

## Affective Science Reading Reaction – Week 1

### **Gross (2010) The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades**

Although short, this article broached many different “hot” topics in emotion research today. Unfortunately, the length of the article prevented Gross from going into any depth, which was very disappointing. After reading Barrett’s article on how emotions are real and why research on defining how emotions become real is still needed, I was somewhat surprised to read Gross state the that field has “moved beyond sterile debates” about the topic, especially considering he opened his own article by stating that the defining emotion is still difficult and that those definitions are still too imprecise. I appreciated Gross’ brief comments on emotion regulation and the difficulty in parsing emotional reactivity from implicit emotion regulation, but I would have preferred much more time spent to the topic. Furthermore, I would have appreciated more specifics in his hot topics list; most of the items on the list could have been about other fields. For example, if we were talking about developmental psychology, his statements about developing new tools, assessment in everyday life, assessment over time, individual differences, etc., all still would have been equally valid. I agree all these topics need to be covered, but I would have valued more insight from Gross instead of broad, general topics.

### **Barrett (2012) Emotions are Real.**

Are there really that many people that believe emotions are “fake” to warrant an article in *Emotion* in 2012? As the Gross article (discussed below) states, many researchers are moving beyond the debate of what are “true” emotions and are no investigation how emotions are elicited and regulated. However, as Barrett eloquently and convincingly states, the question isn’t if emotions are real, but how they become real. Reminiscent of Schacter and Singer’s two factor model of emotion, Barrett proposes that emotions become real by assigning social significance to physical states. Barrett argues that only by providing social meaning to physical and behavioral situations do emotions exist. This can be considered in direct contrast to William James’ theory that emotions are direct consequences of physical reactions and disputes Ekman’s hypothesis that each emotion has a distinct biological profile. As someone who is interested in both the physiological and social components of emotional experience, I agree with Barrett’s viewpoint that physical reactions (e.g., cardiovascular activity) can help describe emotional experience, but that social/environmental context is also needed to help define emotions. Barrett very skillfully demonstrates how social constructs can change the definition of emotional expression in Figure 3. I was also very intrigued by Barrett’s succinct review of the current literature on discrete emotion categories. I particularly found the electrical stimulation findings that the same stimulus provoked different reactions depending on context convincing of Barrett’s theory that emotions are in part socially constructed. Perhaps one of the inspiring aspects of the article is the implication it has for dyadic research paradigms and the research of emotion in social contexts. I am particularly interested in investigating the interplay between emotion and social context and how the two interact and modify each other. Much of emotion research is done statically in a lab, but in everyday life emotion is dynamic, constantly changing and interacting with the environment. I am very interested to examine how these interactions affect emotional experience and regulation.

### **Questions:**

1. How is it different to define emotion based on the subjective experience vs. perceiving it in others? What kinds of individual differences would emerge in each process?
2. How can we provide data for an evolutionary role in emotional processing? How much does that research tell us about human emotion? E.g. rat studies, monkey studies, baby studies, etc.
3. Does socio-cultural context (e.g. Feldman Barrett (2012)) involve explicit or implicit cognition? Does socio-cultural context imply social regulation of emotion? Would this suggest that emotion is different in varied social contexts, or only cross-culturally?