



# Psychology 1702

# The Emotional Mind

Professor Leah Somerville  
Spring 2024

# Today's agenda

- What are emotions and why should we care about them?
- Goals of the course
- Q&A

Have you ever  
experienced an  
emotion?

How do you know?

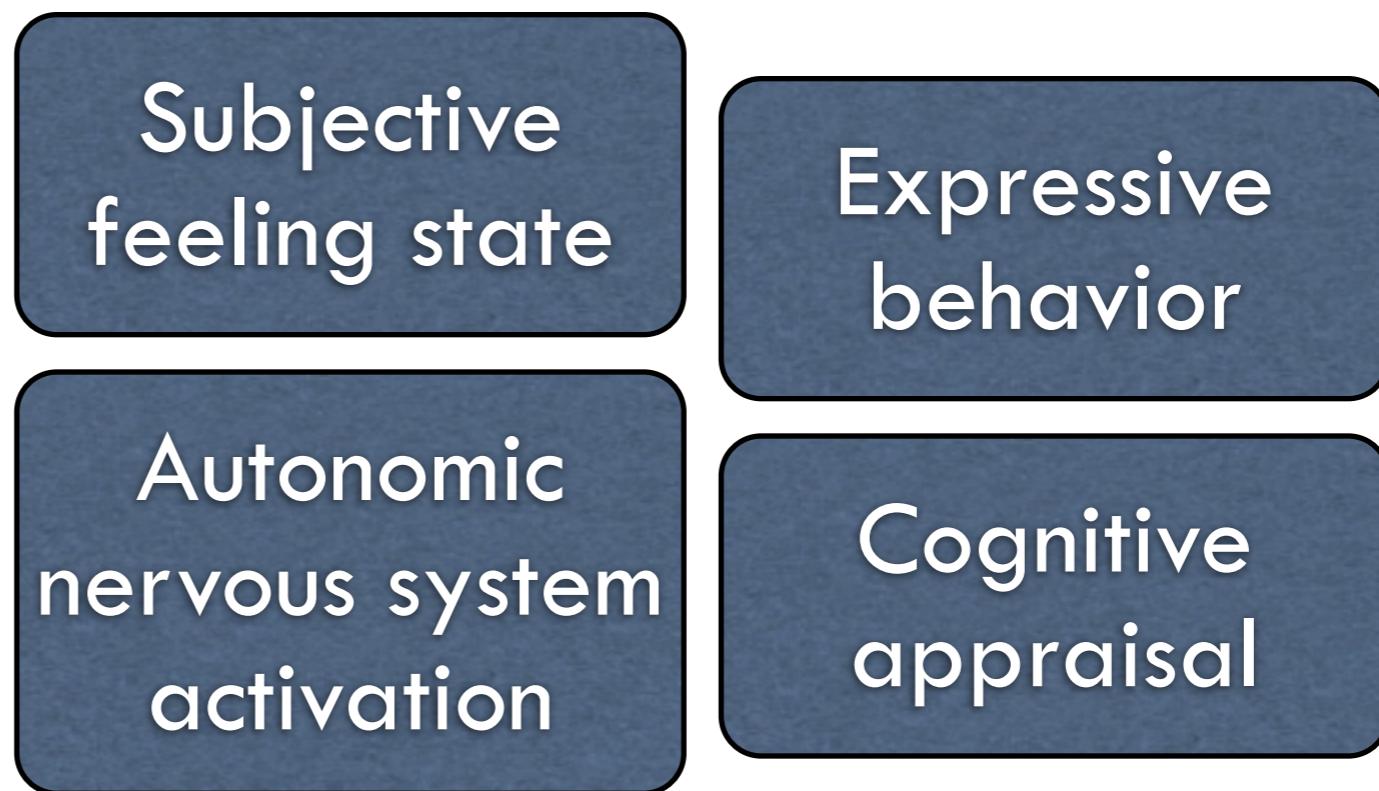
# What are emotions?

“One of the most significant things ever said about emotion may be that everyone knows what it is until they are asked to define it.”

— Joseph E. Ledoux

# What are emotions?

*Building blocks of emotion*



*(How) do the building blocks “fit together”?*  
*Which are necessary?*

An emotional response



Change  
feeling state



Run/Escape  
• Emotions  
mobilize physical  
resources to help  
us run faster

A photograph of three male turkeys (tom turkeys) standing on a red brick sidewalk. They are facing towards the left of the frame. Each turkey has its tail feathers fanned out, creating a large, dark, fan-like shape. Their heads are turned slightly towards the camera, showing their red, fleshy wattle and a white patch of skin around their eyes. The turkeys are positioned on a brick sidewalk that runs along a street. To the left, there's a paved road with a white crosswalk. In the background, there are buildings, including a red brick building on the left and a white building further back. Some autumn leaves are scattered on the sidewalk and in the trees. A parking sign is visible on a pole in the background.

Express  
Emotional  
expressions as a  
communication  
tool



Guide our  
perception

# **Are emotions useful?**

# Varying perspectives on emotion's functionality



*“The only thing we have to fear is... fear itself.”*

Franklin D. Roosevelt

1933

# Varying perspectives on emotion's functionality



*“The only thing we have to fear is having no fear itself — having no feeling on behalf of whom and what we’ve lost, whom and what we love.”*

Amanda Gorman

2022

# Emotions are *functional*

**But not always...**

Timescale

Intensity

Situational match

How do our emotions sometimes lead us astray?

Why emotions are a  
cool psychological topic  
to learn about

# Emotions affect nearly every aspect of our functioning

Daily health & well being

What we pay attention to

Our social relationships

The decisions we make

What we remember

Our survival

The nature of emotions presents a fascinating theoretical puzzle for psychological science

*Emotions “feel” different than thoughts. But are they?*

*What distinguishes one emotion from another? Our biology?  
Our interpretation? Our beliefs?*

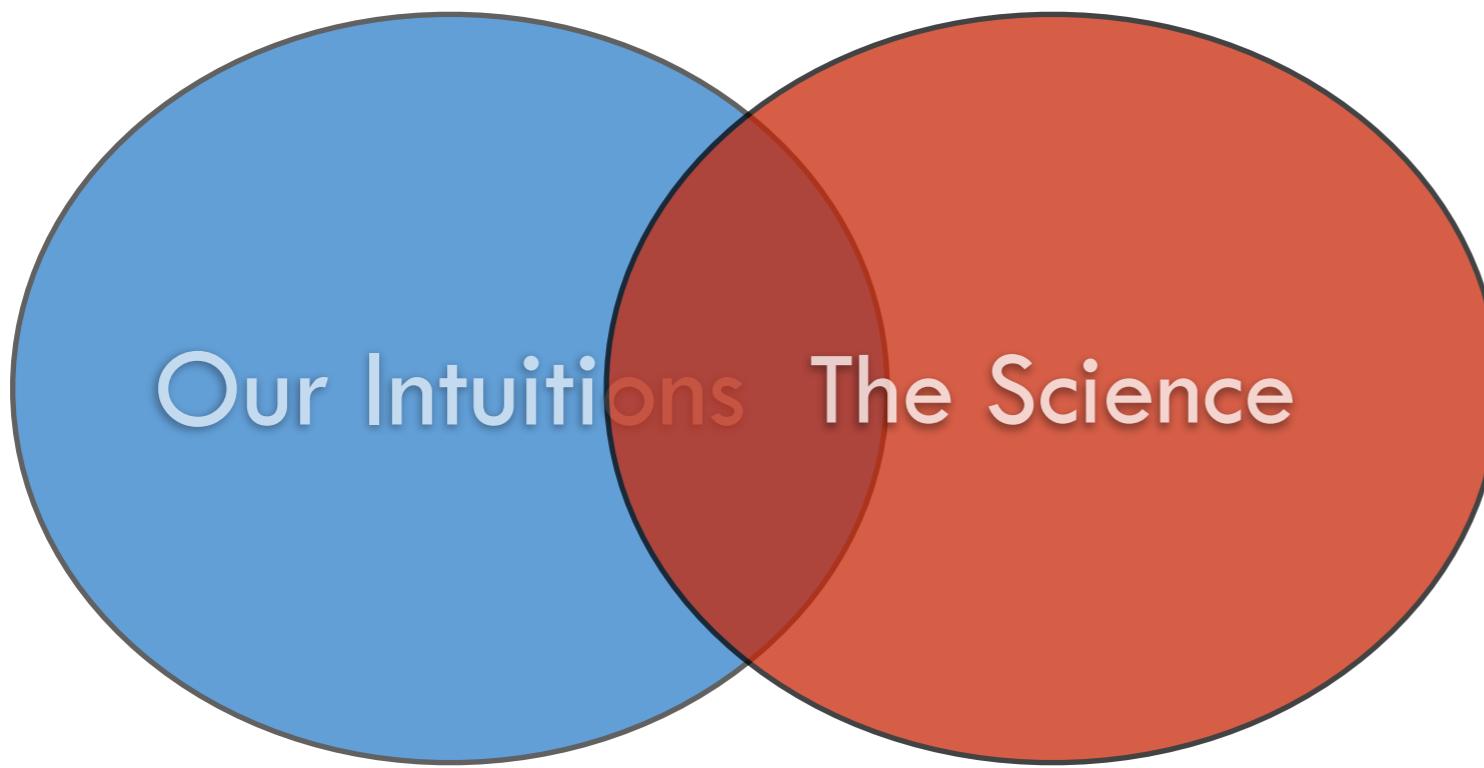
*What guides each of us to have a unique emotional life?*

We have a lot of intuitions about emotions, some of which may not be accurate.

*Are emotions a burden or a benefit to us?*

*Are emotions produced differently than our thoughts?*

*Do animals have emotions?*



This class primarily examines emotion from a scientific perspective

# **Units of this course**

## **1. An emotion is many things**

What are the building blocks of emotion?

How do they fit together? At its core, what is an emotion anyway?

## **2. Emotions in action**

How do emotions help and hinder our daily functioning?

How have emotions promoted our survival as a species?

How do we express emotions and what purpose do our expressions serve?

How to change our emotions

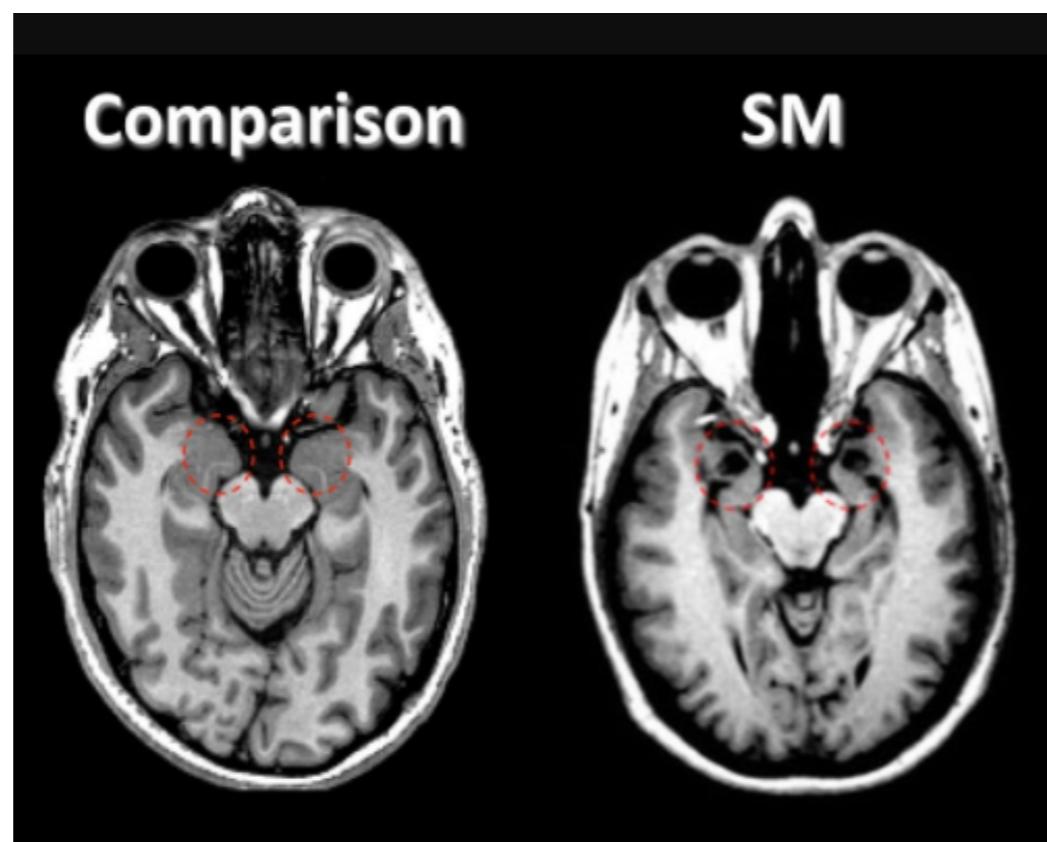
# Units of this course

## 3. Mechanisms of emotion

How do we learn about emotionally important stuff?

How does the brain generate and regulate our emotions?

What if parts of your “emotional brain” were missing?



# Units of this course

## 4. How does who we are shape *the emotions we have?*

How does our life experience and personality shape our emotional lives?

How stable are our own emotional tendencies across the lifespan?

How do emotions depending on mental health?

# Learning goals

Build content knowledge in emotion science

Gain introductory knowledge about the brain basis of emotions

Become informed consumers of the direct, original scientific literature

# FAQs

# **Structure of the course**

**Unique format - 2 audiences**

***Harvard College/GSAS***

***Harvard Extension School***

**Lecture (MW 1:30-2:45)**

**Weekly Section/Discussion activities starting week 3**

**Readings**

# Course enrollment

If you are not already enrolled, come see me  
after class or email me.  
[somerville@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:somerville@fas.harvard.edu)

Potential auditors:  
YES we should have room for you in the  
classroom. See me if I haven't yet given you  
permission to sit in.

# Canvas

⋮ ▾ WEEK 1 Jan 22 - Jan 28

⋮  Syllabus ← *The syllabus*

⋮ Lecture ← *Your slides*

⋮  Readings ← *Your readings*

⋮  Reading - James

⋮  Reading - Fox Chapter2, p. 23-41

⋮  No Section this week

⋮  What's Due

# Readings

*What are the readings?*

**Mostly original research articles and chapters.**

**Everything will be posted on the course website.**

*Do I need to do them?*

**Yes!**

# About me



**Announcements specific to  
Harvard College course  
(In red)**

# **Teaching team/section**

**Me and three amazing TFs —**

**Peter Aungle (Wednesday section)**

**Diya Dharmendran (Thursday sections)**

**Angelina Awad (Friday section)**

**No SECTION this week**

# Evaluation

**15% Attendance - paying attention - participating**

**20% Paragraph responses to Section activities  
(7 total, top 5 grades count)**

**20% Quiz 1 (Units 1 & 2)**

**20% Quiz 2 (Units 3 & 4)**

**25% Final paper (5-6 pages)**

# FAQs

**What if I am sick?**

**Your absence is excused.**

**Email your TF.**

**Extended/chronic absences may require documentation.**

**2 free ‘misses’ before attendance begins to impact your grade.**

*Will there be recordings of lectures?*

**Yes. Under “Extension Class Recordings” Tab**

**You are expected to attend class, not just watch the videos.**

***Will you post lecture slides before class?***

**Yes.**

***Are laptops allowed in class?***

**Yes, but the first row will be a laptop-free zone.**

***Will this course be offered next year?***

**Almost certainly yes!**

# Your questions