



Culture and Emotion

Instructor Manual

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This module, *Culture and Emotion*, provides an overview of how people's cultural ideas and practices shape their emotions, and compares North American and East Asian cultures to illustrate the concepts. The module concludes by discussing the scientific and practical importance of these findings and suggests directions for future research.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)
 - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)
 - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)
 - Refine project-management skills (5.3)
 - Develop meaningful professional direction for life after graduation (5.5)
- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Culture and Emotion
 - Review the history of cross-cultural studies of emotion.

- Learn about recent empirical findings and theories of culture and emotion.
- Understand why cultural differences in emotion matter.
- Explore current and future directions in culture and emotion research.

Abstract

How do people's cultural ideas and practices shape their emotions (and other types of feelings)? This module describes findings from studies comparing North American (United States, Canada) and East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) contexts. These studies reveal both cultural similarities and differences in various aspects of emotional life. Discussed is the scientific and practical importance of these findings as well as directions for future research.

Class Design Recommendations

This module can be taught in a single class period or less, with the unit as a whole taking 1-2 class periods. Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

1st class period (20 min – 30 min):

- Overview
 - What are emotions? What is culture?
 - Historical Background (universalists vs. social constructivists)
- Cultural Similarities and Differences in Emotion
 - Models of the self
 - Emotional expression (physiology, subjective experience, and facial expressive behavior)
 - Emotional Suppression
 - Mixed Emotions
 - Ideal Affect

- Relative Importance of emotional factors

Module Outline

Overview

- Scholars disagree about the extent to which culture shapes people's emotions and feelings, including what people feel, what they express, and what they do during an emotional event. Understanding how culture shapes people's emotional lives and what impact emotion has on psychological health and well-being in different cultures will not only advance the study of human behavior, but will also benefit multicultural societies.

Historical Background

- 1950s and 1960s: The universalist camp claimed that despite cultural differences in customs and traditions, at a fundamental level, all humans feel similarly. The social constructivist camp, however, claimed that despite a common evolutionary heritage, humans evolved to adapt to their environments, and because human environments vary so widely, people's emotions are also malleable and culturally variable.
- 1970s: Ekman conducted one of the first scientific studies that attempted to address the universalist-social constructivist debate. Using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), Ekman and Friesen analyzed people's facial expressions when they were emotional. Across cultures, participants "recognized" the emotional facial expressions by matching them with the "correct" emotion words at levels greater than chance. However, they also found considerable variability across cultures in recognition rates (demonstrating a difference in "display rules").
- In the past 10 years, increasing research has demonstrated cultural differences in not only display rules, but also the degree to which people focus on the face (versus other aspects of the social context), and the degree to which people focus on different features of the face when perceiving people's emotions.

Current and Research Theory

- Rather than classify emotions as universal or socially constructed, scholars are attempting to identify the specific ways in which these different aspects of emotional life are similar and are different across cultures

Cultural Models of Self in North American and East Asian Contexts

- These cultural contexts are the focus of this module
- Differences in individualism and collectivism translate into different models of the self. In North American contexts, the dominant model of the self is an independent one, in which being a person means being distinct from others and behaving similarly across situations. In East Asian contexts, however, the dominant model of the self is an interdependent one, in which being a person means being fundamentally connected to others and being responsive to situational demands.
- These different models of self have important implications for how people feel

Cultural Similarities and Differences in Emotion: Comparisons of North American and East Asian Contexts

- People's physiological responses to emotional events are similar across cultures, but culture influences people's facial expressive behavior
 - Studies of emotional responding tend to focus on three facets of emotional response: physiology, subjective experience, and facial expressive behavior. We tend to observe more cultural similarities than differences in physiological responding (but differences in facial expressiveness).
 - In contexts that promote an independent self, individuals must express their emotions in order to influence others. In contrast, in contexts that promote an interdependent self, individuals must control and suppress their emotions in order to adjust to others.
- People suppress their emotions across cultures, but culture influences the consequences of suppression for psychological well-being.
 - The cultural ideal in North American contexts is to express oneself, so suppressing emotions has negative consequences in these contexts. However, the relationship between suppression and psychological well-being varies by culture.
- People feel good during positive events, but culture influences whether people feel bad

during positive events

- In North American contexts, people rarely feel bad after experiencing something good. However, people in East Asian contexts are more likely to feel bad and good (“mixed” emotions) during positive events.
- These differences can be linked to cultural differences in models of the self. An interdependent model encourages people to think about how their accomplishments might affect others (e.g., make others feel bad or jealous).
- People want to feel good across cultures, but culture influences the specific good states people want to feel (their “ideal affect”)
 - People in North American contexts want to feel excited, enthusiastic, energetic, and other “high arousal positive” states. People in East Asian contexts want to feel calm, peaceful, and other “low arousal positive” states.
 - People base their conceptions of well-being and happiness on their ideal affect.
- People base their happiness on similar factors across cultures, but culture influences the weight placed on each factor
 - In North American contexts with independent selves, feelings about the self matter more, whereas in East Asian contexts with interdependent selves, feelings about the self matter as much as or even less than feelings about others.

Why Do Cultural Similarities And Differences In Emotion Matter?

- Uncovering cultural similarities and differences in emotion is critical to the understanding of emotions and the malleability of emotional processes. It’s also critical to preventing miscommunications and misunderstandings that may have unintended but detrimental consequences for certain ethnic groups.
- Understanding cultural similarities and differences in emotion may teach individuals about other paths to psychological health and well-being.

Current Directions in Culture and Emotion Research

- What about Other Cultures?

- Future research examining other cultural contexts is needed. These studies may also reveal other dimensions or models that have broad implications for emotion.
- How Are Cultural Differences in Beliefs About Emotion Transmitted?
 - Cultural ideas are reinforced by practices, institutions, and products
- Could These Cultural Differences Be Due to Temperament?
 - Most models of emotion acknowledge that temperament and culture both play roles in emotional life, and yet few if any models indicate how.

Conclusion

- Based on studies comparing North American and East Asian cultural contexts, there is clear evidence for both cultural similarities and differences in emotional functioning, and most of the differences can be traced to different cultural models of the self.

Difficult Terms

Affect

Affective Valuation Theory

Collectivism

Culture

Hydraulic models of emotion

Independent self

Individualism

Interdependent self

Positive Affective State

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

This module focuses heavily on the social aspect of emotion (comparing across cultures). For your lecture, you can also consider including physiological and psychological aspects of emotion (the BPS model discussed in the Drive States module, above).

First Class Period

- Warm-up Activity: Do Animals have Emotions?
 - See Activities/Demonstrations (below) for directions
- Discussion/Warm-Up
 - Consider starting class with a basic overview of emotions – what are they? What influences them? Here, you can have the class brainstorm (as the module said, most people have a predisposition to believe that emotions and our expression of them is innate). Because discussion can be so rich regarding this topic—with biological, cultural and social angles to be covered—there are a number of slides devoted to this discussion.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To introduce the historical background & current research/theory around emotion. Once you've given them the chance to think on their own about emotions from the warm-up, you can talk about some of the historical background and different approaches to explaining emotions (e.g., universalists vs. social constructivists).
 - To discuss the importance of similarities and differences. Once you've laid the basic historical and current research groundwork, you can get to one of the interesting applications of emotions: cultural similarities and differences in emotion (in this case, we are emphasizing North American and East Asian cultures). To start this discussion, talk about some of the differences between the cultures in a general sense (e.g., models of the self, individualism vs. collectivism, etc.). You can then dive into the similarities and differences in emotions (e.g., emotional expression, suppression, ideal affect, etc.).
 - NOTE: Some students might initially object to the categorization of people by national or geographic origin (eg. "How can you suggest that all Asians are alike?"). You can reassure students that researchers acknowledge cultural heterogeneity and that broad average results may not apply equally to every individual. Even so, we find general trends that distinguish groups, on average, and these can be informative.
 - To present current research directions.
 - To discuss other fun applications of emotions. Interested in other ways to teach or talk

about emotions? If you've got the time, consider including some other applications of emotions (listed below). These are fun ways to help students understand the complex way in which we experience and react to the world around us.

- Expressing & detecting emotions: Talk about the expression of emotions using non-verbal behaviors (i.e., facial expressions, tone, body language, etc.) Consider talking about cultural or gender differences here.
- Talking about detecting emotions is always a hit with students. You can talk about gender differences, detecting lies, psychological disorders associated with deficits in detecting the emotions of others (e.g., autism).
- Gender differences: Gender differences can be a fun way to look at how emotions can differ across groups (possibly a nice addition to talking about cultural differences). Plus there are a lot of misconceptions about gender and emotions. Below are some potential talking points (there is some overlap with some of the other areas).
 - Women tend to be more expressive than men (note: this does NOT mean they experience more emotions, just that they *express* those emotions).
 - On average, women tend to be better at discerning nonverbal emotions than men.
 - Boys respond to anger by moving away from the causative situation, while girls talk to their friends or listen to music.
- The experience of emotions: Talking about anger can be a great addition to the cultural discussion that forms the basis of this module. Students are likely to be able to relate, as we often experience feelings of anger throughout our lives. You can talk about the catharsis hypothesis (the idea that venting anger through action or fantasy achieves an emotional release or “catharsis” – like punching a pillow after a bad day), which many people believe to be a valid approach to dealing with feelings of anger. However, expressing anger breeds more anger, and through reinforcement it is habit-forming. You could also talk about the “dangers” of anger (anger breeds prejudice) or how the expression of anger is influenced by culture (the expression of anger is more encouraged in cultures that do not promote group behavior than in cultures that do promote group behavior)
- In direct contrast to anger, you can talk about happiness (always an uplifting topic). You can talk about factors that predict happiness vs. factors that do not (consider having your students brainstorm first), life outcomes associated with being happy, or ask the age old question: does money buy happiness? Students seem to really enjoy talking about money and happiness – you won't have a problem getting to

share their opinions on this one.

Activities & Demonstrations

Spot the Fake Smile: Out of Class Activity

This activity can be done either before or after the class period on emotions (doing it before class sometimes helps the students get excited about they are going to learn the next; doing it after class can reinforce what they have learned)

- Time: 0 minutes class time; 15-20 minutes outside of class
- Materials: Link to website, paper and pen (or they can type their response)
- Directions:
 - Direct students to the following website, which has the rate 20 faces (whether or not the smile is genuine)
 - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/surveys/smiles/index.shtml>
 - After completing the survey and finding out their results, have students reflect on the experience (if doing it before lecture, a simple reflection that integrates what they read in the book would suffice; if doing it after content is delivered, use prompts that encourage them to evaluate or synthesize what they have learned).

Do animals have emotions? In-class activity

This is a GREAT in-class activity that you can use to get students thinking about emotions.

- Time: 10-15 minutes
- Materials: Links to the videos, pen and paper for students

- Directions:
 - You can start by showing them one of the following videos:
 - Koko the Gorilla and her kitten: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqTUG8MPmGg>
 - Elephants Mourning Herd Matriarch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjtrdpSwEUY>
 - Temple Grandin: Animal Emotions & Cognitions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pwl8ti6Jhk>
 - Once you've shown the video(s), you can open it up for class discussion or a mini-writing.
- This is usually very interesting to students, so you can ask them a series of questions to get them thinking (e.g., Do animals have emotions? Based on what you have learned in class, state whether or not animals have emotions and support your answer with content from lecture and the book).

Additional Activities

Scollon, C., Wirtz, D., & Wei, X. (2013). Culture and subjective well-being: Culture influences the ingredients of a good life and conceptualizations of happiness. In J. J. Froh, A. C. Parks (Eds.), *Activities for teaching positive psychology: A guide for instructors* (pp. 85-91).

- This activity demonstrates how culture influences what people choose to emphasize in the good life by asking students to allocate points to different life priorities and to indicate their preference for activated versus deactivated positive emotions, after being primed with either an "individualistic" or "collectivistic" mind-set.

Outside Resources

Audio Interview: The Really Big Questions "What Are Emotions?" Interview with Paul Ekman, Martha Nussbaum, Dominique Moisi, and William Reddy

http://www.trbq.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=16&Itemid=43

Book: Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener: Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of

Psychological Wealth

Book: Eric Weiner: The Geography of Bliss

Book: Eva Hoffmann: Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language

Book: Hazel Markus: Clash: 8 Cultural Conflicts That Make Us Who We Are

Video: Social Psychology Alive

<http://psychology.stanford.edu/~tsailab/PDF/socpsychalive.wmv>

Video: The Really Big Questions “Culture and Emotion,” Dr. Jeanne Tsai

<http://youtu.be/RQaEaUwNoiw>

Video: Tsai’s description of cultural differences in emotion

<http://youtu.be/T46EZ8LH8Ss>

Web: Acculturation and Culture Collaborative at Leuven

<http://ppw.kuleuven.be/home/english/research/cscp/acc-research>

Web: Culture and Cognition at the University of Michigan

<http://culturecognition.isr.umich.edu/>

Web: Experts In Emotion Series, Dr. June Gruber, Department of Psychology, Yale University

http://www.yalepeplab.com/teaching/psych131_summer2013/expertseries.php

Web: Georgetown Culture and Emotion Lab

<http://georgetownculturelab.wordpress.com/>

Web: Paul Ekman’s website

<http://www.paulekman.com>

Web: Penn State Culture, Health, and Emotion Lab

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/m/r/mrm280/sotosite/>

Web: Stanford Culture and Emotion Lab

<http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~tsailab/index.htm>

Web: Wesleyan Culture and Emotion Lab

<http://culture-and-emotion.research.wesleyan.edu/>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Enns, C. (1994). On teaching about the cultural relativism of psychological constructs. *Teaching of Psychology*, 21(4), 205-211. doi:10.1207/s15328023top2104_1

- Describes the limitations of a Western, individualistic perspective on psychological theory and proposes a multicultural approach to the study of personality. The author summarizes recent research and theory regarding how personality may be differentially shaped by individualistic and collectivist cultures. Views of the self, emotion and motivation, relationships and groups, and achievement and coping in different cultures are addressed.

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.: Emotion

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19980989/Emotion%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.: Motivation

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981020/Motivation%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/ news: Emotion

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/24993705/Emotion%20in%20the%20News>

Current events/ news: Motivation

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/24883789/Motivation%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio: Emotion

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19980988/Emotion%20Video>

Video/audio: Motivation-Emotion

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/39235435/Motivation-Emotion>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

https://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

https://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

https://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

https://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

https://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

https://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/271/Culture%20and%20Emotion.ppt?1475876630.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award-winning university teachers.

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