The American psychologists Stanley Schachter (1922-) and Jerome Singer (1929-) proposed a theory of emotions (called the cognitive-appraisal/evaluation theory in the 1960s that challenged certain aspects of both the cognitive theory of emotions and the earlier James-Lange theory. Where these other theories assumed that each emotion is associated with a specific physiological state or condition (cf., Funkenstein, 1955), Schachter and Singer argued that individuals who are in a state of physiological arousal for which they have no explanation will label that state as an emotion that is appropriate to the situation in which they find themselves (e.g., the arousal will be labeled as “happy” if the person is at a party, but the same arousal state will be labeled as “angry” if the person is confronting another person in an argument). The experiments of Schachter and his associates point out the fact that emotions seem to depend on two components (Schachter-Singer’s theory is sometimes also called a two-factor theory: (1) some kind of objective physiological arousal and (2) a subjective cognitive or mental process and appraisal whereby persons interpret and label their bodily changes. People who have no reasonable or objective explanation for their internal, emotional, or aroused state may interpret their mood in subjective terms according to their perception of the present existing environment. The Schachter-Singer theory, also, has been referred to as the jukebox theory of emotions because one's physiology is aroused by some stimulus, where the arousing stimulus is compared to the coin placed in a jukebox. The stimulus sets off patterns of brain activity, especially in the hypothalamus that, in turn, activates the auto-nomic nervous system and the endocrine glands, causing a state of general physiological arousal. The body's sensory receptors report these physiological changes to the brain. However, the sensations are vague and can be labeled in many different ways, just as a jukebox activated by a coin can be made to play any one of a number of different songs, depending on which button is pushed. Although the experiments of Schachter and his associates seem to support a cognitive theory of emotions, they may actually come closer to the James-Lange theory because Schachter-Singer’s theory implies that the physiological arousal state comes about first, and the cognitive label that defines the emotion comes afterward. Some theorists [e.g., the American psychologist Magda B. Arnold (1903-2002)] argue that Schachter's experiments are interesting but not relevant for a theory of emotion inasmuch as people do not normally look for a label to identify their emotions. The alternative view is that emotions are felt without attending to the physiological changes that accompany them, and people react to the object or event and not to a physiological state within themselves. On the other hand, although some recent studies of emotion have not always agreed with Schachter and Singer's viewpoint, many investigators do offer support for the contention that people often interpret their emotions in terms of external cues. The Schachter-Singer theory has been fruitful, also, in suggesting the important research question of the origin or source of one's physiological arousal. For example, one source of arousal that has been explored in recent years is the discrepancy between actual and expected events. According to the Austrian-born American American psychologist George Mandler's (1924-) discrepancy-evaluationconstructivity theory, the greater the gap between what a person expects and what actually happens in a given situation, the greater the resulting arousal. Such arousal is interpreted, then, cognitively to yield subjective experiences of emotion. The discrepancy-evaluationconstructivity theory suggests, further, that arousal level determines the intensity of the emotional experience, whereas cognitive evaluation determines its specific identity or quality. Thus, the discrepancy-evaluationconstructivity theory extends the Schachter-Singer theory by identifying a major cause of the arousal that people interpret—in terms of external cues—as one emotion or another. See also
AROLD'S THEORY OF EMOTIONS; ATTRIBUTION THEORY; COGNITIVE THEORIES OF EMOTIONS; EMOTIONS, THEORIES/LAWS OF; JAMES-LANGE/LANGE-JAMES THEORY OF EMOTIONS.

REFERENCES

  
  The physiology of fear and anger.
  Scientific American, 192, 74-80.

  
  Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state.
  Psychological Review, 69, 379-399.

  
  A constructivity theory of emotion.
  In N. Stein; B. Leventhal; T. Tragbasso (Eds.), Psychological and biological approaches to emotion. Erlbaum. Hillsdale, NJ.

  
  Construct accessibility and the misattribution of arousal: Schachter and Singer revisited.
  Psychological Science, 5, 15-19.

© 2006 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA