# Culture and Emotion (pt. I)

Psychology of Emotion
Lecture 8
Professor David Pizarro

# Exam on Wednesday (Feb 22)

- some details
  - 25-30 multiple choice questions
  - 3 pages of short answer (10-15 pts/page)
  - bring pencil for scantron
  - sample questions up on course website (peezer.net/exams)
  - make use of remaining TA/instructor office hours (peezer.net/people-psych-3850)

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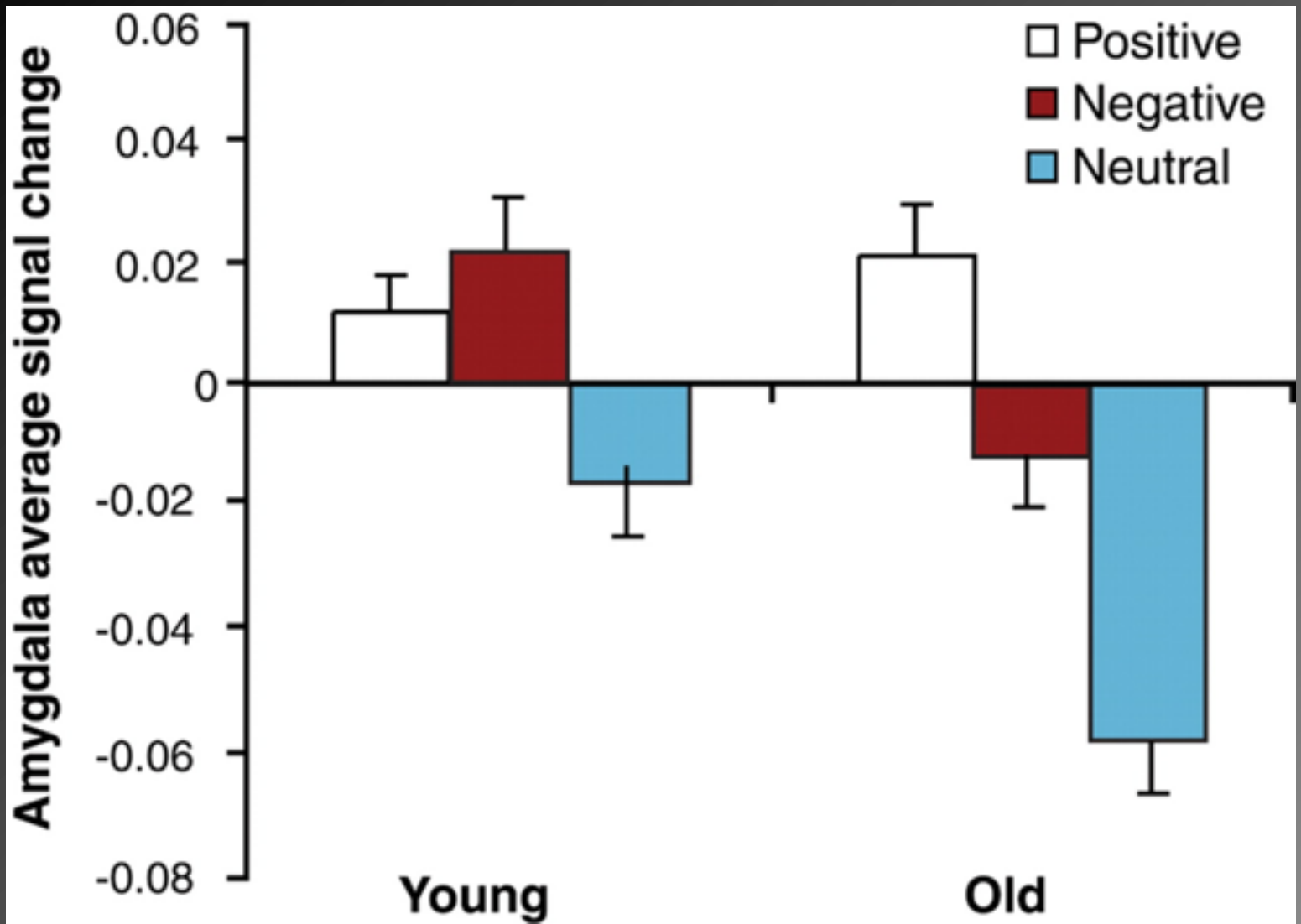



# Amygdala activation to emotional stimuli

# age differences thought to be primarily driven by motivational differences

- e.g., older participants motivated to keep social networks smaller, cherish positive events
- but capturing younger individuals at a moment in life when they are about to move (e.g., seniors in college) can demonstrate this shift in motivation
- shift is gradual, and can be changed temporarily in both old and young
- (link to a brief article in *Science* posted on the course website)

# *Universal* causes of emotion...

- We *defined* emotion (theoretical attempt at universality)
- A lot of our discussion in this class focuses on universals
  - Biology, Evolution, Brain, Development
- But there are important sources of *difference*

how would these people differ in emotion?

# Side-note: What *is* Culture?

- Tough--entire courses are taught in an attempt to answer this question
  - Human-made things (as opposed to “nature”)
  - Systems of *meaning* (interpret the world around us).
  - Concepts transmitted through *social participation*
  - Presumably (and rather obviously) affects/shapes many psychological processes

# Why should *culture* make a difference?

- Given that we're all made of the same "stuff" and evolved similarly why would we have differences?
  - It's possible we overestimate how "hard-wired" emotional systems really are.
  - It's possible that even with hard-wired "basic" emotions that there is flexibility in expression, elicitors, regulation, etc.

# Why should *culture* make a difference?

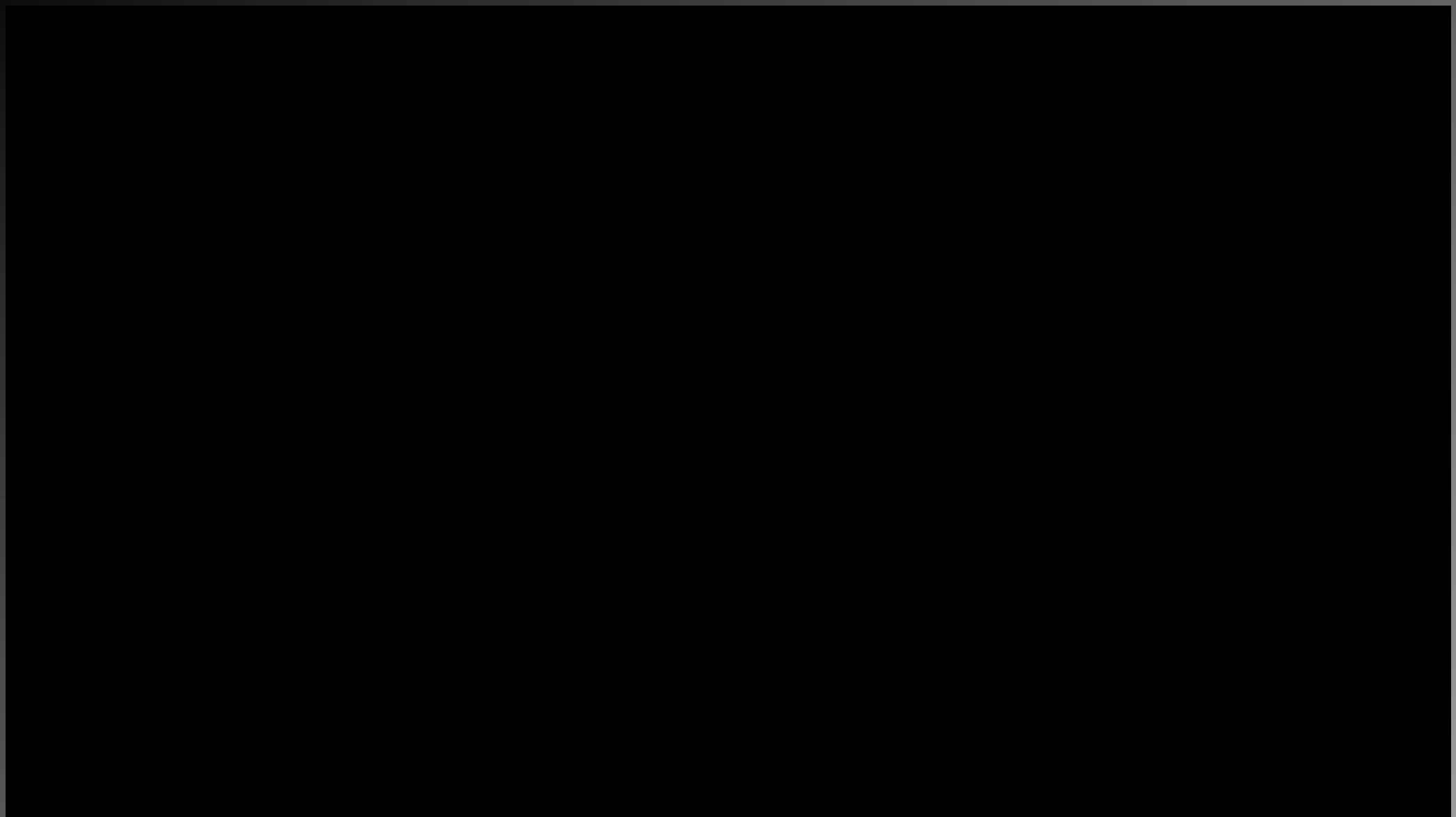
- "Evolved" doesn't preclude "flexible"
  - Example:  Anger when important goal is blocked. Definition of "important goal" varies across many individuals, situations, and cultures.
  - A certain amount of flexibility would be advantageous

# What kinds of cross-cultural differences might exist?

- differences in emotionality/emotional experience
- differences in cultural norms regarding emotions
  - display rules
  - value placed on different emotional experiences

# Differences in Emotional Experience?

- It has often been observed (ethnographically, as well as colloquially) that some cultures seem to be more or less “emotional” than others
- Imagine that a situation that *universally* gives rise to anger/sadness/happiness across all cultures. Would people in some cultures simply be more angry/sad/happy?



# Differences in Emotionality Across Cultures?

- True, or just stereotypes?
- Large body of evidence showing differences in emotionality across cultures.
  - Much of this research has focused on Asian (esp. Japanese and Chinese) vs. Caucasian (esp. Americans)
- But also shown across various cultures and subcultures

# Overview of general findings

- Some cultures show emotion more than others
  - Americans more likely to express emotions
    - More likely to laugh out loud in public
  - Americans more likely express anger across a variety of social situations
- Compared to Japanese students, American students reported experiencing emotions longer and more intensely, and report more bodily symptoms (Matsumoto, Kudoh, Scherer, & Wallbott, 1988)

# "Culture of Honor"

- Subcultural Differences-The "Culture of Honor" in the Southern U.S. (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996)
- In response to insult, southerners displayed more anger, were more physiologically aroused, and gave stronger shocks to a confederate

# Wallace Friesen (1972)

- Compared Japanese vs. American students who were watching a film depicting a disgusting surgical procedure
- Japanese students were much more “stone-faced” than American students (when watching film in the presence of an authority figure)
- We’ll get back to this study...

# Apparent cultural differences in emotionality

- But why?
- Physiological Differences?
  - Genetic differences in physiological response/ reactivity?
  - Cultural norms influence emotionality at the level of physiological response/reactivity?
- Display Rules?
  - Cultural norms influence the display of emotions, but not necessarily the physiology?

# Emotional Reactivity

- Ethnographic accounts of emotional differences noted that Asians tended to be less “emotional” than Westerners
- Early research in this area was an attempt to demonstrate physiological (possibly genetic) differences across cultures of the East vs. West

# Freedman& Freedman (1974)

- Began with the hypothesis that emotional reactivity in Asian vs. European newborns should be different.
- Compared U.S. Caucasian and Asian (Chinese, Japanese) infants on neonatal scales of reactivity (behavioral ratings)
  - Temperament
  - Sensory Development
  - ANS and CNS maturity
  - Motor Development
  - Social Interest/Response

# Example of measures...

- In order to measure “defensive movements” placed cloth over infant’s face and removed it
- Researchers coded for reactionary movements

# Findings
# (Freedman & Freedman, 1974)

- In general, found temperamental differences between Caucasian and Asian Newborns
  - Asian newborns were less irritable
  - Took longer to reach peak excitement
  - Grew accustomed to novel stimuli sooner
  - Better able to stop crying by themselves than Caucasian Newborns
- Exception: Asian infants were more “tremulous” (more body and facial tremors)

# Consistent findings from...

- Linda Camras (1992, 1998)
  - Japanese and American infants in an arm-restraint procedure (to elicit anger and frustration)
  - Used more objective measurements (BabyFACS) than the subjective ratings used by the Freedmans
  - 5 month-old American children more rapidly showed negative facial expressions than 5 month-old Japanese children

# And More...

- Kagan and his colleagues (1994)
  - 4-month old Chinese, Irish, and US Caucasian babies
  - Presented a variety of stimuli to senses (smell, sight, touch)
  - Chinese infants less reactive than Western infants
  - American infants cried the most and most active and fretful (followed by Irish, then Chinese)

# Interpretation?

- Freedmans and Kagan interpreted these differences in reactivity as due to genetic factors
- Another possibility = Early communication of cultural norms
- What cultural norms?

# Cultural Norms About Emotion

- Cultures differ in prescribed rules about how to interpret and perceive emotions and emotional expressions in others
- Cultures have differing rules about when it is okay to display emotions--when, how, where, and how intensely.
- Culture is an efficient mechanism--learned early, often becomes unconscious and automatic.
- Might expect very early influences...

# Support for early cultural norms...

- Kuchner (1989) compared parenting styles at home of Chinese American and European American mothers when infants were 3 weeks, 1, 2, and 3 months old
  - EA mothers routinely introduced changes and novel stimuli into infants' environments more than CA
  - CA mothers more likely to use calming as a method to sooth distressed babies compared to EA mothers

# Support for early cultural norms...

- Harkness & Harper (1983) found that constant presentation of stimuli is related to:
  - increases in sleep difficulties
  - higher levels of physiological arousal
- Differences in arousal may be mediated by cultural differences in parenting style, not genetic factors

# Another tactic...

- Test this claim by finding *culturally* different but *genetically* similar Asian groups?
- Chinese vs. Japanese cultures
  - Chinese have been described as having less emphasis on *intergroup* relationships and more emphasis on relations *between* individuals
  - Accordingly, emotional control may be seen as more important for the individual in Chinese culture.

# As evidence... (Camras et al. 1998)

- Japanese American newborns more able to stop crying when compared to Caucasian Americans, but less so than Chinese Americans.
- JA also more tremulous, easily startled, and more likely to show genuine smiles than CA newborns.
- Nonverbal transmission of emotional norms likely candidate for causality of observed differences

# Cultural influences in adults

- Yet another tactic--measure physiology in immigrants after recent move to a new culture, then after having been "immersed"
  - e.g., autonomic responses of Japanese immigrants during stressful task changes after about a year of being in US (they become *more* reactive)

# Physiological differences

- Although there are a wide variety of results demonstrating some differences in physiology, much more *similarity* across cultures than *differences*.
- Another important source of observed differences in emotionality lies in the ability to influence the *display* of emotions

# Cultural "Display Rules"

- Perhaps there is much more cultural variability in the expression of emotion than in actual experience.
- Display rule: Cultural rules that dictate how emotions should be expressed and when and where their expression is appropriate
- Often, a society's display rules require people to give evidence of certain emotions that they may not actually feel or to disguise their true feelings