Introduction

To be fully human is to have feelings. Can we imagine being alive and not feeling happy at our success on a daunting task or not being sad if a loved one dies tragically? Are there people who have never become angry at learning that someone has wronged them or who haven't enjoyed a concert or an exciting game or a cooling drink on a hot day or who haven't been frightened by a sudden danger? Surely, unless there's some serious neurological problem, to live is to experience pleasure or displeasure, happiness or sadness, anger or fear or contentment.

This book is concerned largely with the causes and, especially, the consequences of positive and negative feelings: How our thoughts, judgments, memories, and interactions with others can be affected as a result of experiencing pleasure or displeasure. You will see that our emotions, our moods, and even our physical sensations can distort our judgments, alter what ideas occur to us and what we remember, and affect our behavior to those around us. Many of these influences are quite surprising and certainly far more complicated than most people generally expect. More important in this pragmatic age, feelings can lead to error. The best way to minimize the mistaken judgments and/or erroneous decisions and/or faulty recollections that feelings can produce is to understand the nature of these effects and the conditions under which they arise.

This book will attempt to summarize what is known about the causes and consequences of good and bad feelings. Neurologists, cognitive neuroscientists, and psychophysiologists have taught us a great deal about emotions and feelings, and the interested reader would do well to delve into their writings on these topics. But we can also obtain valuable insights from the research and writings of psychologists and other behavioral scientists.

I'm not claiming that we have only recently gained an adequate understanding of how feelings operate. Astute observers of humankind have discussed their possible influences at least since the times of the ancient Greeks, and much of what they said holds up under close scrutiny. Still, it's worth noting that many of the comments and analyses offered in generations past are in substantial disagreement and that we can't find consistent guidance in the classic writings. More than this, as you will see, some of the most popular notions of feeling effects are, at best, oversimplified, and others are wrong, at least at times. With feelings being so pervasive and so significant in our daily lives, we would do well to understand what impact they have.

Before proceeding further, however, I should be clear what is involved in the term *feeling* as this word is used here. In this book feeling is synonymous with conscious affect. It encompasses experienced emotions but covers other kinds of sensations as well. Many psychologists have a rather narrow conception of emotions. They prefer to think of emotions as having fairly specific causes and targets (for example, most emotion theorists say we're angry at someone or happy about something). In order to minimize confusion, then, I will only speak of feelings and will give this term a broad meaning that includes emotional experiences, moods, and even physical sensations.

One implication of this far-ranging notion is that feelings can arise in a variety of ways. Sometimes they're produced by definite events in the outside world (such as the joy arising from a victory); at other times they result from highly noticeable physical sensations (such as the pleasure of sex or the discomfort created by being confined in a hot, humid room). But as a growing body of research has now shown, feelings can also be aroused by stimuli of which we're not fully conscious – details in the situation that we've actually detected but at such a low level of awareness that we don't consciously realize that we have encountered them.

To give you a brief taste of some of the interesting findings psychologists have obtained in their studies of the many and varied causes of feelings, I'll say a little more about this last-mentioned nonconscious stimulation. When Oatley and Duncan asked people to describe times when they had been happy, sad, angry, and afraid, they found that in a number of cases the respondents did not know what had provoked the emotion.[1] The persons reporting these ''free-floating'' feelings apparently had responded to certain cues (or signals) in the surrounding world even though they did not consciously

know to what they had reacted. This probably is what happens when people are anxious or even somewhat irritable on entering a particular situation and don't know why they have these feelings. From this book's perspective we would say that they don't have unconscious feelings; feelings for us here are conscious experiences. It's better to say, instead, that the processes by which the feelings are produced are nonconscious. The next chapter will discuss this further as we consider how feelings are generated.

It's also important to recognize that however feelings are aroused, their representation in our mind, our conscious experience, is often a mental construction based to a certain extent on the awareness of bodily changes. This is certainly not a new idea. Over 100 years ago the great American philosopher-psychologist William James held that emotional experiences grow out of the bodily reactions to some significant occurrence. One passage in his 1890 masterwork *Principles of Psychology* is well known as a convenient summary of James's theory:

> *Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect . . . and the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble.*[2]

I think it's fair to say that most contemporary investigators of human emotion now accept the essentials of James's theory: Bodily sensations have a major role in emotional experience. This may seem to be a rather unremarkable idea, but it has some very important implications. Thus, very much in line with James's conception, we now know that the bodily sensations produced by making the muscular movements characteristic of a particular emotional state can give rise to the feelings that are typically experienced in that state. The stereotypic upper-class Englishman who keeps a ''stiff upper lip'' and remains impassive when confronted by serious problems might actually lessen the feelings of distress he would otherwise experience. Chapter 2 will summarize some of the evidence for this kind of bodily feedback effect and will suggest some of the conditions that make it more or less likely.

In accord with James's thesis, my view is that people's experienced feelings are formed largely from their bodily reactions to the emotion-instigating stimulation. The mind integrates the bodily sensations along with other associated mental representations, with this mental

construction being guided partly (but not entirely) by previously acquired conceptions of how one customarily feels in a certain class of situations. To make this more concrete, suppose that Joe is faced by a bully who has just insulted him. Joe's body reacts quickly: His heart beats faster, his face becomes hot, his mouth clamps shut and his brows draw together, his fists clench. Joe also might recall other times when he had been insulted and the feelings that he had experienced on these occasions, as well as the stories he had read, seen, and heard about angering occurrences. He also thinks of himself as angry. Joe's mind integrates all of these inputs, guided to some degree by his conception of what anger is like, and forms the anger experience. Joe feels angry.

I've said a number of times that this book will be concerned largely with the consequences of the hedonic nature of affective states. You can see this in the title: *Causes and Consequences of Feelings*. It's reasonable to ask whether this focus on feeling valence doesn't omit other important aspects of feelings, other qualities that might also have a significant influence on thoughts and actions. Think of fear and distress. Can we appropriately group them together because of their hedonic similarity – both are unpleasant – at least for the purposes of interest to us in this book? Chapter 1 will show that we can characterize any given affect, to a great extent, in terms of both its valence and its intensity. Both fear and distress are felt as negative, but fear is often experienced as more intense than distress. Nevertheless, because both of these states are affectively unpleasant, can we disregard their differences at times, and ask only what are the effects that both have in common, indeed, that all negatively valenced feelings produce?

But of course, affective states have qualities other than their valence and intensity, and these other qualities can sometimes have an influence on what thoughts come to mind and what actions are undertaken. Thus, at least partly because of the specific physiological reactions that occur in these emotions, anger is typically experienced as a ''hot'' feeling, whereas many persons say they feel ''cold'' when they are afraid. The consequence is that anger and fear don't always affect judgments and actions in the same way. Anger is generally associated with approach inclinations but fear is usually linked to an urge to avoid the perceived danger. In keeping with the rather specific nature of anger, I'll show you later in the book that anger doesn't always have the same impact on thought processes, such as the use of stereotypes, as other unpleasant feelings.

In spite of these exceptions, however, we will look mostly at the consequences of a feeling's hedonic nature (or valence). This means I won't have anything to say about specific feelings (or emotions), such as envy, elation, or disgust. You can find interesting and provocative discussions of specific affective states in many textbooks on emotions, such as those by Carlson and Hatfield, Izard, and Lazarus.[3] This book seeks only to report the findings obtained by psychologists, usually social psychologists, in their carefully conducted investigations of the causes and consequences of feelings, and as I have noted, most of the studies of interest to us here have dealt only with the effects of feeling valence. Even with this perhaps limited coverage, however, you'll see that there is a substantial body of research and that a great deal can be said about what has been learned.

Let me give you some brief examples.

Take the matter of the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. Suppose a person is walking down the street when two automobiles collide only a few yards in front of her. She has a strong emotional reaction. Will the intense sensations she feels affect her memory of what happened? And more particularly, will her recollection of the event be accurate if she is called on to testify in court? You will see later, in Chapter 3, that the answers to these questions are much more complicated than you probably believe. Emotionally aroused people may actually have a very good memory for the central features of the emotional occurrence, although their memory of the more peripheral details in the situation can suffer. The witness might be quite accurate in her report, say, of how the cars were traveling and yet be in error about other aspects of the situation, such as how many bystanders there were on the nearby sidewalks.

Let's turn to a much more controversial matter. Quite a number of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, and other mental health specialists have claimed that sexually abused youngsters frequently repress their memories of an adult's shocking mistreatment of them. If prior traumatic incidents are frequently vividly and easily recalled – and this is often the case for children, as for adults – why is childhood sexual abuse (supposedly) readily buried in the unconscious so that it cannot be recalled until much later in life? We'll take up this question in some detail in Chapter 4 when we consider the impact of stress on memory.

Although certainly not as controversial, there are also surprises in the research on the effects of pleasant moods. Happy feelings can also

influence our judgments, decisions, and actions in unexpected and complicated ways. In general, don't we believe that good moods promote all kinds of good things – that people will work harder, think more clearly, and make better decisions when they're feeling good rather than bad? We would expect this, but life isn't quite this simple. Research to be reported later will show you that happiness can sometimes have undesirable consequences.

Then too, consider how positive and negative moods might affect susceptibility to persuasion. Most of us generally suppose that a communicator is most likely to be convincing when the audience is in a good mood. But here too, as you will see in Chapter 6, this is a much too simple expectation. For one thing, the audience members' positive feelings might actually make them indifferent to whatever high-quality, though complex, arguments are contained in the message. Some studies have suggested that when people are feeling happy they are apt to be fairly lazy mentally, so they don't think actively about the information they obtain.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first section, Chapter 1 will begin with a survey of attempts to identify the underlying dimensions along which the various affective experiences can be placed. This review will consider, among other things, the relationship between positive and negative feelings: Are they the opposite ends of a single bipolar continuum or are they independent dimensions? After this, the chapter will look at the varied causes of feelings, starting with relatively automatic influences in which thought does not play a major part. Chapter 2, the second half of this first section, will continue the discussion of the causes of feelings. It will look at the effects of cognitions, including appraisals and attributions, but then will turn to the noncognitive role of bodily reactions in generating feelings.

The next major section of the book is concerned with the impact of feelings on memory. Chapter 3 will first introduce some important concepts and then will provide an overview of the associative network analysis of how feelings can influence memory. Among other things, this review will look at the controversial problem of mood-dependent memory – whether memory is affected by the degree of similarity between one's mood at the time certain information is first encountered and the mood later when an attempt is made to recall the information. Following this discussion, the chapter will begin our discussion of the effects of stress on memory by considering the accuracy of eyewitness reports: To what extent are eyewitnesses' recollec-

tions of what they had seen impeded or even distorted by the feelings that the event had aroused in them? Chapter 4 will then extend this examination of possible affect-induced memory distortions by reviewing the controversy regarding the effects of personal traumas. Here we will be particularly interested in the argument about repressed memories. What evidence is there that children who had been victimized by adult abusers often defensively block their memories of the disturbing occurrences from conscious awareness?

The third section of the book has to do with affective influences on ways of thinking. Chapter 5 will focus on the effects of feelings on judgments and decision making, and in covering this topic will introduce you to the most important theories regarding the influence of affective states on cognitive processes. These theoretical analyses will be extended and even modified somewhat in Chapter 6, where we will turn to the effects of feeling on persuasion and task motivation. As I indicated earlier, in reviewing these affective influences we will look at the intriguing findings regarding the effects of a good mood. But in addition, we will consider whether communicators can enhance the acceptance of their proposals by frightening the people in their audience.

Finally, Chapter 7, which comprises the fourth and last section, will take up the influence of feelings on social behavior, notably helpfulness and aggression. Here you will see how good moods can promote magnanimity to others and that bad feelings are apt to bring out the worst in people. Although you may expect findings such as these, you may be surprised at the pervasiveness of these effects, as well as the conditions that keep them from occurring.

I've now given you just a brief sampling of the topics to be covered in this book and the ideas that will be developed as we go along. Feelings permeate our daily lives, and we certainly wouldn't want to do without them. Yet few of us have more than a seriously incomplete understanding of how feelings come about and how they may influence what we think and do. Part of what we believe we know is fairly valid, grounded as it is in our daily interactions with others. But much of what we also think we know about feelings can be incorrect, at least by being an overly simplified conception of how feelings actually operate. This book will try to take you on a voyage of discovery so that you can gain a better understanding of a major part of your life.

Before we embark on this journey, however, let me tell you about

some of the conventions I will follow in organizing the material. First of all, even though I will refer to research throughout the book, some studies will be reported in more detail, generally because I will discuss them at some length. These relatively important investigations are identified for you by being indented and printed in italics. I will also occasionally indent and italicize other especially important material. In addition, to make the book more readable, the research references appear in the form of notes at the end of the book.

PART I

The Nature and Origin of Feelings