

EMOTIONAL EVENTS

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Abstract

In the last half century, the study of emotions has been largely in the grip of a static paradigm. Moved initially by the work of Darwin and further entrenched by the efforts of Paul Ekman and his collaborators, these and theories have tended to be founded on fixed facial expressions, which infer that emotions are static states rather than dynamic events. It is this claim that I investigate and question. I begin by briefly reviewing the context and assumptions that guided Duchenne and Darwin in their use of photography. While innovative scientifically, the photographs of the period were far from instantaneous as the exposure time of photosensitive film was still 10s of seconds in length. As such, the emotional expressions depicted were either self-conscious poses or utter feats of theatricality. While Darwin, it seems, did the best he could with the technology of his day, it remains puzzling to see Ekman and others accepting Darwin's methodology and in turn his static paradigm so faithfully (e.g. in spite of the fact that moving picture technology has been available since the 1890s). After briefly reviewing possible reasons for this, I conclude the paper by offering an alternative methodology and possible model of the emotions. While facial expressions as "expressive events" remain a component to this model, they are but one of several dynamic modalities that need to be identified and recorded. Others may include body postures, behavioral patterns, vocal expressions, and various internal processes in addition to the setting (including other subjects) in which the experience is undergone. Ultimately, I claim that the capturing of an emotional event should look more like a full-fledged Hollywood blockbuster movie involving teams of contributors rather than a single mute photograph taken by an individual.

Keywords: emotion, mental events, mind, psychology, photography, film, Darwin, Ekman