

Introduction to a Special Section on Basic Emotion Theory

James A. Russell

Department of Psychology, Boston College, USA

Erika L. Rosenberg

Center for Mind and Brain, University of California, Davis, USA

Marc D. Lewis

Social Development Research Group, Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

The various emotions we witness or experience can be divided into classes. All languages include words for such classes; English lists *joy, grief, fear, love*, and on and on. Some theorists—called here *basic emotion theorists*—propose that there are classes that cut nature at the joints, that capture hardwired centrally organized syndromes of coordinated emotional responses, or at least some theorists propose something along these lines.

What exactly do basic emotion theorists propose? We need to have clear and current statements of the various theories included under this umbrella phrase (such is the narrow but important goal of Part 1 of the special section). Additionally, we need to see how basic emotion theory adjusts to or withstands criticisms and alternatives (the goal of Part 2). Such problems motivated the current special section.

Basic emotion theory has been and remains *the* major program for scientific research on emotion. Yet, the phrase *basic emotion theory* covers a range of theories, different theorists propose somewhat different theories, and theories evolve over time. Basic emotion theory might better be characterized as an evolving program of scientific research that has offered a family of theories, methods, and empirical results. This program is central to discourse on emotion. It has been the object of criticism and the theory against which alternatives are contrasted. Conceptual progress in the field of emotion (which is after all the goal of the journal *Emotion Review*) requires explications, critiques, and defenses of basic emotion theory.

This special section of *Emotion Review* consists of two parts. In Part 1, we invited four active researchers and their colleagues broadly identified with basic emotion theory; indeed their names are synonyms for *basic emotion theorist*. We asked these theorists to provide a position article with a

focus on their theory today. The central question asked is this: What are the main assumptions and hypotheses of your theory? In order to facilitate comparisons between theories, we also followed in Ekman and Davidson's (1994) footsteps by providing a list of eight more specific questions. Indeed, the Ekman–Davidson list was the starting point for ours. In this way, the different theorists address the same set of issues. (Each article provides the list of questions.) Theorists were not of course restricted to just these issues. Although our focus was on obtaining clear statements of the theory, we also asked each writer to point briefly to evidence supporting each proposition or to the kind of evidence that would test it. We invited Jessica Tracy and Daniel Randles to compare and contrast the final versions of these four articles.

In Part 2, we invited a new set of theorists also broadly identified with basic emotion theory. We asked these theorists to define or extend or revise (or not) basic emotion theory in light of problems, criticisms, and alternatives that have arisen over the years. For example, questions have been raised about the clarity and status of basic emotion concepts and about data that seem inconsistent with some of its assumptions. The theorists were not given specific criticisms or questions to address, but chose those issues they thought most interesting to consider. The aim of Part 2 was not to repeat or even respond to the arguments; rather, it was to improve the clarity and precision of basic emotion concepts, to extend or revise these theories in light of the criticisms, to incorporate new ideas into basic emotion theory, or perhaps even integrate an alternative with basic emotion theory.

Reference

Ekman, P., & Davidson, R. J. (1994). *The nature of emotion: Fundamental questions*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.