Travis Moore

PSY201: Section B — Fall 2016

Professor: Vanessa Hemovich

**­**

Homework Assignment #6  
Emotion & Cognition

Consider a video game that you have either had personal experience playing, or are otherwise very familiar with. You may choose to draw from other experiences beyond games (e.g., film/TV, books, social media, etc.)

1. Identify and explain 2 of the 4 major **cognitive determinants of emotion**.

1a. Appraisal Theory

Appraisal theory explains how emotions come from our appraisal or estimate of an event. In the original form of appraisal theory, there are three specific forms of appraisal: primary, secondary, and re-appraisal. These subdivisions explain our process of assessing an event and the subsequent emotions we experience. As an example, if I’m playing Dark Souls and I lose to a boss that I’ve fought 27 times already my primary perception of this event could be that the game is dumb, unfair, and stupidly difficult. As a result of the primary appraisal, my secondary appraisal emotions of anger, disappointment, and uncontrollable sobbing are the result of my previous perception and comes from my ability to cope with my initial assessment. Lastly, my re-appraisal involves internal monitoring of the primary and secondary appraisals to form a modified appraisal that maybe next time I’ll be able to beat the boss, and hence the death spiral continues (in the case of Dark Souls).

1b. Action Tendencies

Action tendencies are actions associated with emotions and are a reaction to emotions felt from appraisal of a stimulus or situation. In a sense, an action tendency can be thought of as a knee-jerk physical reaction to an event based on your emotional response. For example, if I were to eat something that I perceived as disgusting, I might experience the emotion of disgust and have an action tendency to expel said disgusting food and avoid taking in any more of this food.

2. According to **Cognitive Appraisal Theory**, subjective emotional reactions move through a series of evaluative stages. Describe an example (e.g., in games, conversations with others, or an event) that engages all three appraisal stages.

The series of emotional reactions are the primary, secondary, and re-appraisal stages of the appraisal theory. The primary stage involves the initial perception of an event. As an example, I might have a beer in a social situation and perceive this experience as a fun. This leads to the secondary stage of appraisal where I assess this experience emotionally as ‘happy’ using the resources I have available to cope with my perception of ‘fun’. This might seem straightforward, but the final stage involves re-appraisal of the stimulus and my emotional coping mechanisms in order to modify my feelings as necessary. After a few more beers I might re-appraise my situation as a mistake and have emotional feelings of regret after some time.

3. Much can be said about the ‘steep negative gradient’ for a **negativity bias**. What does this mean? What is one factor that should help mitigate this effect?

The negativity bias affects is the idea that given a negative and a positive event of equal intensity, the negative event will have a greater effect on one’s psychological state than the positive event. The steep negative gradient refers to one’s knowledge of the negative event that forms a state of impending doom leading up to this event. For example, if a game project is due in a week I will feel an increasing feeling of dread that I will perceive as more and more negative as every day passes by compared to the an equally intense positive event, like Christmas coming soon.

Situational modification is one method that could help mitigate the negativity bias effect. Situational modification involves effort to modify one’s situation so as to change its emotional impact. Using the game project example, I can choose to work at home instead of at school in order to change my physical environment away from how depressing DigiPen can be at times. Other situational modification can involve injecting humor into my games as a way to increase my own happiness in a project that I otherwise do not want to be doing at the moment.

4. When initiating a **“flow” state**, describe an example how this could (or perhaps should?) occur. *\*Note*: If you choose to explain your own game (or one familiar to you), be specific how this is accomplished.

Initiating a “flow” state in a game can vary from game to game. I think a great genre of games that I find easy to initiate the “flow” state in are space exploration games. I’ve ragged on “No Man’s Sky” before, but the fact of the matter is I can still find myself easily getting into a “flow” state despite the game’s shortcomings. I believe this is possible due to many reasons, but for the sake of being concise I find most of these games are great at establishing what you are doing, are within one’s mechanical abilities to perform, and give great, non-distracting feedback.

“No Man’s Sky” can create a flow state due to the nature of the game being all these things. You are tasked with a simple goal, explore the galaxy. The controls are simple enough to be learned quickly so that one can play the game without thinking hard about the mechanics of the game. Seriously, it’s a first person shooter with simple controls, you don’t have to think real hard about it. The last part involves a silent contract between the player and the game that you will suspend disbelief and accept the world that you’ve been thrown into. This is where I think space games get away with a lot because the player doesn’t know what space is like and doesn’t know what the future will hold, so accepting space guns, ships, alien, and crazy technology is easier compared to games that ask us to pretend we are in a contemporary time era.

My biggest complaint about “No Man’s Sky”, as far as “flow” state is concerned, is that the UI gets a little too in the way. I love the visual style of the game, but the UI, including its audible warnings, try too hard to be noticed. I think if they would’ve kept things a little subtler and simpler the game would be even better at initiating flow state than it already is.