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RESEARCH ELSEWHERE

Robert A. Olsen

Core Affect and the Psychological Construction of Emotion

by James A. Russell

Psychological Review, Vol. 110, 2003, pp. 145–172.

Noting that there is little agreement among Psychologists about the nature of an emotion, the author advances a conceptual framework that integrates current thinking about emotions, their causes and consequences. More specifically, Russell identifies two primitive concepts that can be used to create a unified model of emotion. The first primitive is "core affect". It consists of two object-less dimensions, the first of which is pleasure/displeasure (valence) and the second is activation/deactivation (arousal). The second primitive is "affective quality," which consists of the pleasure/displeasure and activating/deactivating qualities of a stimulus. Whereas core affect exists within the person, affective quality exists in the stimulus. At any given moment, one's conscious experience (feeling) is a blend of the two dimensions. Core affect is not about anything or any object in particular but is like background temperature and is influenced by genetic and environmental factors. Prolonged core affect, without an object, is defined as mood. On the other hand what the author calls attributed affect is a change in core affect, which is attributed to a particular object. Phenomenologically, attributed affect could be represented by such feelings as fear of a bear, sadness at a loss, etc. In general, core affect influences all behavior from reflexes to decision making. Changes in core affect evoke searches for its cause and thus orient and motivate individuals.

In addition to the conceptual development, the author provides an extensive and detailed rationale and review of the relevant emotion literature.

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Surprises: Low Probabilities or High Contrasts

by Karl Halvor Teigen and Gideon Keren

Cognition, Vol. 87, 2003, pp. 55–71.

The authors point out that surprise has not been uniformly associated with the occurrence of low probability events. Thus they develop and empirically test an alternative "contrast" hypothesis wherein the level of surprise is more a function of the difference between the expected and the actual outcome. More specifically, while the surprise of an unexpected outcome can be due to the event being surprising because (1) it was not expected or (2) something else was expected more strongly, the authors suggest that the second interpretation is a more natural and a more potent source of surprise. Based on a series of laboratory experiments, the authors conclude that low probabilities are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for surprise to occur. In particular, it is the contextual background that is more important in determining whether low probabilities will elicit surprise. The decisive factor is the relationship between the expected and the obtained outcome. The authors also find that positive outcomes tend to elicit more surprise than negative outcomes. In addition, surprise value varies directly with the importance of the outcome and the novelty of the outcome. Finally, surprise can be reduced thru a more detailed imagining of possible future events.

The Stock Market and Consumer Confidence: European Evidence

by W. Jos Jansen and Niek J. Nahuis

Economic Letters, Vol. 79, 2003, pp. 89–98.

The authors suggest that the positive statistical relationship between consumer confidence and the level of the stock market may be the result of two separate channels of influence. First, higher market levels may make stock holding consumers feel wealthier and thus more confident about their financial futures. Second, higher market levels may make consumers more confident about the future of the economy as a whole and