

Introduction to Special Section: Psychological Constructivism

William A. Cunningham

Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, Canada

In an attempt to better understand and integrate theories and research in the field of emotion, *Emotion Review* has dedicated several special sections to address core concepts and controversies in the field. Critical to this goal has been a series of issues examining the current status of the dominant perspectives on the nature of emotion. Special sections on basic emotion theory, appraisal theory, and social constructivism have already appeared, and this section continues this series by exploring psychological constructivism. Constructivist approaches suggest that psychological concepts (e.g., happiness) are created and do not reflect biological “natural kinds.” Whereas social constructivist approaches propose that emotions arise from culture, social convention, and agreed-upon meaning (Averill, 1980), psychological constructivist approaches propose that emotions arise from the interaction of primitive psychological processes that may have a biological basis (Barrett, 2009; Russell, 2003). Although culture and convention matter for psychological constructivist approaches, the focus is on the core invariant psychological principles that shape our experience. Critically, emotions do not separate class from cognition, but rather emerge from the interaction of fundamental processes that are shared across psychological domains (Barrett, 2006; Cunningham & Brosch, 2012; Cunningham & Kirkland, 2012; Lindquist & Gendron, 2013; Lindquist, Wager, Kober, Bliss-Moreau, & Barrett, 2012; Russell, 2009; Widen, 2013).

Because emotions are proposed to be emergent and not reducible to a single process, research from a psychological constructivist approach needs to articulate not only which ingredients are necessary/sufficient for emotion, but also how these ingredients combine and interact to give rise to new psychological states (Barrett, 2013). Further, the sets of processes that give rise to different emotions (i.e., either an episode of fear and an episode of anger; or two instances of fear) can rely on both shared and distinct processes. To examine these ingredients and their interactions, for each of the articles in this special section the authors were asked to discuss why psychological constructivism was a useful approach to understand emotion, and to provide details about how emotions emerged from core ingredients.

Specifically, the authors were asked to address a series of questions:

1. Why is a psychological constructivist approach useful for understanding emotion?
2. What are the psychological ingredients that give rise to emotion? Do they have independent effects, or do they interact in some way?
3. How does your approach explain the emergence of differentiated emotion categories?
4. How does your psychological constructivist approach connect to appraisal models? How much can be accounted for by appraisals alone?
5. Is the body necessary for emotion, or can emotions be constructed entirely in the brain?
6. Are emotion categories (fear, anger, sadness, etc.) useful psychological constructs? If so, how and when? If not, how would you propose we reconcile our language with the language of the public?

Clore and Ortony (2013) explore how emotions can be understood by understanding the situations in which they occur, Lindquist (2013) explores how core effect—that is, valence and arousal—is shaped by conceptualization processes to give rise to varied emotional outcomes, and Cunningham, Dunfield, and Stillman (2013) explore how emotions reflect changes in dynamic affective processing. Following these articles, three commentaries explore the general core principles of psychological constructivism (Barrett, 2013), psychological constructivism within a philosophical perspective (Faucher, 2013), and the relationship between psychological constructivism and modern appraisal models (Brosch, 2013).

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