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Excerpt

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PART I

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

CHAPTER 1

Answers from Cognitive Psychology

What are emotions? To most of us, the question hardly needs asking; emotions are the most immediate, the most self-evident, and the most relevant of our orientations toward life. But from the moment the question is taken seriously, troubling difficulties of definition arise.

Emotions have been compared to colors.¹ Both emotions and colors have a strong subjective or experiential character; that is, it makes sense to individuals to describe the qualities and features of the perceived color or the experienced emotion, sometimes at length. In both cases, there is no way for an independent observer to check these “self-reports.” However, these reported experiential qualities display great constancy from one person to another. Most agree, for example, that pink is a warm color, while blue is cool; most agree that fear brings excitement, rapid thinking, a readiness for action, whereas sorrow is inactive and renders one incommunicative. There is a long-standing common sense that says that both color perception and emotional experience are biologically based and therefore everywhere the same. The experiential qualities individuals report are, by this common sense, universal, “hardwired”; just as sugar always tastes sweet, so pink always looks warm and loneliness always feels cold. But while scientific evidence on color perception supports this commonsense view, research into emotions has failed to substantiate it. This contrast is instructive, a good starting point for appreciating the difficulties into which the concept of “emotion” plunges us.

In a study published in 1969, Brent Berlin and Paul Kay argued that color perception provided an instance of a universal, extralinguistic

¹ For comparison of emotions to colors, see, e.g., D’Andrade & Egan (1974); Lutz & White (1986:415); Church, Katigbak, & Jensen (1998:64).

category scheme. Linguists and anthropologists had been extolling for decades the power of language to shape perception and experience. But Berlin and Kay insisted that, in the case of color at least, our visual apparatus and the way it interacted with light shaped natural languages, not the other way around. The human retina contains cone cells with pigments that are most sensitive to three specific wavelengths of light (which English speakers associate with the color terms red, blue, and green). The visual cortex is able, by parsing this input, to identify what in English is called yellow. (Experts on color perception are in the habit of designating these specific wavelengths as “focal” red, “focal” blue, “focal” green, and “focal” yellow.) Berlin and Kay conducted interviews of native speakers of twenty languages, and added to this what they could find out about the color lexicons of seventy-eight more languages. On the basis of the evidence they gathered they concluded, among other things, that:

1. All languages contain color terms for white and black.
2. If a language contains three color terms, then it contains a term for red.
3. If a language contains four color terms, then it contains a term for either green or yellow (but not both).
4. If a language contains five color terms, then it contains terms for both green and yellow.
5. If a language contains six color terms, then it contains a term for blue.
6. If a language contains seven color terms, then it contains a term for brown.
7. If a language contains eight or more color terms, then it contains a term for purple, pink, orange, grey, or some combination of these (1969:2–3).

Berlin and Kay viewed these results as stunning evidence of the impact of biology on language. In a later study Paul Kay and Chad McDaniel (1978) nicely applied fuzzy set theory and more recent neurological research to the earlier linguistic data to argue that all informants, no matter how many or how few the color terms in their native languages, pick focal colors as the best examples of certain of their language’s color terms. Speakers of languages with fewer than eight terms categorize unnamed colors as more or less poor examples of named colors. (Purple, for instance, might be categorized as a poor example of “red” in a language with no term meaning purple.) If the

language in question has more than six color terms (including terms for black and white), then the excess terms' best examples will be derived, first, from the set referred to in English by the terms *brown*, *pink*, *purple*, *orange*, and *grey*. Berlin and Kay dubbed as "basic color categories" the colors referred to by these eleven English words: *black*, *white*, *red*, *green*, *yellow*, *blue*, *brown*, *pink*, *purple*, *orange*, and *grey*. By "basic" they meant that the designated wavelengths have a perceptual salience based on the structure of the human visual apparatus, and that human languages universally recognize this salience. That is, they were "basic" both in the sense of "hardwired" and in the sense of conceptually prototypical.

Berlin and Kay's work has not gone without challenge. Controversy has centered, for example, on whether neurological evidence of nervous-system color processing can be taken as a sure guide to the structure of cognition. Rather than speaking of "focal" colors, some researchers have argued, we need to analyze the color space. Color lexicons are structured in terms not of focal wavelengths but, given the number of color terms available, in terms of maximum contrast. (See Smallman & Boynton 1990; Jameson & D'Andrade 1994.) These disagreements have not raised doubts, however, about the finding that, whatever its exact character, color perception has nonlinguistic, universal conceptual features. (For more recent discussion, see Hardin & Maffi 1997.)

Efforts to uncover the hidden order among emotion words in various languages have yielded very different results. It is difficult, in the first place, to know just how to distinguish one emotion term from another in a given language. Where color terms can usually be associated with a specific segment of the electromagnetic spectrum, there is no such yardstick for emotion terms. Karl Heider published in 1991 the most thorough attempt to date to make sense of the inner logic of emotion lexicons. He asked speakers of three Indonesian dialects to give numerical ratings for the similarity or dissimilarity of emotion terms in their own language. Using such ratings, he developed semantic maps of related terms, diagrams in which the length of a line linking two words was inversely proportional to the speakers' sense of their likeness. The more similar they were in meaning, the closer they were on the map. Compare his diagram displaying the elusive relationships among Indonesian words for *happy* with Berlin and Kay's table schematizing their findings (Figures 1 and 2). In Berlin and Kay's table, the whole structure of a language's color lexicon can be designated with a few pluses and minuses. Heider, in contrast, must push the resources

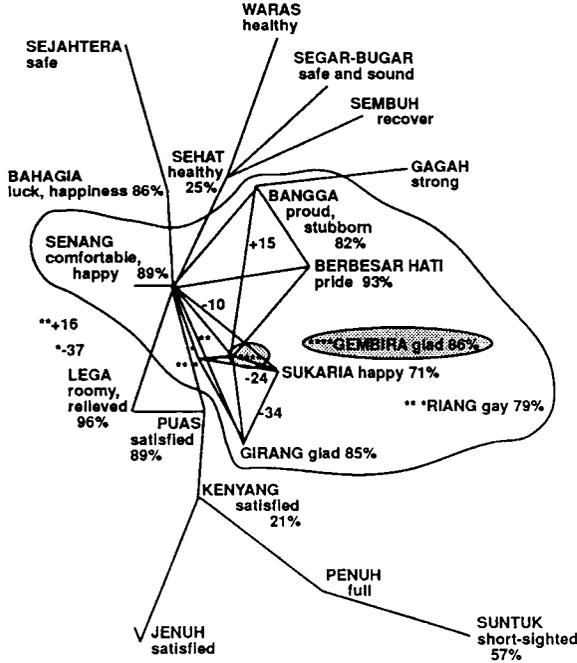


Figure 1. "Happy" cluster BI(M). From Karl G. Heider (1991), *Landscapes of Emotion: Mapping Three Cultures of Emotion in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), fig. 2.2, p. 147. Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

of numerical measurement and two-dimensional display to the limit to comprehend the relations among a few emotion terms from one language. Heider notes that even this representational strategy was not always equal to the complexity of his data. "[I]t often happens that A is close to B, B is close to C, but C very far from A. . . . Cognition goes where plane geometry cannot follow" (1991:26–27).

Other researchers have tried to cut through this sort of complexity by situating emotion terms in a space defined by two or more axes representing general characteristics of emotions. J. A. Russell in 1983 argued that in most languages "emotion-related words fell in roughly a circular order in a space definable by two dimensions: pleasure–displeasure and arousal–sleep" (see Figure 3). Lutz in 1986 offered a diagram of Ifaluk emotion terms using, as one axis, the pleasure–displeasure dimension and, as the other axis, a measure of whether the person experiencing the emotion was, in Ifaluk terms, in a strong or a

Type	No. of basic color terms	Perceptual categories encoded in the basic color terms										
		white	black	red	green	yellow	blue	brown	pink	purple	orange	grey
1	2	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	3	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	4	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	4	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	5	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	6	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
7	7	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
8	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
9	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-
10	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-
11	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+
12	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
13	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-
14	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
15	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-
16	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
17	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+
18	10	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
19	10	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
20	10	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
21	10	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+
22	11	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Figure 2. The twenty-two actually occurring types of basic color lexicon. (Berlin and Kay note, "Only these twenty-two out of the logically possible 2,048 combinations of the eleven basic color categories are found.") From Brent Berlin and Paul Kay (1969), *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press), tab. 1, p. 3. Reprinted by permission of the authors.

weak position vis-à-vis other actors (Figure 4). Kitayama et al. in 1995 diagrammed Japanese and American emotion concepts using, again, pleasant-unpleasant as one axis, and "engaged" vs. "disengaged" as the other (Figures 5 and 6). Both Lutz and Kitayama et al. chose their second axis on the basis of local ways of categorizing emotions. On Ifaluk, a Pacific atoll, emotions are primarily of moral and political importance and thus have to do with social position and authority. In Japan, emotions are comprehended in terms of the degree of dependence vs. independence they entail – anger, for example, being an independent emotion, love being a dependent one. The Japanese, who

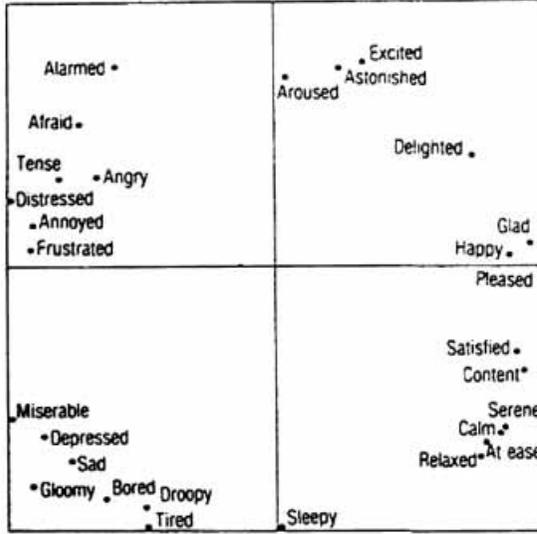


Figure 3. Two-dimensional scaling solution for 28 English emotion-related words. From James A. Russell (1983), "Pancultural Aspects of the Human Conceptual Organization of Emotions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45, fig. 1, p. 1288. Copyright 1980 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted by permission.

value dependence, they argue, regard pride as an unpleasant emotion, whereas Americans regard it as a pleasant one. Examples of this kind of variation are common; the Chinese regard love as a sad emotion, for example, as do the Ifaluk (Shaver et al. 1987:184; Lutz 1988). Does this mean that pleasantness–unpleasantness is a culturally variable feature of emotions? More fundamentally: Who is to say whether arousal is the more useful dimension to examine (in line with our belief about the biological basis of emotions) as opposed to authority or independence, as the Ifaluk and Japanese, respectively, would contend? There is no instrument, no spectrograph, that can solve these puzzles for us.

EMOTION AND COGNITION

Western specialists who study emotion cannot even agree on what the term *emotion* means. George Mandler, in 1984, remarked, "there is no commonly, even superficially, acceptable definition of what a psychol-

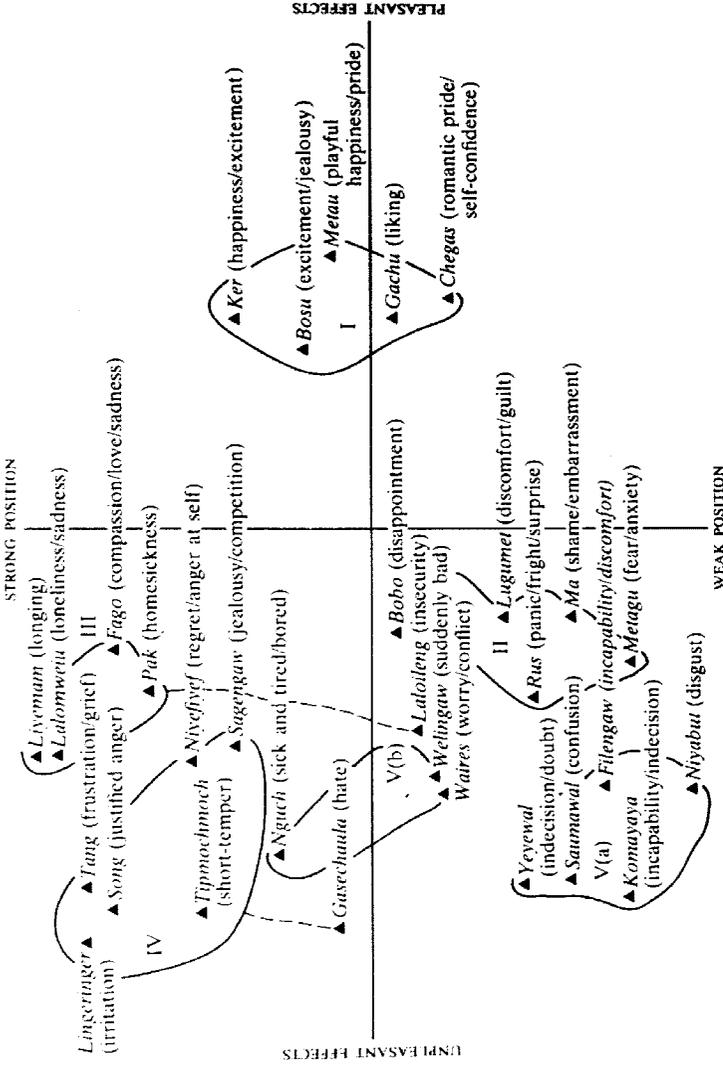


Figure 4. Two-dimensional picture of 31 Ifalukian emotion words (stress = 0.0882). Circles indicate groups found in cluster analysis. Dashes connect outlying members of cluster. From Catherine A. Lutz (1986), "The Domain of Emotion Words on Ifaluk," in *The Social Construction of Emotion*, ed. Rom Harré (Oxford: Blackwell), fig. 2. Copyright 1982 by the American Anthropological Association. Reprinted by permission.

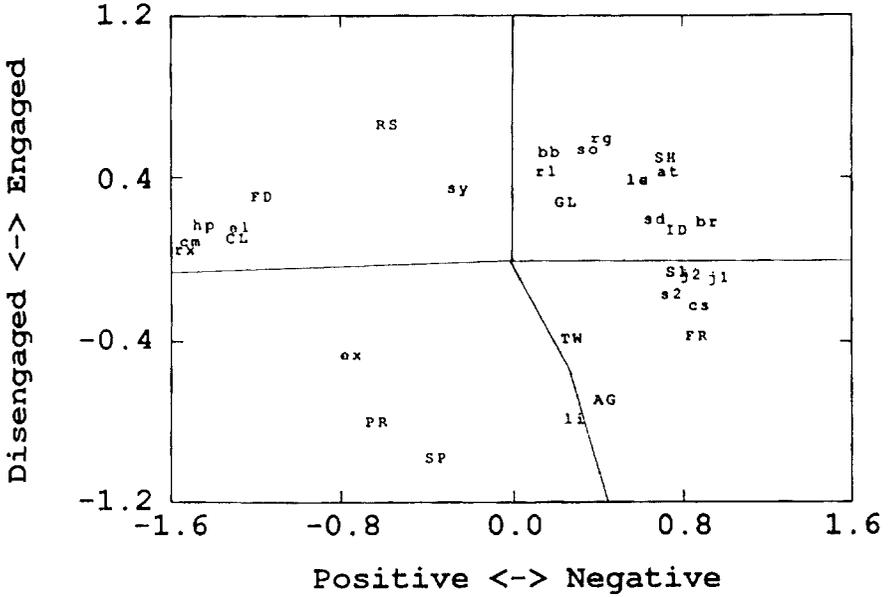


Figure 5. The structure of emotional experience: Japanese data. The following abbreviations are used:

Socially engaged positive emotions: CL, Feelings of closeness; FD, Friendly feelings; RS, Feelings of respect.

Socially disengaged positive emotions: PR, Pride; SP, Feelings of superiority; TW, Feeling like being at the top of the world.

Socially engaged negative emotions: GL, Guilt; ID, Feelings of indebtedness; SH, Shame.

Socially disengaged negative emotions: AG, Anger; FR, Frustration; S1, Sulky feelings (strong).

Others: at, Afraid of causing trouble for someone; bb, Feeling like being babied; br, Boredom; cm, Calm feelings; cs, Feelings of constraint; el, Elated feelings; ex, Excitement; hp, Happiness; j1, Jealousy (Higami); j2, Jealousy (Shitto); le, Feeling like leaning toward someone; li, "Licking" someone; rg, Resigned feelings; rl, Feeling like relying on someone; rx, Relaxed feelings; s2, Sulky feelings (weak); sd, Sadness; so, Feeling that one is superficially optimistic; sy, Sleepy feelings.

From Shinobu Kitayama, Hazel Rose Markus, and Hisaya Matsumoto (1995), "Culture, Self, and Emotion: A Cultural Perspective on 'Self-Conscious' Emotions," in *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, ed. June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer (New York: Guilford Press), fig. 18.1A, p. 449. Copyright 1995 by the Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission.

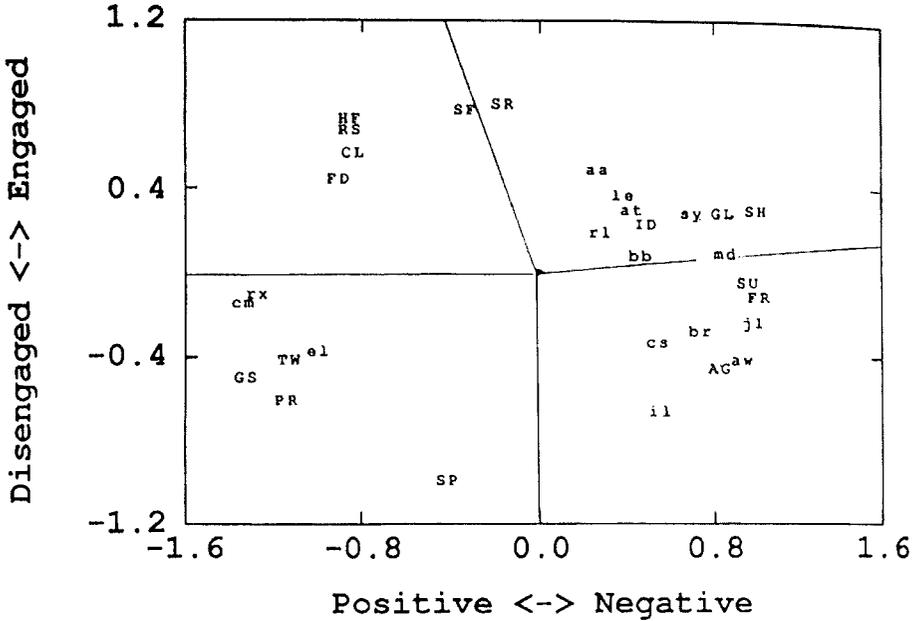


Figure 6. The structure of emotional experience: U.S. data. The following abbreviations are used:

Socially engaged positive emotions: CL, Feelings of closeness; FD, Friendly feelings; HF, Feeling happy for someone; RS, Feelings of respect.

Socially disengaged positive emotions: GS, Feeling good about oneself; PR, Pride; SP, Feelings of superiority; TW, Feeling like being at the top of the world.

Socially engaged negative emotions: GL, Guilt; ID, Feelings of indebtedness; SF, Feeling sad for someone; SH, Shame; SR, Feeling sorry for someone.

Socially disengaged negative emotions: AG, Anger; FR, Frustration; SU, Sulky feelings.

Others: aa, Afraid of angering someone; at, Afraid of causing trouble for someone; aw, Awkward feelings; bb, Feeling like being babied by someone; br, Boredom; cm, Calm feelings; cs, Feelings of constraint; el, Elated feelings; il, Ill feelings for someone; jl, Jealousy; le, Feeling like leaning on someone; md, Moody; r1, Feeling like relying on someone; rx, Relaxed feelings; sy, Sleepy feelings.

From Shinobu Kitayama, Hazel Rose Markus, and Hisaya Matsumoto (1995), "Culture, Self, and Emotion: A Cultural Perspective on 'Self-Conscious' Emotions," in *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, ed. June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer (New York: Guilford Press), fig. 18.1B, p. 450. Copyright 1995 by the Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission.