necessarily be associated with a certain, immediate event or cause. While emotions are directed at something or someone (e.g. you are angry at your brother or you are frustrated about waiting in line), moods can arise for no apparent reason, such as waking up irritable one morning without anything unpleasant having occurred the previous day. Nevertheless, moods are important because they too influence our actions. For example, wanting to socialise more with friends when in a good mood and avoiding social situations when feeling low over the weekend.

1.3.1 Functions of Emotions

Emotions matter. They provide information to us and serve certain purpose. They became part of the human experience and have continued to remain so because of the functions they perform. Each function is associated with a certain utility or role.

Intrapersonal functions: This domain refers to the functions that emotions serve within individuals. They help one guide behaviour and make decisions, so that we can survive as well as function as human beings. For instance, they inform us when to fight and when to leave a dangerous situation. Feeling respect for oneself encourages one to care and look after oneself. Happiness promotes creative thinking and expands our focus to allow new ideas and small details to be noticed (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Even mild sadness contributes to more realistic thinking and improves judgment by encouraging us to scan information more carefully and thoroughly (Kalat, 2017)

Interpersonal functions: These functions are performed by emotions between individuals. The act of expressing emotions serves as an indication or signal to others about how one might feel about them or the relationship, what one’s intentions might be and what one’s needs might be. Displaying a positive facial expression such as a smile usually encourages other people to approach us. Showing sadness may stimulate others to show empathy or sympathy. Emotional expression is thus an important communication and relationship management tool. In fact, as early as 1872, Darwin identified that emotional communication aids the survival of the human species by enabling the reading of signs of impending aggression in others or warning others of a threat by displaying fear (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2009).

Social and cultural functions: This dimension has to do with how emotions contribute to the construction and maintenance of societies and cultures. Emotions such as trust often act as a social glue that keeps groups together. Cohesive groups in turn form societies and evolve their own distinct cultures. On their part, cultural codes inform individuals and groups about specific display rules that exist for emotional expression. For example, men are often conditioned to only display certain emotions such as anger and aggression, while showing “softer” emotions such as sadness is discouraged in eastern cultures. Certain work places are driven by unspoken rules about whether certain emotions such as affection are appropriate for display in work related contexts.

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Define emotion.
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2. What is the difference between emotion, feeling and mood?
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3. What are the interpersonal functions of emotions?
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1.4 COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONS

Emotions can be viewed as having five components.

1. *Affective:* also referred to as a conscious, subjective feeling. Individuals monitor their internal, felt states and recognise what they are feeling.
2. *Cognitive:* involves describing or assigning meaning to the emotion. Thus, thinking about a feeling is very different from the actual feeling. Individuals

try to understand the reason behind why something is happening and try to judge how an event might impact them.

3. *Physiologic*: bodily reactions such as palms sweating upon feeling anxious.
4. *Motivational*: Going toward or away from an action or person. This component is also referred to as action tendencies, which refers to specific actions that the individual takes that may be voluntary or involuntary. For example, moving one’s hand away from a hot pan is an involuntary action, while going on an early morning run despite feeling tired is a voluntary action. Each emotion may be associated with a particular action tendency. Some of these are presented in Table 1.1 (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2009).

Table 1.1: Emotions and their Associated Action Tendencies

EMOTION	ACTION TENDENCY
Anger	Attack
Fear	Escape
Disgust	Expel
Guilt	Make amends
Shame	Disappear
Sadness	Withdraw
Joy	Play
Interest	Explore

5. *Expressive*: Displaying emotions through facial expressions such as smiling, crying, frowning or body movements such as throwing a vase when angry to communicate emotions to others.

The interaction of these components explains how emotions work. Consider the following scenario:

Jhanvi’s boss shouts at her in response to a recent report that she submitted to him, which he says contained several errors and was not satisfactory. This can be labelled as an experience for her. As he shouts, Jhanvi can feel that the palms of her hands are becoming sweaty, her heartbeat becomes quicker and she can feel a sinking sensation in her stomach. This is the physiological reaction to the stimulus that she has just experienced. She also finds herself thinking “What if I lose my job?”, “He is humiliating me in front of others” or “ My work is not valued”. Jhanvi is now responding cognitively. As her face turns red and her eyes tear up to express her distress, we see the expressive component in play. Simultaneously, she might recognise that she is feeling shame and anxiety as affect, giving rise to the motivation or action urge to walk out of the office and run to the restroom where she might have privacy to experience these emotions and compose herself.

With practice, you can become quite aware of these components as you encounter situations, especially those that give rise to intense emotions within you. You can try the following exercise to develop this skill.

Exercise 1

Step 1: Identify a situation in which you felt an intense emotion. Where were you, what happened, who said or did what.

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Step 2: What sensations or changes did you notice in your body? In which parts of your body did they occur?

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Step 3: What thoughts went through your mind? How did you explain what was happening to yourself? Did you make any predictions about what would happen next or in the future?

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Step 4: What was the name of the feeling that you experienced? Was there more than one feeling? List all of them here.

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Step 5: If someone were to observe you in this situation, how would they describe your facial expressions and body movements?

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Step 6: What did you do or say in response?

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1.5 TYPES OF EMOTIONS

Emotions are also commonly classified as primary and secondary. Primary emotions are those that are basic and universal in the sense that they are “hard-wired”, automatic and experienced in all cultures and social contexts. They are thought to have evolved so as to aid our survival as a species. Robert Plutchik (2003) identified eight of these- fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation, joy and trust and represented them in the form of a colour wheel. Each of these emotions vary in intensity and show up as layers. For example, the primary emotion of fear may be called apprehension when it is at a very low intensity and terror when it is at its highest intensity. The core emotion remains the same i.e. fear.

Combinations and layers of primary emotions may give rise to more complex emotions. These are called secondary emotions and may be culture specific. These are represented in Fig. 1.1 below.

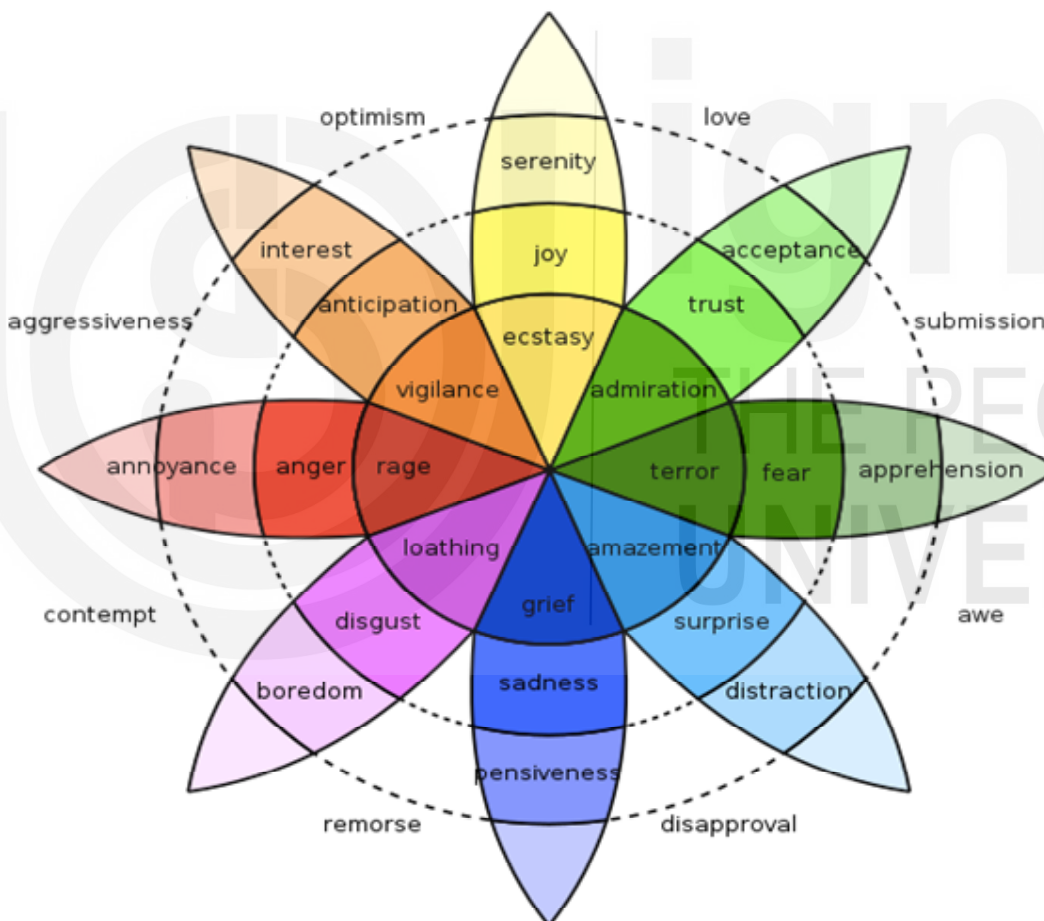


Fig 1.1: Plutchik’s Emotion Wheel

(Source: Wikicommons)

The colour families in the figure indicate similar emotions. Darker shades indicate greater intensity. The spaces between emotions indicate combined emotions that emerge from the merging of primary emotions. In the above representation, contempt can be a combination of anger and disgust. Optimism can be seen as the combination of serenity and interest. In addition, some emotions can exist as opposites of each other: sadness is the opposite of joy, trust and disgust lie at

opposing ends, as do fear and anger. The wheel above indicates that different emotion words can be used to express different intensities of the same family of emotions. The emotions in the central circle of the wheel are at the highest level of intensity; rage, vigilance, ecstasy, admiration, terror, amazement, grief, and loathing. As one moves outwards in the wheel, the emotional intensity decreases—anger is less intense than rage and annoyance is even milder.

Emotions do not remain static and can transition or evolve into others over time. For example, one may be angry about a fight with a close family member at first. Over a day, this can turn into sadness, even if nothing seemingly changes in the situation.

You can practice identifying and labeling emotions through the following exercise.

Exercise 2:

Refer to Step 4 in Exercise 1. Using the colour wheel in Fig. 1.1, try and see if you can find your emotion in the wheel. Maybe you find that another emotion name fits your experienced feelings better than the one you originally selected.

i) What is the colour of your emotion?

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ii) Is it a primary emotion or a combination of others?

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iii) Are there any new words that you can find in the wheel that you may not have used before?

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Self Assessment Questions 2

1. Distinguish between primary and secondary emotions.

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2. Which component of emotions determines judgments, predictions and analysis of thoughts?

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3. How does culture impact emotional expression?

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1.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONS, THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR

Recall a recent time when you were feeling happy and content. What was your view of the world during the time you were in this mood? Now try and remember a time when you were feeling upset and angry at something. How did you view the world during this time? It is likely that your perception of the world (including the people in it) was different during both these phases and influenced by whichever emotions were dominant at the time. Chances are that you also behaved differently towards other people as a consequence.

Emotions, thinking and behaviour are inextricably linked. The relationship between them can best be explained through contemporary models of emotion. Referring to Fig. 1.2 below, one’s thoughts or interpretation of a situation has a significant impact on the emotion one feels (Strongman, 2003). Imagine that your friend suddenly shouts at you. This is an emotional stimulus and encountering it may make you interpret or judge the outburst as “my friend is angry with me” or “my friend is rude”. Depending on what you think about the stimulus, you will experience a feeling. Subsequently, some form of adaptive behaviour will follow. If your interpretation of the situation is that is your friend is angry with you, you might feel confused and ask them why they are angry. If you think that your friend is being rude, you might experience anger and shout back at them too and thus your behaviour may look very different.

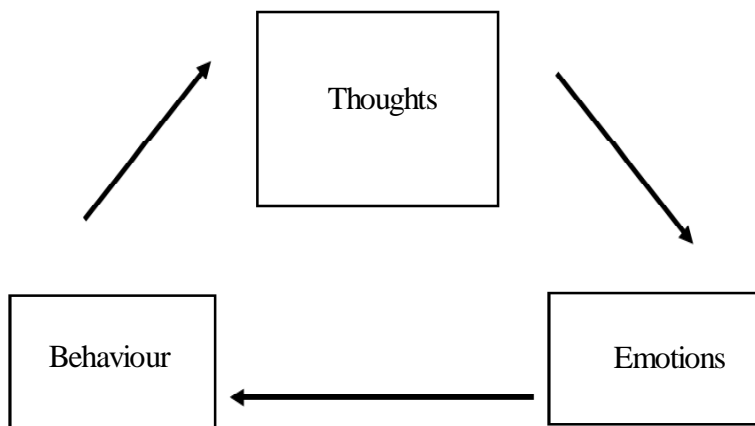


Fig. 1.2: Relationship between Thoughts, Emotions and Behaviour

This process of assigning meaning to an event and our reaction to it is called appraisal. A cognitive appraisal is, therefore an evaluation or interpretation of the personal meaning of certain circumstances that results in an emotion (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2009). Specific appraisals usually give rise to particular emotions and influence their intensity and quality as well. For example, an appraisal of “I desire something that someone else has”, goes along with the emotion of envy. “I have been treated well by another” creates the experience of gratitude. Table 1.2 below presents a summary of some other appraisals and the emotions they create (Coon et al., 2010).

Table 1.2: Appraisals and Emotions they give rise to

EMOTION	APPRAISAL
Anger	You have been slighted or demeaned
Anxiety	You feel threatened
Sadness	You have experienced a loss
Guilt	You have broken a moral rule
Happiness	You are moving toward a desired goal
Love	You desire affection from another person
Hope	You fear the worst but yearn for better
Compassion	You are moved by someone’s suffering
Pride	You are linked with a valued object or accomplishment.

According to Gross (2001) and Deuschendorf (2009), changing one’s interpretation of an event can prevent the experience of feeling drained and guard against overwhelming emotions. For instance, in the above example, by changing your appraisal to “she doesn’t mean it”, you could easily brush- off her behaviour and get on with your day. Appraisals, therefore, have the power to impact our reactions to the daily experiences of emotions, especially those that are unpleasant and stressful. By changing our own appraisals, we may be able to protect ourselves from stress and promote our well- being, even if we cannot control external situations or other people. In addition, because of differences in how a situation or event may be appraised, the same situation may give rise to different behaviour on the part of individuals. Infact, the same person may also react differently to the same situation at different times.

However, it is important to keep in mind that while emotions have the potential to energise us to act, whether action is actually taken depends on more than just emotions. Situational context, the object at which emotion is directed, anticipation and judgment of possible consequences of actions and past experiences, culture and gender all determine behavior (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007). For example, people from western cultures feel comfortable expressing anger more openly than those from eastern cultures, where showing anger in the presence of others is regarded in a more negative light because of the importance assigned

to maintenance of relationships (Coon et al., 2010). Gender differences notwithstanding, men and women may be similar in their subjective experiences of emotions but express them very differently due to the differences in how they are conditioned to show their emotions (Fischer, 2000). Women are generally more comfortable showing vulnerability through the expression of sadness while men are raised not to cry easily and instead are more accepting and expressive of anger and aggression.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Emotions are complex states that are difficult to define but also fundamental to our experiences. Without their existence, our individual, interpersonal and cultural existence would be meaningless. Emotional complexity arises out of multiple components that comprise emotional experience- subjective feelings, interpretations, physiological/ bodily changes, action tendencies and expression. As human beings, we share certain basic or primary emotions, while more complex, secondary emotions may be learnt and expressed as combinations of primary emotions. While emotions may ready us for action, they do not directly cause behaviour. How we think about an emotional event determines which emotion is felt, what action is taken and how the emotion is eventually expressed. These dynamics add considerable richness to our individual and social lives and allow us to adapt to situational demands. Understanding and changing our appraisal of an experience can empower us to change our reactions and gain better control of our emotions.

1.8 KEY WORDS

- Emotion** : Emotion is a complex chain of loosely connected events that begins with a stimulus and includes feelings, psychological changes, impulses to action and specific goal- directed behaviour (Plutchik, 2001).
- Feelings** : The term feeling is used to refer to a person's private emotional experience or self- perception of a specific emotion.
- Moods** : Moods are of lower intensity, generally last for longer periods of time, even days and may not necessarily be associated with a certain, immediate event or cause.
- Primary Emotions** : Primary emotions are those that are basic and universal in the sense that they are "hard- wired", automatic and experienced in all cultures and social contexts.
- Secondary Emotions** : Combinations and layers of primary emotions may give rise to more complex emotions. These are called secondary emotions and may be culture specific.

1.9 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Emotion is defined as a complex chain of loosely connected events that begins with a stimulus and includes feelings, psychological changes, impulses to action and specific goal- directed behaviour (Plutchik, 2001).

2.

Emotion	Feeling	Mood
Instant physical response to a stimulus without awareness	Conscious awareness of an emotion that arises in response to a stimulus	Can occur without an external stimulus
Brief in duration	Brief in duration	Lasts over a long period of time; sometimes days

3. When emotions serve the purpose of communication between persons and contribute to the initiation and management of relationships with others, they are performing an interpersonal function. Emotional expressions provide vital information about how one might feel towards another or what one intends to do with reference to another person. For example, an expression of disgust signals others to withdraw or stay away, while a smile is often considered a social invitation.

Self Assessment Questions 2

1. Primary emotions are instinctive and universal among human beings. They are also limited in number. Researchers have identified eight primary emotions: fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation, joy and trust. In contrast, secondary emotions are learned and may not be shared across different cultures or societies. They are formed by combining at least two primary emotions. Unlike the very limited range of primary emotions, secondary emotions are many. Plutchik identified as many as 24 secondary emotions formed by mixing primary emotions.
2. Cognitive component of emotions determines judgments, predictions and analysis of thoughts because it involves the process of assigning meaning to an experienced emotion.
3. Culture exerts an impact on emotion expression by defining display rules about which emotions are considered appropriate to be expressed in different contexts and the manner in which they are to be expressed. For example, eastern cultures encourage free expression of aggressive emotions such as anger in men and label them as strong, to the exclusion of emotions such as sadness. Similarly, crying may be considered weak and unmanly. Individualistic societies such as western cultures value ambition and ruthlessness and associate it with achievement, while collectivistic cultures value trust and consideration for the group or community and may drive behaviour by reinforcing sacrifices for others.

1.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. What are the different components of emotions? Explain with the help of an example.
2. Differentiate between primary and secondary emotions.
3. Explain the relationship between emotions, thoughts and behavior.
4. What is cognitive appraisal? How is it useful?
5. In your opinion, are emotions disruptive or useful? Justify your answer.

1.11 ANSWERS TO UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Emotions have five main components:

Affective: subjective feelings

Cognitive: interpretation or thinking

Physiologic: bodily arousal

Motivational: capacity of emotions to direct one to or away from some action

Expressive: displaying emotions through facial expressions or body language.

2. PRIMARY EMOTIONS	SECONDARY EMOTIONS
Basic, independent units	Made up of two or more primary emotions
Hard-wired and universal	Not universal but culturally influenced

3. Emotions, thoughts and behaviour are connected to each other. When a situational event occurs, individuals interpret or evaluate the situation to make sense of it. This occurs in the form of thoughts. The kind of thoughts one has about a situation, may determine what one feels or experiences as an emotion. The felt emotion, in turn, has the potential to give rise to some form of action directed towards the situation. This cycle may continue with one's reaction giving rise to further thoughts and emotions and so on.
4. Cognitive appraisal refers to evaluation or interpretation of information received about a particular environmental situation or state of the body. Appraisals are useful because they enable us to make sense of our environment (especially emotion producing events) and internal states. Specific emotions arise as a result of specific appraisals. They also influence the intensity and quality of emotions as well. It therefore follows that emotions can be changed by altering our appraisals as well.
5. In and of themselves, emotions are neither entirely disruptive nor entirely useful. The utility of emotions is determined by how an individual may use them as important sources of information or become perturbed by them because of his/ her own difficulties in managing or using them. For example, fear has the useful function of alerting us to potential danger

so that we may act to protect ourselves. However, when it arises when there is no real threat in the environment or is extremely intense when the threat is very small in comparison, an inability to manage it may lead to adverse consequences. For example, a fear of public speaking or group presentations may lead to extensive preparations and indirectly lead to improvement in performance quality but paralysing fear and an inability to manage it may also hinder academic success or career growth.

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