

Module-11

Dimensions of Subjective Adjustment: Emotions and Adjustment

We have extensively discussed emotion in the course *Basic Psychological Processes*. Before we look at emotions from the perspective of human adjustment process, let us recapitulate some of the basic concepts. Eysenck has defined emotion as ‘a complex state involving heightened perception of an object or situation, wide-spread bodily changes, an appraisal of felt attraction or repulsion, and behavior organized toward approach or withdrawal’. It can be construed as multifaceted processes that involve physiological reactions, behavioural reactions, expressive reactions and subjective experiences. Physiological reactions influence us in a covert way whereas behavioural and expressive reactions are likely to directly affect person-environment relationship. In the long run subjective experiences would also have bearing on our emotions. Behavioural reactions directly govern our approach and avoidance reactions, which in turn, influences our adjustment to the environment. The ecocultural framework of Berry (1976) and his colleagues (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002) have also referred to three kinds of antecedental influences— ecological indices, sociopolitical indices, and aggregated psychological characteristics.

Emotion and Adjustment

Studies in psychology and allied disciplines have established relationship between emotion and subjective well-being. Primarily the findings endorse that in some respect the

quality of adaptation shown by an individual is proportionate to the happiness one derives in life and overall life satisfaction. This, in turn, positively affects one's subjective well-being.

Emotion has certain biological universals but what makes it significant for the adjustment process is the sociocultural variability of the progression. It is a well known fact that few societies (such as agricultural societies) lay emphasis on compliance whereas few cherish independence (Barry, Child, & Bacon, 1959). Interestingly, conformity and compliance influences not only the way emotions are expressed but also the way they are experienced. For instance, in individualistic societies the expression of happiness is encouraged at the cost of expression of sadness. On the other hand, collectivist societies cherish the reverse (Hofstede, 2001). People forgo negative emotions in order to support group standards in collectivistic society. Studies have reported less public expression of negative emotions in collectivistic societies. On the other hand, individualistic societies (such as North America), 'may sanction the communication of these emotions more, as they relate to individual freedom to express and perceive negative emotions' (Matsumoto, 1989, p. 101).

It is important to understand the distinction between positive and negative emotions. The six basic emotions are classified into two broad categories with respect to their valance. For instance, happiness and surprise are positive emotion whereas sadness, fear, anger and disgust are negative emotions. Some view positive – negative emotion as separate domains (Watson et al., 1988) whereas others consider them as correlated or bipolar domains (Russell & Carroll, 1999). The two sets of emotions can very well manifest in subjective experiences, physiological mechanism as well as self – appraisal.

Lazarus (1991) has described emotional responses as an outcome of internal and situational appraisal processes such that emotions induce coping activities. He talks about problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. In problem-focused coping one makes efforts to overcome or minimize the effects of an unwelcome situation, whereas in emotion-focused coping one adopts strategies to master, ease, or endure an undesirable situation. We spend substantial amount of time and energy in adapting to the constraints of dealing with social and environmental demands. We need to manage our actions without violating the social needs, norms and obligations. All this requires interplay of emotional processes such that they serve social function. Inability to do so might be an indicator of maladjustment.

It is important to broadly classify emotions into goal congruent and goal incongruent categories in order to understand the salience of emotional processes in adjustment. Happiness, love and pride constitute the goal congruent emotions whereas sadness, anxiety, shame, guilt, envy and disgust are the goal incongruent emotions. As you can make out, the goal congruent emotions are positive in nature and they are likely to moderate the day-to-day things that might bother us. In doing so, they play adaptational role by sustaining our morale, facilitating coping and restoration of normal life pattern. Highlighting the importance of appraisal in emotional processes, Lazarus (1991) has elaborated the primary and secondary appraisal components responsible for the goal congruent emotions. They are reproduced below.

Appraisal of Happiness*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including happiness.
2. If there is goal congruence, then only positive emotions are possible, including happiness.

3. Type of ego-involvement is irrelevant.

Secondary Appraisal Components

5. Blame and coping potential are irrelevant.

6. If future expectations are positive, we expect the good fortune to continue, and if the overall life outlook is favorable in general, the existential background is that which is essential to feel happy. If future expectations (and the existential background) are guarded or unfavorable, then happiness is apt to be muted or undermined.

All other appraisal components, including type of ego-involvement, are not essential.

Appraisal of Pride *

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including pride.

2. If there is goal congruence, then only positive emotions are possible, including pride.

3. If the type of ego-involvement is enhancement of one's self- and social esteem, then the potential emotions are narrowed to pride, happiness, and relief.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If credit is to oneself, then pride occurs.

No other secondary appraisal components are relevant.

Appraisal of Love*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including love.
2. If there is goal congruence, then only positive emotions are possible, including love.
3. If the type of ego-involvement is desire for mutual appreciation, which is affirming to our ego-identity, then the emotion possibilities narrow to love (or at least liking); if to this is added sexual interest or passion, then love is romantic rather than companionate.

Secondary Appraisal Components

No secondary appraisal components are involved, except perhaps future expectation, which when positive favors love but when negative (that is, the other does not reciprocate) prevents or undermines love.

* Source: Lazarus, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaptation*. Oxford University Press, New York, (pp. 268, 271 and 278).

Another set of emotions are outcome of goal incongruence. They are negative in nature. Anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy and disgust come under this category. Anger happens to be one of the most prominent goal incongruent emotions. The much talked about frustration-aggression hypothesis of Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower, and Sears (1939) proposed that frustration which is “the state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response” often lead to aggression. Other researchers fine-tuned this stating that the amount of frustration and subsequent aggression is contingent upon how close the individual is to the goal. Later, Berkowitz proposed that frustration alone cannot produce aggression and it is an outcome of interaction between internal emotional state and environmental cues. From the

adjustment point of view, it is important to evaluate the appropriateness of the negative emotion and the environmental demands before expressing it.

Once again, appraisal of blockade of the goal will determine the nature of negative emotion. For instance, if goal-obstruction reflects potential harm then one might show anxiety. If such blockade appears irreversible and you do not hold anyone responsible for it then it might induce sadness; but if the blame is imposed on the self, it might lead to anger, guilt or shame. Sadness is indicative of less engagement and resistance. However, it should not be equated with depression. Anger and anxiety are also negative emotions but there is an element of struggle or resistance in both of them. As far as guilt and shame are concerned, guilt has its origin in the internalized value pertaining to dos and don'ts. The societal way of analyzing right and wrong becomes important. On the other hand, shame originates when an individual fails to withstand his/ her ego-ideal. The inconsistency between the real and the ideal self is important over here. According to Lazarus (1991), "shame is based on an internalized ideal and guilt is based on a moral transgression" (pp. 241). At times we get indulged in negative social comparison leading to envy or jealousy. In certain situation we even distance ourselves from the person or the situation, thus expressing disgust.

Appraisal of the significance of the goal and level of ego-involvement play very important role in determining goal incongruent emotions. Lazarus (1991) has elaborated the primary and secondary appraisal components responsible for the goal incongruent emotions. They are reproduced below.

Appraisal of Anger*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including anger. If not, no emotion.

2. If there is goal incongruence, then only negative emotions are possible, including anger.

3. If the type of ego-involvement engaged is to preserve or enhance the self- or social-esteem aspect of one's ego-identity, then the emotion possibilities include anger, anxiety, and pride.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If there is blame, which derives from the knowledge that someone is accountable for the harmful actions, and they could have been controlled, then anger occurs. If the blame is to another, the anger is directed externally; if to oneself, the anger is directed internally.

5. If coping potential favors attack as viable, then anger is facilitated.

6. If future expectancy is positive about the environmental response to attack, then anger is facilitated.

Appraisal of Fright*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including fright. If not, then no emotion.

2. If there is goal incongruence, which is a threat to bodily integrity by a sudden, concrete harm, then only negative emotions are possible, including fright.

3. Ego-involvement is typically not relevant to the generation of fright, though it may be important in the appraisal of the significance of how one reacts to the fright encounter.

Secondary Appraisal Components

No secondary appraisal components are essential; blame is irrelevant, coping potential is uncertain, as is future expectancy.

Appraisal of Anxiety*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including anxiety.
2. If there is goal incongruence, then only negative emotions are possible, including anxiety.
3. If the type of ego-involvement is protection of personal meaning or ego-identity against existential threats, then emotion possibilities narrow to anxiety.

Secondary Appraisal Components

No secondary appraisal components are essential. Blame is irrelevant, as implied in 3, coping potential is uncertain, and future expectancy uncertain.

Appraisal of Guilt*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including guilt.
2. If there is goal incongruence, then only negative emotions are possible, including guilt.
3. If the type of ego-involvement is to manage a moral transgression, then emotion possibilities narrow to anger, anxiety, guilt, and disgust.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If blame is to oneself, then emotion possibilities narrow to guilt.

5. If coping potential is favorable, then guilt may be expiated by apology or making amends.

6. If future expectations are favorable, then guilt may also be mitigated or reduced.

Appraisal of Shame*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including shame.

2. If there is goal incongruence, only negative emotions are possible, including shame.

3. If the type of ego-involvement is to manage a failure to live up to an ego-ideal, then the possible emotions narrow to anger, anxiety, shame, and disgust.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If blame is to oneself, then the possible emotions narrow to shame.

5. If coping potential is favorable, then shame can be mitigated by promising to redouble efforts to live up to an ideal.

6. If future expectations are favorable, then shame may be mitigated or reduced along with the threat of abandonment.

Appraisal of Sadness*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including sadness.

2. If there is goal incongruity, then only negative emotions are possible, including sadness.

3. If there is a loss to any type of ego-involvement- e.g., esteem, moral value, ego-ideal, meanings and ideas, persons and their well-being, or life goals- sadness is possible.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If there is no blame, then sadness is likely; if blame is external or internal, then other emotions such as anxiety, guilt, or shame are likely.

5. If coping potential is favorable, that is, the loss can be restored or compensated for, then sadness may not occur, or will be associated with hope.

6. If future expectations are favorable, then sadness is associated with hope and not hopelessness and depression.

Appraisal of Envy*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including envy.

2. If there is goal incongruity, then only negative emotions are possible, including envy.

3. If what is possessed by another involves a major lack in any of the six types of ego-involvement, the possible emotions narrow to envy.

Secondary Appraisal Components

No secondary appraisal components are essential; however, if future expectancy is not hopeful, then there are apt to be feelings of sadness or even anger, depending on the coping process and

the appraisals that this generates.

Appraisal of Jealousy*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including jealousy.
2. If there is goal incongruity, then only negative emotions are possible, including jealousy.
3. If the desire for another's affection or favor, which is threatened to be or has been taken by another, constitutes a major threat to any of the six types of ego-involvement, jealousy is favoured.

Secondary Appraisal Components

4. If there is external blame, then the possible emotions narrow to jealousy.
5. A favorable coping potential helps modestly to keep jealousy alive but is not crucial.
6. A negative but not hopeless future expectation likewise helps modestly to keep jealousy alive but is not crucial.

Appraisal of Disgust*

Primary Appraisal Components

1. If there is goal relevance, then any emotion is possible, including disgust.
2. If there is goal incongruence, then only negative emotions are possible, including disgust.
3. If any of the six types of ego-involvement is at risk of being contaminated by a “poisonous idea,” then disgust will occur.

<i>Secondary Appraisal Components</i>
No secondary appraisal components are essential.

* Source: Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Emotion and adaptation. Oxford University Press, *New York*. (pp. 226, 236, 237, 242, 243, 249, 254, 255 and 261).

Emotions and Health

Besides playing key role in the adjustment process, emotions are also found to affect our health. The genesis of the word ‘health’ is in the German word ‘hale’ which imply whole. Several culture, such as Indian, China and Greek culture, have explained health in terms of balance with the nature. This balance or harmony incorporates equilibrium among the physiological, psychological, and social well-being. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health also considers health as state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Illness has been explained in terms of disequilibrium. For instance, the traditional Indian form of medicine, *Ayurveda*, talks about balance (equilibrium) among the three energies in our physical constitution— *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. Ailments (*dosha*) are explained in terms of imbalance among these three energies.

From the viewpoint of modern medicine, illness has been analyzed in terms of cause-effect relationship. Two models prevail that try to explain illness— the generality model and the specificity model. The generality model explains illness in terms of disturbance of the internal equilibrium. The susceptibility to such disturbances increases as a result of stress or emotional reaction. The figure given below illustrates this model.

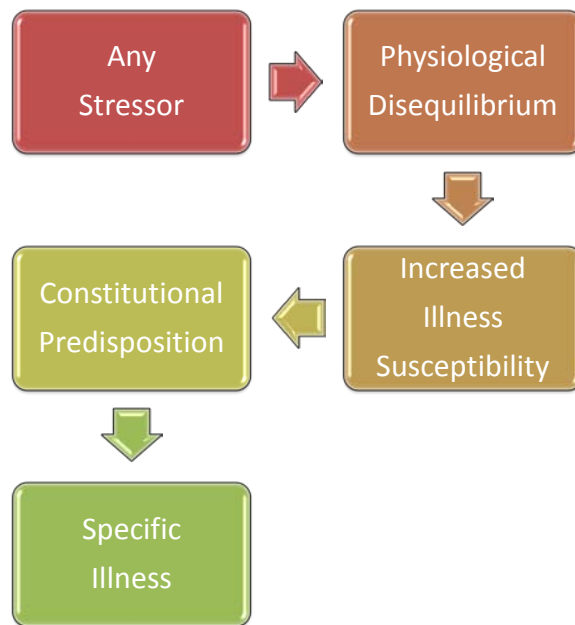


Figure 8.1: The generality model of illness (Adapted from: Lazarus, R. S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Appraisal and coping*. Springer Publishing Co., New York).

The specificity model, on the other hand, emphasize upon specific agents responsible for the illness. This model conceptualizes emotion centered causal phenomena of illnesses and explains the effect of psychosocial factors on health. The figure given below illustrates the specificity model.

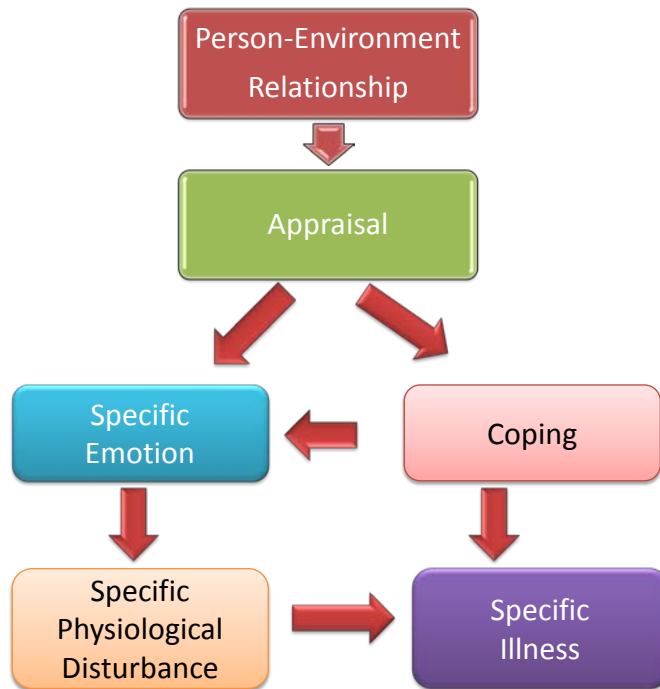


Figure 8.2: The specificity model of illness (Adapted from: Lazarus, R. S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Appraisal and coping*. Springer Publishing Co., New York).

In recent time there have been arguments in favour of looking at alternatives to the medical model. This has already been talked about in the first unit. Antonovsky (1990) has advocated adopting salutogenic model of health rather than pathogenic model which implies that health should be studied instead of disease. Subjectivity and objective measures are equally important when it comes to health. While laboratory based measures such as blood test, ECG and so forth are used as indicators of certain disease the subjective report of the patient also bear importance. The existing models of assessing diseases bank on both these reports. Sensing and reporting an ailment is crucial. It is important to realize that acceptance of a disease could be as important as the disease itself, or even more than it. Emotions and appraisal process are central to this acceptance. You would also come across research on confounding effect of emotions on evaluation of health status.

The reaction to a detected illness has strong emotional reaction attached to it. Say, if someone is told about his/ her having high blood pressure, the reaction to it might not be intense. If the same person is informed having high blood sugar, the reaction might be little more intense; and if the same person is told to have been tested HIV positive, the reaction might be very intense. Hence, acceptance, reaction and dealing with the symptoms are crucial for the health.

As emotions are byproducts of some form of person-environment relationship, somatic illnesses as well as psychiatric disorders can be explained in terms of varying degree of emotions. Alexander's vector theory which is based on the basic biological processes of intake, retention, and expenditure also argues that all emotions implicated with the vectors can disturb the body. Emotions do affect the biochemistry of the body and intense or sustained changes in the biochemistry can induce symptoms of an illness. Further, emotions can be supplemented with inappropriate coping and faulty appraisal. This could indirectly propel the individual towards maladaptation and distressing experiences, which can affect the biochemistry, thus leading to illness.

Similarly, emotions and appraisal affect the psychiatric disorders too. For instance, in hypochondriasis one remains preoccupied with the bodily processes and assumes of a disease. All of us are conscious of our bodily processes and changes, if any. However, we all do not get over-involved with it in order to search a possible disease. So, hypochondriasis in a manner is an outcome of appraisal of the bodily functions and changes and the emotional reaction to it.