

SHOW SOME EMOTION
by EdB

"Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it." Vincent van Gogh (1889) Painter

Emotion is a chemical state in our brains which we experience as feelings. It is a very important aspect of our mental life, though often overlooked, and neglected by psychologists. A psychological state, arising intuitively (spontaneously) accompanied by physiological changes, involving changes that prepare the body for action. It is what gives quality and meaning to our existence.

Personally I have always been labeled "emotional" which, until now, I assumed to be a negative. Unable to suppress my emotions I was often misunderstood. Learning about emotion, and finding ways to control this, has considerably improved my life.

*"My duty is to try to reach beauty. Cinema is emotion. When you laugh you cry."
Roberto Begnini, actor*

Emotion is a response to events triggering bodily changes, motivating certain behavior. We come into this world prepared by evolution, to have emotions. The nascent emotions are sufficiently formed so that from the beginning of life we are able to alert others about our feelings. However the path to emotional competence continues throughout life, and differs from person to person.

We all possess a variety of emotions, and have universally recognizable expressions of them. Robert Plutchik developed a list (1980) of eight primary human emotions: Joy, acceptance, fear, submission, sadness, disgust, anger and anticipation. This is called the "wheel of emotion".

Spinoza claimed : Body & soul are aspects of a single reality; emotions, as affections of the soul, make the difference between the best and worst lives, as they either increase the soul's power to act or diminish that power.

Emotions, a class of feelings, differentiated from sensation. They are feelings caused by changes in physiological conditions relating to the autonomic and motor functions . A certain perception (arousal) sets off a collection of bodily responses and our awareness of these responses is expressed through emotion.

Emotions have a structure consisting of biological and mental layers. It is a moving of the mind and soul. A response to stimuli that involves physiological changes: increase of pulse rate, rise in body temperature, activity of certain glands, change in breathing. This motivates us to further activity.

"I am not interested in the relationship of color, or form, or anything else. I am interested in basic human emotions." Mark Rothko, artist

UNDERSTANDING EMOTION

When we put ourselves mentally into a persons situation, we can experience the emotions of that person more strongly. (empathy). By learning to recognize emotions in detail, we can respond to them more appropriately. Emotions act to motivate us, by sending us signals, reflecting our inner landscape. By watching and understanding them better, trying to figure out our triggers, we can make better decisions.

Of the approximately 90 facial muscles, 30 of them have the sole purpose of signaling emotion to other people; in this way we even motivate others into action. Emotional arousal is a process of our senses. This typically happens when the body is triggered by something we see, touch, smell, hear or taste. The body then releases chemicals into the brain that act to stimulate our emotions, decrease cortical functioning and reduce conscious control. This creates physical agitation, and prepares us for action, be it a positive or negative experience.

A lot of decisions are based on emotion, especially those reactive decisions (as in a heated argument). It takes about 0.01 seconds for the rational cortex to get rolling, with the main driving force being emotion, disregarding and overriding logic.

Our ability to think rationally is hindered by our emotion. The chemicals that inhibit our higher cognitive capabilities and limit rational thought are the same chemicals released through emotion.

When we find ourselves in a state of depression, we are unable to feel any sense of arousal, interest & engagement with the world around us. Some people with Alzheimer, or other brain injuries, have an impaired ability to use rational thinking, because of damage to that part of the brain where emotions are generated, thus disabling them from making even the simplest decisions.

"How much has to be explored and discarded before reaching the naked flesh of feeling..." Claude Debussy, composer

WHAT WE CAN DO

Self knowledge is the first step to being able to handle emotions more properly. Become more "emotional literate" ; recognize your own emotions (and that of others), identify them (label) and control them, then give yourself a chance to do something about them. Do not abandon them, try instead to balance emotion with reason. Take responsibility for them and for your (own) happiness.

EXPRESSING EMOTION

Emotions are ambiguous, confusing, complex, multi dimensional and ultimately resisting of description. Emotion; the energy that empowers art, is a fundamental element in creating and perceiving art. Art provides a profound, lasting transformative experience. The essence of art lies in the expression of emotion, as well as feeling, mood, thought, attitude, and a whole array of attributes.

Art therapy is used to help people manage (physical and) emotional issues. By using creative activities to express emotion, providing a way to come to terms with emotional conflict, increasing self awareness, and expressing unspoken (unconscious) concerns. Other ways to learn to control (and express) emotions is through creative arts such as dance, movement, music, drama, poetry etc. This is the best way to get in touch with emotions. Creative art is healing, it helps to express hidden emotions, reduces stress, fear and anxiety. It also provides a sense of freedom. The act of creating is believed to influence brain waves and chemicals released by the brain.

So sing a song, pick up a paint brush, move your body to the sound of your soul. It will acquaint you with the wonderful releasing feeling all artists thrive on. This is not a secret, it is a fact.

"I do not want to imitate life, I want to represent it. And in the representation I use the colors I feel and sometimes they are fake colors, but always it is to show emotion."

Pedro Almodovar, film maker