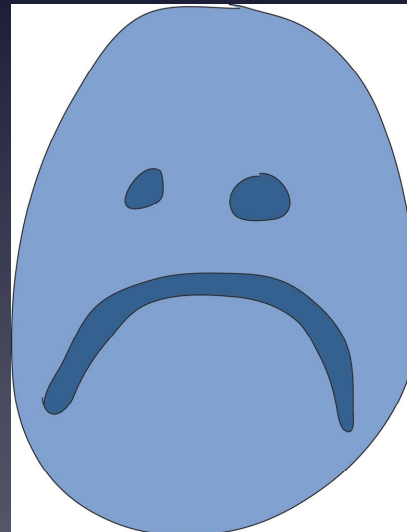


# The Mystery of Emotion



Last day!!  
Psychology of Emotions  
Prof. David Pizarro



From the moment we're born...



...to the moment we die

# ...life is filled with emotion...

- ...our greatest joys and pleasures
- ...our greatest sorrow and suffering
- Without emotion, life would be very different...



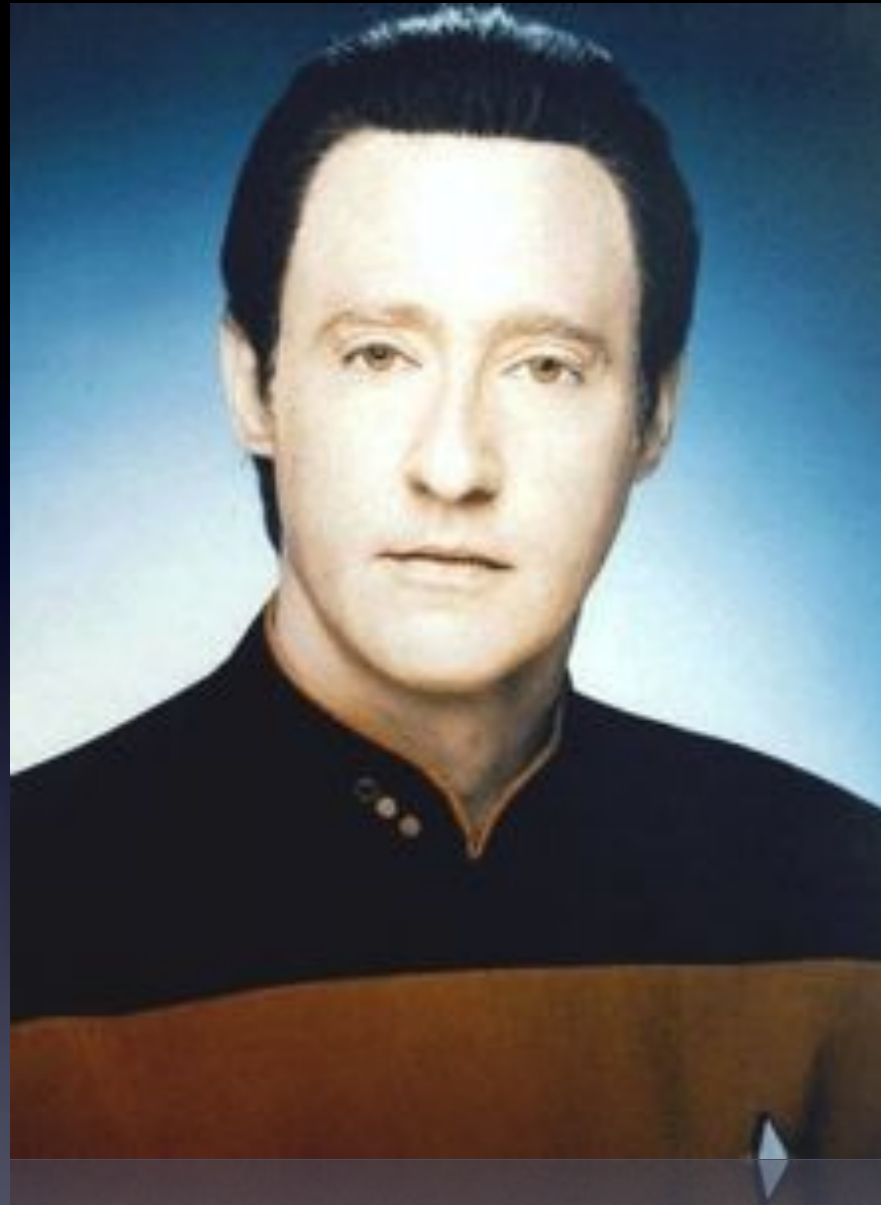
# Emotion-less Existence

- Brain-damaged patients show some deficits of emotion
- Severe depression is often marked by an emotional “numbness”, and an inability to feel pleasure
- **Alexithymia**

# Alexithymics

- Greek “Lexis” (words) and “Thymos” (feelings). “No words for feelings”
- Have difficulty in processing, understanding, and describing emotions.
- Often unaware of their own feelings
- Little imagination or dreams
- Often self-injurious
- Sometimes described as “human robots”





No completely emotionless  
human beings

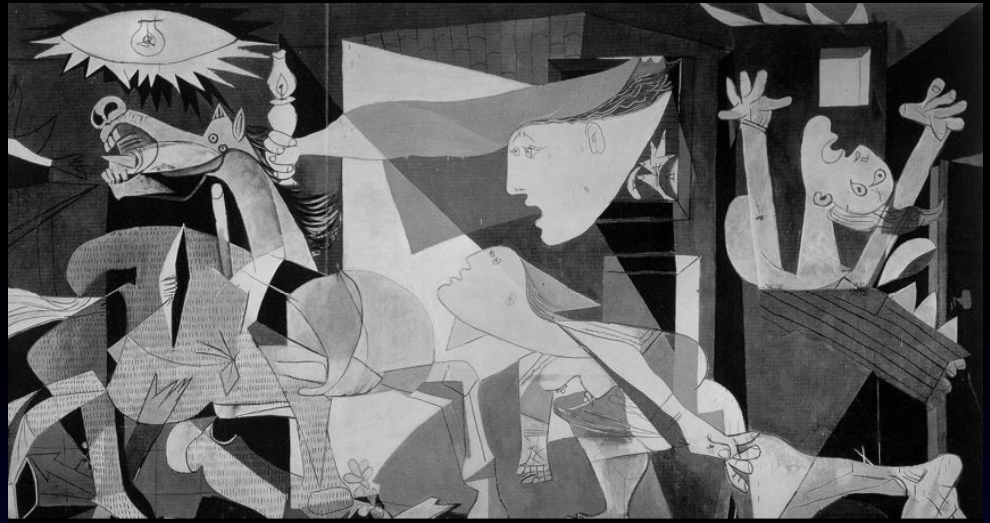
# The Mystery of Emotion

- It is no wonder that emotions have fascinated us for so long
- But despite their ubiquity the emotions have a mysterious quality
- Many attempts at gaining insight into the nature of emotions...



# How to learn about emotions

- There is more than one route to knowledge
  - e.g., personal experience, the inspired works of artists



# How to learn about emotions

- There is more than one route to knowledge
  - e.g., personal experience, the inspired works of artists
  - **The detailed observation and recording of emotional phenomena--aka *science*.**

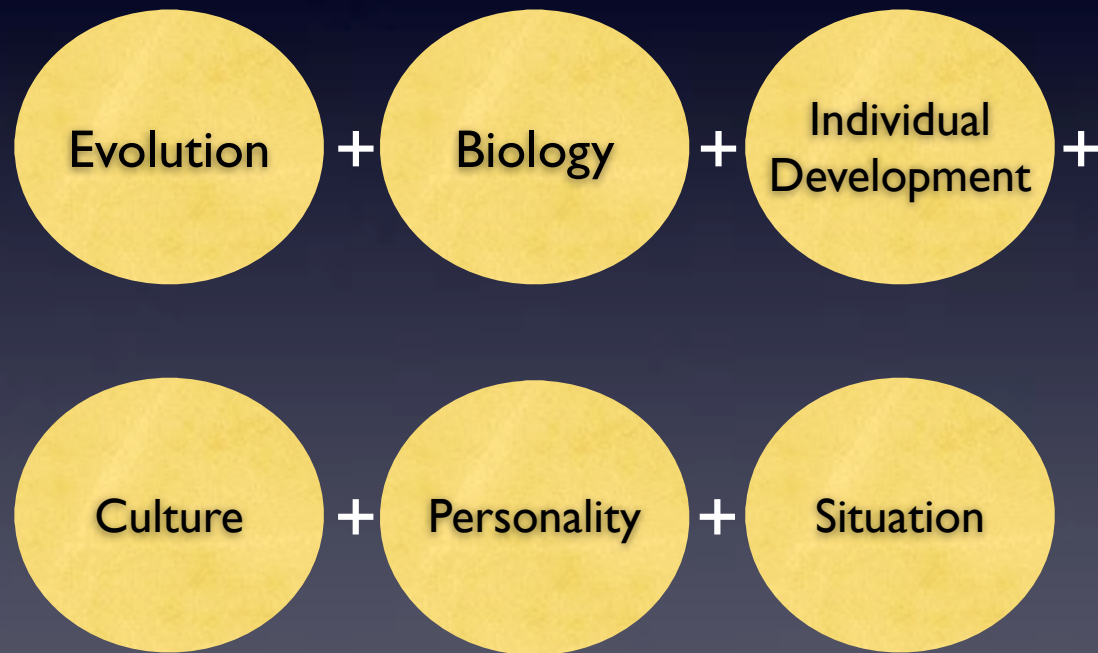
# The Science of Emotions

- This is a great time to be teaching this course
- We finally have enough “emotion science” to be able to speak intelligently about this
  - Emotions are hard to *define*
  - Emotions are hard to *study* (carefully)
- But we’ve learned quite a bit about them so far...

# Big Question: Where do emotions come from?

- What are the CAUSES of emotion in human beings? Where do they come from? Why do we have them?
- It helps to take a step back and look at the science of emotion as offering *multiple* causes.
- we've distinguished levels of analysis...

# “Causes” of Emotion: From Distal to Proximal...



# Evolutionary Origins

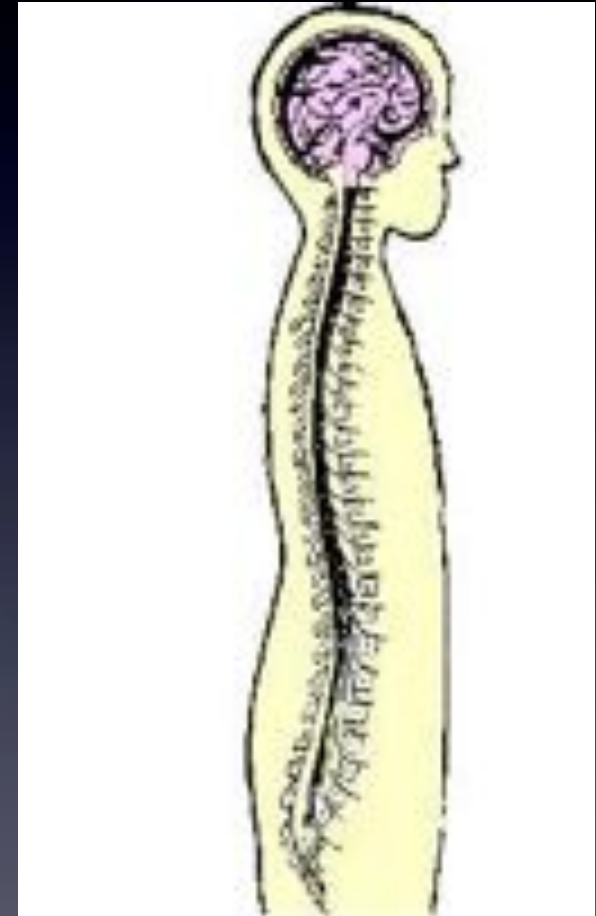
- Hard-wired responses to problems we faced in our early environment
- Universal, Functional, Basic
- What advantage do they confer in terms of
  - Survival?
  - Reproduction?
- Most likely we have a set of specified responses that were selected for.

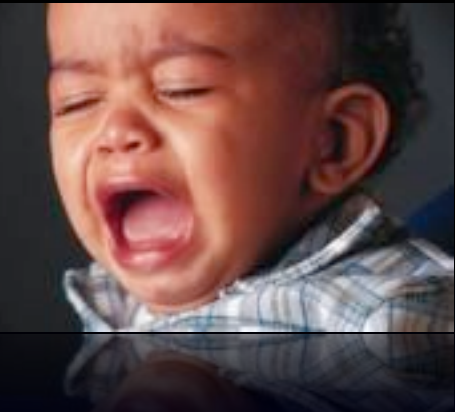




# Biology

- At another level, we can look at the actual physiological equipment that *gives rise to* and *is part of* our emotional responses.
- We have dedicated neurological structures that are implicated in emotion
- We have peripheral nervous system responses that arise during emotional episodes





# Emotional Development



- We come into the world with basic emotional responses present very early on.
- As we mature biologically other responses become available to us (nature)
- As we are exposed to our environment much of our emotional life is shaped (nurture)
- Universal developmental process, and idiosyncratic ones contribute to how and when we feel emotions, and what we do with our emotions.



# Culture

- Where and when you were born has an important influence on our emotional lives
- Some early cultural influences shape things like the elicitors and the display of emotions
- Cultures provide rules, constraints, and prescriptions for what to feel and when.

# Personality/ Individual Differences



- Despite the enormous influence of the more “distal” factors such as biology, evolution, and culture there is a great deal of variety in what we feel, when and why we feel it, and how we deal with emotions.
- No two people are alike. What makes one person happy doesn't affect another.
- Normal variations in personality, temperament, emotional skills, that can be magnified to *abnormal* levels.



# The Power of the Situation

- The social situation can exert such a profound influence on emotions that we can reliably (with fairly trivial methods) manipulate people's emotional reactions.
- But the ability of our emotional system to respond flexibly to novel (and not-so-novel) social situations represents a great advantage.
- This flexibility can also be used for mass manipulation and the perpetration of atrocities.



# Levels of Analysis

- Unfortunately, when scientists refer to a certain mechanism responsible for *emotional phenomenon X*, this is often taken as attenuating or eliminating the explanatory power of some other mechanism.
- Example: “The ball fell because of gravity.” vs. “The ball fell because I dropped it”.
- But “Fear is an evolved response” often leads to “How can you say culture doesn’t matter?!”
- Need to be informed consumers of science...

# Levels of Analysis and Conflicting Explanations

- While there are cases of genuine competing claims, many times there is no real inconsistency.
- E.g., The fact that we are attracted to beautiful people due to our evolutionary heritage says little about how culture influences attraction
- The most basic rule: There should be no *deep inconsistency* across levels of analysis.
- The “ball fell because of magic” is inconsistent with what we know about physics, and should most likely be discarded as a real explanation.



# Lucky us

- In the last few decades we've learned SO much more about the causes and consequences of emotion
- Many disciplines, sub-disciplines, methods, definitions...
- But there is so much yet to discover.
  - Example: Our textbook is one of the ONLY textbooks on emotion. It's only recently in its second edition
  - This is the first "Psych of Emotion" lecture course taught in psych department.
- Whether academically interested or taking the class on a whim, hopefully what we talked about can add value to your life!

# *Apologia*

- I'd like to thank you for your patience, attendance, and contribution.
- All errors are mine, and all glory to to the TA's, researchers in the field, and generous colleagues who have let me steal their material.

