Research Report

The World of Emotions Is Not Two-Dimensional

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ABSTRACT—For more than half a century, emotion researchers have attempted to establish the dimensional space that most economically accounts for similarities and differences in emotional experience. Today, many researchers focus exclusively on two-dimensional models involving valence and arousal. Adopting a theoretically based approach, we show for three languages that four dimensions are needed to satisfactorily represent similarities and differences in the meaning of emotion words. In order of importance, these dimensions are evaluationpleasantness, potency-control, activation-arousal, and unpredictability. They were identified on the basis of the applicability of 144 features representing the six components of emotions: (a) appraisals of events, (b) psychophysiological changes, (c) motor expressions, (d) action tendencies, (e) subjective experiences, and (f) emotion regulation.

Reduction of complex data sets involving a large number of measures to a few meaningful underlying dimensions is common in many branches of science. For example, the perception of color is described by the dimensions of brightness, hue, and saturation. For more than half a century, emotion researchers have attempted to establish the underlying dimensional space that most economically accounts for the similarities and differences in emotional experience, and there has been considerable disagreement about the number and nature of the dimensions that provide an optimal framework for studying emotions. Most early research suggested at least three dimensions, commonly evaluation-pleasantness, potency-control, and activation-arousal

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(e.g., Osgood, May, & Miron, 1975). Although many recent researchers have focused exclusively on two-dimensional models, such as the valence-arousal model (e.g., Yik, Russell, & Feldman-Barrett, 1999), the search for the optimal low-dimensional representation of the emotion domain remains open.

Past work has primarily derived dimensions of emotion from the perceived similarity of emotion labels or facial expressions (e.g., Fontaine, Poortinga, Setiadi, & Suprapti, 2002; Schlosberg, 1952; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Conner, 1987), or from individual differences in verbal descriptions of emotional experiences (e.g., Yik et al., 1999), and the dimensions have often been derived in an atheoretical manner. In contrast, the work reported here started from the widely shared theoretical conceptualization of emotions as consisting of variably interrelated changes in activity across a set of six components: (a) appraisals of events, (b) psychophysiological changes (bodily sensations), (c) motor expressions (face, voice, gestures), (d) action tendencies, (e) subjective experiences (feelings), and (f) emotion regulation (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Niedenthal, Krauth-Gruber, & Ric, 2006; Scherer, 2005). No previous studies have included all six of these components, and most have included only one or two. To obtain definitive evidence concerning the optimal low-dimensional space, we used a semantic-profile approach (Scherer, 2005), asking participants from three different Indo-European language groups (English, French, and Dutch) to evaluate 24 prototypical emotion terms on scales representing 144 features that represent activity in all six of the major components of emotion (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003).

METHOD

Instrument

For this study, we used a new instrument originally constructed in English, the GRID instrument (Scherer, 2005). The GRID consists of a Web-based questionnaire composed of 24 emotion terms and 144 emotion features. The 24 terms are prototypical emotion terms commonly used in both emotion research and daily language. This representative set was chosen on the basis of frequent use in the emotion literature, consistent appearance in cross-cultural free-listing and prototypicality-rating tasks, and frequent mention in the self-reports from a large-scale Swiss household study of people's descriptions of an emotional situation they experienced the previous day (Scherer, Wranik, Sangsue, Tran, & Scherer, 2004). The 144 emotion features operationalize activity in each of the six emotion components (see Table 1). Thirty-one features refer to appraisals, 18 to bodily experiences, 9 to facial expression, 12 to vocal expression, 5 to gestural expression, 40 to action tendencies, 22 to subjective feelings, and 4 to regulation. An additional 3 features represent other qualities, such as frequency and social acceptance. The features were derived from a broad range of very diverse emotion theories and literature, such as the appraisal theory of Scherer (2001), the psychophysiological emotion literature (Stemmler, 2003), the action-tendency theory of Frijda (Frijda, Kuipers, & Terschure, 1989), the current-affect theory of Russell (Yik et al., 1999), and the expression-regulation theory of Ekman and Friesen (1969). The English GRID instrument was translated into French and Dutch by means of the translation/back-translation procedure.

Procedure

The GRID was administered in a controlled Web study (Reips, 2002) in which each participant was given 4 emotions randomly chosen from the set of 24 and asked to rate each in terms of the 144 emotion features. Using a 9-point scale ranging from *extremely unlikely* (1) to *extremely likely* (9), they rated the likelihood that each of the 144 emotion features can be inferred when a person from their cultural group uses the emotion term to describe an emotional experience. Each of the 144 emotion features was presented on a separate screen, and participants rated all 4 emotion terms for that feature before proceeding to the next feature.

Participants

In total, 198 Dutch-speaking students in Belgium (102 males, 96 females; average age = 20.88 years), 188 English-speaking students in the United Kingdom (74 males, 114 females; average age = 21.23 years), and 145 French-speaking students in Switzerland (37 males, 108 females; average age = 23.26) completed the GRID instrument in their own language.

RESULTS

To reduce the dimensionality of the emotion domain, we used principal component analysis (PCA), which finds the dimensions of greatest variance in the data set and represents each observation by its coordinates along each of these dimensions. PCAs were computed within and across the three languages, treating the 24 emotion terms as observations and the average

scores on the 144 emotion features as variables. A four-dimensional solution was selected on the basis of both the scree plots and the replicability of the configurations across the three languages (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). This solution accounted for 75.4% of the total variance. After varimax rotation, the first dimension (evaluation-pleasantness) accounted for 35.3% of the variance, the second dimension (potency-control) for 22.8%, the third dimension (activation-arousal) for 11.4%, and the last dimension (unpredictability) for 6.0%. This overall structure was replicated within each of the three language-culture samples.

The interpretation of the four dimensions is based on their relationships with the 144 emotion features and on the coordinates of the 24 emotion terms. Table 1 lists all 144 emotion features and their relationships to the four emotion dimensions (component loadings). Figure 1 represents the coordinates of the 24 emotion terms on these dimensions.³ The first dimension can be interpreted as an evaluation-pleasantness dimension. Appraisals of intrinsic pleasantness and goal conduciveness, as well as action tendencies of approach versus avoidance or moving against, characterize this dimension. Pleasant emotions are opposed to unpleasant emotions on this dimension (see Fig. 1a). The second dimension is characterized by appraisals of control, leading to feelings of power or weakness; interpersonal dominance or submission, including impulses to act or refrain from action; changes in the rate and volume of speech; and parasympathetic symptoms. On this dimension, emotions such as pride, anger, and contempt are opposed to sadness, shame, and despair (see Fig. 1a). This dimension can therefore be interpreted in terms of potency-control. The third dimension is an activation-arousal dimension. It is mainly characterized by sympathetic arousal, such as rapid heartbeat and readiness for action. It opposes emotions such as stress, anger, and anxiety to disappointment, contentment, and compassion (see Fig. 1b). The last dimension is characterized by appraisals of novelty and unpredictability (and behaviors such as jaw dropping, eyebrow raising, and spontaneous exclamations), as compared with appraisals of expectedness or familiarity. Obviously, surprise is

¹Because there are only 24 emotion terms in the analysis, the variation in the 144 emotion features could be perfectly represented by a solution with 24 components. Thus, the matrix is not positive definite (the rank is only 24, not 144). Factor analyses (exploratory or confirmatory) that assume underlying factors cannot be used with these data, as these techniques require a positive definite matrix. PCA, however, is adequate, as it is a pure reduction technique. It makes sense to see whether a matrix of rank 24 can be further reduced to an even smaller number of components without losing much information. Analyzing a matrix with more variables than observations is not uncommon in lexical personality research. In that area of research, as here, the replicability and the reliability of the components are considered most important. A more extensive account of the analytic procedures is available from the first author.

²First, a structure was identified across the three languages. Then, a language-specific structure was computed and orthogonally Procrustes-rotated toward the overall structure. For each of the three language groups and for each of the four dimensions, the Tucker's phi congruence coefficient exceeded .90.

³The profiles of the emotion words on the four emotion dimensions can be requested from the first author.

TABLE 1
The 144 Emotion Features, the Components of Emotion They Represent, and Their Correlations With the Four Dimensions After Varimax Rotation

Emotion feature	Emotion component ^a	Correlation				
		D1	D2	D3	D4	
Incongruent with own standards and ideals	Appraisal	.926	.201	.113	.180	
Pressed lips together	Face	.919	.038	.245	086	
Wanted to destroy whatever was close	Action	.914	.024	.206	022	
Frowned	Face	.914	010	.172	.091	
In itself unpleasant for the person	Appraisal	.911	.321	.103	.103	
Wanted to do damage, hit, or say something that hurts	Action	.908	090	.183	011	
Wanted to oppose	Action	.907	131	.195	.053	
Consequences negative for person	Appraisal	.905	.325	.113	.103	
Treated unjustly	Appraisal	.901	.172	.091	.212	
Felt negative	Feelings	.886	.425	.078	005	
Wanted to break contact with others	Action	.871	.354	.105	047	
Violated laws or socially accepted norms	Appraisal	.858	.157	.133	.169	
Felt the urge to stop what he or she was doing	Action	.844	.457	.109	.142	
Wanted to undo what was happening	Action	.843	.491	.075	.041	
Wanted to prevent or stop sensory contact	Action	.843	.454	.074	.064	
Felt bad	Feelings	.835	.515	.084	.013	
Felt inhibited or blocked	Action	.805	.491	.186	.094	
Wanted to keep or push things away	Action	.801	.516	.110	.088	
In itself unpleasant for somebody else	Appraisal	.799	.294	.026	.149	
Consequences negative for somebody else	Appraisal	.781	.292	.020	.030	
Withdrew from people or things	Gesture	.760	.546	.037	.009	
Irrevocable loss	Appraisal	.748	.450	.117	.137	
Moved against people or things	Gesture	.745	263	.287	.016	
Wanted to run away in whatever direction	Action	.709	.602	.213	.120	
Felt out of control	Feelings	.702	.241	.513	.136	
Felt powerless	Feelings	.695	.619	.079	.162	
Wanted to be in control of the situation	Action	.677	166	.348	105	
In danger	Appraisal	.675	.333	.331	.332	
Muscles tensing (whole body)	Body	.674	052	.636	.177	
Tried to control the intensity of the emotional feeling	Regulation	.669	.415	.170	091	
Felt exhausted	Feelings	.653	.644	.068	029	
Consequences avoidable or modifiable	Appraisal	.641	006	.070	338	
Hid the emotion from others by smiling	Regulation	.617	.581	.123	111	
Wanted to be in command of others	Action	.593	497	.229	172	
Inconsistent with expectations	Appraisal	.527	.219	.198	.486	
Frequency of experience in the cultural group	Other	321	213	.257	245	
Caused by a supernatural power	Appraisal	364	.023	.101	.285	
Felt an urge to be attentive to what was going on	Action	475	419	.216	.104	
Confirmed expectations	Appraisal	539	405	130	443	
Familiar event	Appraisal	587	349	061	516	
Felt in control	Feelings	684	615	127	254	
Event with consequences the person was able to live with	Appraisal	701	324	076	187	
Important and relevant for goals of somebody else	Appraisal	702	316	044	100	
Important and relevant for the person's goals	Appraisal	724	278	001	126	
In itself pleasant for somebody else	Appraisal	727	451	015	014	
Person was at the center of attention	Appraisal	730	053	.370	038	
Wanted to take care of another person or cause	Action	739	040	091	205	
Consequences positive for somebody else	Appraisal	757	443	058	067	
Wanted to go on with what he or she was doing	Action	767	536	026	147	
Felt calm	Feelings	771	172	529	172	
Wanted to comply with someone else's wishes	Action	812	.037	084	135	
Wanted to get totally absorbed in the situation	Action	815	493	.032	049	
Social acceptability of the emotion	Other	819	193	058	.111	
Muscles relaxing	Body	827	128	368	108	

Table 1. (Contd.)

		Correlation				
Emotion feature	Emotion component ^a	D1	D2	D3	D4	
Felt at ease	Feelings	882	414	121	082	
Wanted to be near or close to people or things	Action	883	145	072	032	
Felt positive	Feelings	887	436	034	021	
Wanted the ongoing situation to last or be repeated	Action	901	392	060	025	
Felt good	Feelings	905	394	048	011	
Consequences positive for person	Appraisal	906	345	078	070	
Smiled	Face	916	341	014	029	
Wanted to be tender, sweet, and kind	Action	916	056	198	128	
Wanted to sing and dance	Action	918	329	.011	.003	
In itself pleasant for the person	Appraisal	925	334	049	017	
Wanted to submit to the situation as it was	Action	930	097	126	020	
Decreased the volume of voice	Voice	.076	.855	360	145	
Wanted to hand over the initiative to someone else	Action	.024	.832	.095	.079	
Felt weak limbs	Body	.105	.832	.298	.209	
Fell silent	Voice	.368	.831	102	.004	
Felt submissive	Feelings	.426	.825	.049	036	
Felt weak	Feelings	.542	.803	.012	.076	
Wanted to make up for what he or she had done	Action	.220	.766	083	205	
Wanted to withdraw into him- or herself	Action	.596	.765	.006	042	
Lacked the motivation to do anything	Action	.535	.740	218	029	
Wanted to do nothing	Action	.315	.737	321	071	
Wanted to disappear or hide from others	Action	.655	.713	.057	031	
Wanted someone to be there to provide help or support	Action	.498	.700	.065	.134	
Closed his or her eyes	Face	.092	.696	164	.040	
Spoke slower	Voice	.068	.683	572	132	
Wanted to flee	Action	.672	.679	.160	.091	
Got pale	Body	.589	.675	.158	.307	
Had a feeling of a lump in the throat	Body	.422	.671	.228	.052	
Wanted to be hurt as little as possible	Action	.533	.663	.123	081	
Felt cold	Body	.562	.650	166	.207	
Felt tired	Feelings	.598	.633	052	158	
Had a trembling voice	Voice	.564	.632	.364	.068	
Showed tears	Face	.067	.628	.112	.020	
Had stomach troubles	Body	.600	.610	.391	.046	
Showed the emotion to others less than he or she felt it	Regulation	.321	.600	.103	144	
Lacked the motivation to pay attention to what was going on	Action	.436	.591	219	095	
Will be changed in a lasting way	Other	107	.557	087	360	
Wanted to act, whatever action it might be	Action	.376	529	.487	.009	
Wanted to move	Action	085	581	.535	013	
Produced a long utterance	Voice	310	599	.121	072	
Moved toward people or things	Gesture	583	599	.123	.078	
Showed the emotion to others more than he or she felt it	Regulation	248	601	069	.330	
Caused intentionally	Appraisal	205	649	089	169	
Wanted to show off	Action	606	650	.109	107	
Felt alert	Feelings	100	664	.473	.166	
Felt an urge to be active, to do something, anything	Action	184	699	.407	109	
Felt powerful	Feelings	574	702	.093	182	
Felt energetic	Feelings	624	707	.269	.019	
Wanted to be seen, to be in the center of attention	Action	571	711	.114	112	
Felt strong	Feelings	589	733	.111	142	
Increased the volume of voice	Voice	.079	777	.460	.218	
Wanted to tackle the situation	Action	.034	786	.242	064	
Wanted to take initiative him- or herself	Action	093	796	.191	126	
Felt dominant	Feelings	374	822	.127	183	
Had an assertive voice	Voice	060	908	.072	105	
Felt heartbeat getting faster	Body	019	210	.927	.100	

Table 1. (Contd.)

Emotion feature		Correlation			
	Emotion component ^a	D1	D2	D3	D4
Felt breathing getting faster	Body	.260	099	.893	.161
Felt hot	Body	.189	077	.850	088
Sweated	Body	.339	.231	.843	.017
Perspired, or had moist hands	Body	.372	.272	.799	.005
Spoke faster	Voice	055	576	.717	.107
Produced abrupt body movements	Gesture	.217	356	.688	.419
Felt restless	Feelings	.397	115	.688	.066
Was in an intense emotional state	Feelings	.164	.151	.647	043
Felt shivers	Body	048	.157	.647	.403
Blushed	Body	402	049	.602	212
Felt nervous	Feelings	.541	.381	.593	.013
Felt warm	Body	413	420	.558	264
Produced speech disturbances	Voice	.520	.461	.557	.182
Opened her or his eyes widely	Face	254	464	.537	.496
Required an immediate response	Appraisal	.187	005	.528	.486
Wanted to overcome an obstacle	Action	.226	355	.509	161
Changed the melody of his or her speech	Voice	190	287	.388	.192
Did not show any changes in face	Face	.008	.085	519	358
Did not show any changes in vocal expression	Voice	252	.053	578	357
Did not show any changes in gestures	Gesture	017	.288	585	361
Felt breathing slowing down	Body	496	.102	701	096
Felt heartbeat slowing down	Body	208	.369	715	.006
Had no bodily symptoms at all	Body	154	072	779	.006
Had the jaw drop	Face	014	.105	129	.798
Had eyebrows go up	Face	018	291	.136	.723
Unpredictable event	Appraisal	.120	.153	.348	.680
Produced a short utterance	Voice	.399	057	.151	.608
Event occurred suddenly	Appraisal	058	.083	.400	.589
Caused by chance	Appraisal	516	150	.136	.521
Caused by somebody else's behavior	Appraisal	.396	335	.106	.416
Caused by the person's own behavior	Appraisal	532	126	.069	599
Consequences predictable	Appraisal	320	385	210	621
Person had enough resources to avoid or modify	^ ^				
consequences of the event	Appraisal	027	199	.043	632
Experienced the emotional state for a long time	Feelings	089	.224	061	755

Note. For each feature, the highest loading is in boldface. D1 = evaluation-pleasantness dimension, D2 = potency-control dimension, D3 = activation-arousal dimension, D4 = unpredictability dimension.

distinguished from all other emotions on this dimension. However, meaningful differentiations emerge among these other emotions as well; for example, fear is distinguished from stress and disgust from contempt (see Fig. 1c).

DISCUSSION

The results of this cross-cultural study provide robust evidence that more than two dimensions are needed for a low-dimensional representation of the semantic space of emotion. It is important to note that there were no major differences among the three language-culture groups. As suggested half a century ago, the three most important dimensions are evaluation-pleasantness, potency-control, and activation-arousal, in that order of impor-

tance. A fourth dimension, unpredictability, seems necessary to allow a satisfactory differentiation of emotions reflecting an urgent reaction to a novel stimulus or an unfamiliar situation. Although unpredictability has not emerged in most previous general studies of the dimensions of emotion, uncertainty is an important dimension in many appraisal theories (cf. Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003), and unexpectedness in the form of interruption was central to Mandler's (1975) model. In fact, the emergence of this factor in our comprehensive approach may explain the ambivalent status surprise has always had in the emotion pantheon, as it often co-occurs with and is confused with other emotions. Our results suggest that the term *surprise* may in fact refer to a particular quality or dimension of emotional experience based on appraisal of novelty and unexpectedness.

^aAction = action tendency, Body = bodily experience, Face = facial expression, Feelings = subjective experience, Gesture = gestural expression, Voice = vocal expression.

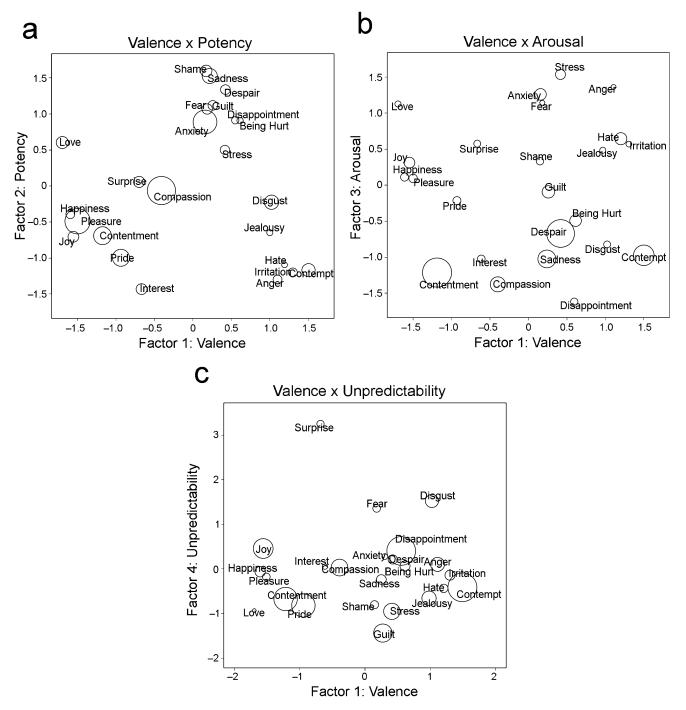


Fig. 1. The four-dimensional solution representing the 24 emotion terms. Midpoints of the circles represent the mean coordinates across the three languages. The diameter of each circle represents the mean euclidean distance among the coordinates for the three languages; the smaller the circle, the more similar the respective terms across the languages. The three panels show plots of coordinates for (a) Evaluation-Pleasantness \times Potency-Control, (b) Evaluation-Pleasantness \times Activation-Arousal, and (c) Evaluation-Pleasantness \times Unpredictability.

The four-dimensional structure of emotion derived in the present research can be considered important because it is based not only on a representative sample of prototypical emotion labels, but also on a representative sample of features of emotional experience. This is the first study that has included all six of the major components of emotion identified by emotion researchers. The explanations as to why the same two or three

emotion dimensions emerged in previous research were speculative. A major contribution of the present study is that it recovered the same three dimensions from a very precise analysis of the meaning of emotion terms, as rated on 144 specific criteria that most current emotion theorists explicitly assume are centrally relevant to the domain of emotions. Moreover, basing a dimensional analysis on comprehensive feature profiles for

different emotion terms allowed us to infer, for the first time, the features on which similarity judgments for emotion words and experiences are based and the subsets of those features that underlie specific dimensions (see Table 1). The complete profiles for the terms, with respect to both the 144 individual features and the four dimensions (not reported in this article), allow us to determine which features are essential for the meaning of a term and to compare terms across languages.

A limitation of the current study is that it included only student samples. Although the same overall emotion structure can be expected with representative adult samples—the students were asked not about their own experiences, but about the meaning of the emotion words in their culture—it is possible that slight differences exist between different age groups. For instance, in our student samples, *love* was scored high on arousal features. It is quite possible that the meaning of *love* is associated with less arousal in older age groups.

Moreover, because our research involved perceptions of the meanings of emotion words, it is obviously relevant to the meaning structure of the emotion domain in three languages. We cannot be sure that our findings represent the dimensions of emotional experience. Robinson and Clore (2002) have highlighted the distinction between current emotion, which is episodic, experiential, and contextual, and beliefs about emotion, which are semantic, conceptual, and decontextualized. Clearly, by design, our data on semantic profiles belong to the latter category. However, the fact that the same four dimensions emerged for all three language-culture groups suggests that the findings represent more than mere linguistic or cultural conventions. We are currently conducting research in a much larger sample of linguistic and cultural groups, including non-Western languages and cultures, and preliminary data confirm the patterns reported here. Although language is abstracted from human experience, it must correspond to human experience and represent important human concerns. Consequently, as the emotion words and features used in the present research are highly similar to those commonly used in procedures for assessing emotion, one would expect to find a similar four-factor structure in assessments of emotional experience. But this is for future research to show. Of course, a representative selection of emotion words and emotion features is a precondition for an emotion-experience instrument to uncover the same structure.

Given that the comprehensive approach reported here confirms the existence and the importance of the classic factors of valence and arousal, working with these two factors is not an issue of right or wrong choices. The optimal number of dimensions to be included in a study depends on the question the researcher is asking. For a researcher interested in the effects of sympathetic activation, one dimension (arousal) may be sufficient. For a researcher interested in the subtle distinctions among related emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, and self-anger, four dimensions might not be enough. But for researchers interested in providing a fairly comprehensive

general account of the emotional experiences of the people they study, we strongly advocate using at least four dimensions.

Because models drive research design, restricting the number of emotion dimensions studied may severely bias the choice of methods and the interpretation of results. The current results imply that simple two-dimensional models, such as the valencearousal model, miss major sources of variation in the emotion domain. Such models fail to differentiate important emotions like fear and anger (see Fig. 1b), which are clearly separated on the potency-control dimension (Fig. 1a) and on the unpredictability dimension (Fig. 1c). The potency-control dimension is of particular interest for emotion research. Its meaning is not limited to social and interpersonal experiences of dominance and submissiveness, as has been suggested in the past (e.g., Russell, 1991). It is also characterized by specific vocal response characteristics and action tendencies, such as wanting to take initiative versus being apathetic. Low potency-control is particularly relevant for emotion researchers who are interested in the biological underpinnings of emotions, as this dimension also captures parasympathetic forms of activation, such as weak limbs and gastrointestinal symptoms. The currently dominant two-dimensional models, such as the valence-arousal model, represent only sympathetic forms of activation (see Fig. 1b).

The findings of the present study have implications for very diverse forms of emotion research. For instance, experimental neuropsychological research designed to identify the brain processes underlying subjective emotional experiences requires a representative mapping of these subjective experiences. For many clinical and applied studies, it is crucial to distinguish whether a person is experiencing fear or anger, and two-dimensional models do not capture this distinction, which can be more adequately studied with the four-dimensional emotion model. Even for those researchers who are interested only in evaluation and activation, the four-dimensional model allows for better control of unintended variation on the two other emotion dimensions. Whereas two-dimensional models may be appropriate for studying some questions, researchers should seriously consider whether such models are sufficient for their particular questions.

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