

**Making Observations of Psychological Processes in Everyday Life [Student Handout]****[07] Emotion****A. Introduction**

For much of the history of psychology emotion was treated like an ugly stepchild—at best something to put up with but certainly not something to take seriously—

as if it were something normal people grow out of. We now know that people with defective or deficient emotions are not just not normal, but seriously impaired, and that emotional evaluation is an indispensable part of virtually all mental processes.

**Key Concepts**

- James-Lange theory
- Schachter's Experiments (emotion = interpretation)
- Facial feedback hypothesis
- Microexpressions
- Kagan's research on shyness

Nonetheless there remains a deep, abiding and pervasive prejudice against emotions and emotional expression. Indeed, how much emotion we express (and where, with whom and under what circumstances we do so) is often taken as an index of how mature and grown up we are. In the past this was explicitly connected with racist, sexist and homophobic and other prejudicial convictions—although the fact that it is now officially politically incorrect and even sometimes illegal to do so hardly means such implications (or the behaviors associated with them) have disappeared.

**B. Questions to Guide Your (Re)Search**

[1] Because emotions are typically treated as signs of infancy, weakness or even imbecility we are generally encouraged by the dominant culture to put them aside in order to make 'reasonable' and 'rational' choices for ourselves. How often does that happen in daily life? How often does it happen in the media? How often do we evaluate others based on the degree of emotion in their reactions?

[2] In real life people seldom label their emotions or even make specific note of them—and when they make choices about expressing them they typically don't think much more about them. Perversely that makes it difficult to notice how emotional responses affect us. What can you observe about the effects of suppressed or denied emotions on people's behavior? What can you observe about when such 'automatic' suppression of emotions takes place? How often does it happen? Are there particular circumstances or situations in which it occurs? When do people *not* suppress their emotions?

[3] How do emotions and displays of emotion get treated in everyday life? What are the messages we get about emotions from the media, from TV, movies, books, video games, etc? What are the messages we get about emotions from our parents? How does the dominant culture label emotions as 'positive' or 'negative'?

[4] When and where is it *allowed* or *expected* to act emotionally? What light do such exceptions to the rule shed on the rule itself? Are there particular people who are allowed or expected to show emotions? Are there particular circumstances or situations in which such expressions are allowed or expected? How do messages about such things get spread throughout the dominant culture? How do people react when an individual or group does *not* 'violate' the rule about emotional expression when it is expected that they should?