

Not just another aspect of pleasure: Functionality as a distinct component of emotions

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According to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT, Ellis, 1985; Ellis & DiGiuseppe, 1993) functionality is the central criterion when distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive emotions. Hereby, adaptive emotions signify appropriate responses to an eliciting event, whereas, maladaptive emotions signify inappropriate reactions. This research examines relevant characteristics of emotions (i.e., pleasure, arousal, duration, influence on life, and typicality) as potential predictors of functionality.

In Study 1 ($N = 96$) using single item measures results indicated that pleasure and arousal had a significant predictive value on functionality, whereas the predictive value of the other dimensions was limited. Study 2 ($N = 240$) widely confirmed these results by using different psychometrically more reliable scales. In both studies all predictors explained less than 30% of the variance of functionality.

Functionality should be regarded as a predominantly independent characteristic of emotions, which is partially associated with pleasure and arousal.

Introduction

The theory underlying REBT assumes that adaptive emotions result from appropriate appraisal of an eliciting event. Maladaptive emotions by contrast arise from inappropriate appraisal of this event. Emotions like anxiety, rage, guilt, and depression (David, Schnur, & Belloiu, 2002) are among the maladaptive emotions. They lead to dysfunctional behaviour patterns, which sabotage or even block achieving personal goals. On the other hand the adaptive emotion pendants fear, annoyance, regret, and sadness lead to successful coping with the eliciting situation, thus supporting functional behaviour. Hence functionality is according to REBT the central dimension to distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive emotions. The aim of the present research is to examine, whether functionality is an independent aspect of emotions distinct from other dimensions which are well-established to describe emotions. These dimensions are:

- *pleasure, displeasure and arousal* as central dimensions for the characterisation of emotions, which were investigated in numerous studies of pleasure-arousal theories (cf. Reisenzein, 1994),
- *duration*, the perceived time period an emotional experience lasts (Zammuner, 1998),
- *influence on life*, the degree to which different areas of life are influenced by an emotion (Fridja, Ortony, Sonnemans, & Clore, 1992) and
- *typicality*, the extent to which an emotion term is rated as a typical emotion (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987).

Hypothesis: There is a substantial amount of variance of functionality which cannot be explained by these dimensions.

Method

Study 1

96 participants (aged 19-60 years, $M = 26.5$, $SD = 8.6$; 63.5% female, 82% students) rated all of the eight examined emotions on 11-point Likert scales. The questionnaire contained one item for each dimension.

Study 2

240 participants (aged 17-47 years, $M = 23.46$, $SD = 3.96$; 50% female, 84% students) rated one adaptive emotion and the maladaptive pendant each on 11-point Likert scales. For each dimension a scale consisting of three items was used.

Results and Conclusion

As shown in both tables, functionality can be predicted by the other dimensions. Especially pleasure and arousal are significantly linked to functionality. The more an emotion is connected with pleasure and arousal the more it is perceived as a functional emotion. The results of Study 1 were in line with Study 2. All predictors in Study 1 explained less than 30% of the variance of functionality. The higher R^2 values in Study 2 in relation to the R^2 in Study 1 are probably due to the improved reliability of the scale. When analyzing only those items of Study 2 which were already part of Study 1, the resulting $R^2_{\text{overall}} = .25$, $F(11, 468) = 15.81$, $p < .001$, is similar to the R^2 of Study 1. Nevertheless in both studies an important amount of the variance (i.e., more than 60%) of functionality was not explained by the predictors. Thus in accordance with REBT functionality can largely be regarded as an independent aspect of emotions.

	Pleasure	Displeasure	Arousal	Influence on life	Duration	Typicality	R^2_{adj}	ANOVA
Adaptive emotion	.13*	-.18**	.24**	.09	.02	.01	.15	$F(10, 373) = 7.74$ $p < .001$
Maladaptive emotions	.14*	-.08	.36**	-.10	.11*	.04	.23	$F(10, 373) = 12.16$ $p < .001$
Overall	.12**	-.14**	.27**	.00	.07*	.02	.27	$F(11, 756) = 27.20$ $p < .001$

Study 1: Multiple regression analysis predicting functionality by the other dimensions; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

	Pleasure	Displeasure	Arousal	Influence on life	Duration	Typicality	R^2_{adj}	ANOVA
Adaptive emotions	.22**	-.20**	.17**	.04	.12	.19**	.23	$F(10, 229) = 8.24$ $p < .001$
Maladaptive emotions	.28**	-.10	.29**	-.10	.22**	.04	.31	$F(10, 229) = 11.54$ $p < .001$
Overall	.24**	-.15**	.21**	-.03	.15**	.12**	.35	$F(11, 468) = 24.02$ $p < .001$

Study 2: Multiple regression analysis predicting functionality by the other dimensions; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Several variables like age and gender were included in the regression analysis as covariates, however, they showed no significance.

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