John Sudol Acting Studio

Committed to educating, inspiring and empowering actors.

ABOUT THE NATURE OF EMOTIONS

Based on the research of Dr. Paul Ekman

John Sudol Acting Studio
11650 Riverside Dr., Suite 11, North Hollywood, CA 91602
818-505-1223 | www.johnsudolstudio.com |
thejohnsudolsactingstudio@yahoo.com

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About the Nature of Emotions

Surprise

Almost anything can be surprising, provided it is unexpected in some way. A sight, sound, smell, taste or touch can be surprising. Not only physical sensations trigger surprise; an unanticipated idea, comment or suggestion from another person can be surprising.

Example: You may be surprised if you walk into your living room expecting to see neat and tidy and it's a mess, if you hear a sound that does that does not belong in your environment, if you take a bite out of your usual boring hamburger and it's filled with flavor, or if you pull your sweater over your head and it's unusually small. You can be surprised by a new thought or idea about the case you're working on or the suggestion someone else makes about the case.

Surprise is brief. If you have time to think about the events and consider whether or not you are surprised, then you're not. The surprise registers the moment you become aware of the stimulus. You can never be surprised for long unless a surprising event reveals new surprising elements. Surprise doesn't linger. When you cease being surprised, its disappearance is often a sudden as its onset

Once you have evaluated the unexpected, you move quickly from surprise into another emotion. Surprise is a neutral emotion. It's the emotion that follows that gives a positive or negative tone to the experience (depending upon the nature of the event). Surprise turns to pleasure or happiness if the event foretells something you like.

Disgust greets the noxious or distasteful event. If the event is provoked by aggression, then surprise yields to Anger. If the event poses a threat which you cannot immediately mitigate, then you feel fear. Fear is the most common sequel to surprise, perhaps because unexpected events are often dangerous and many people come to associate anything unexpected with danger.

Because the experience of surprise is so brief and often followed by another emotion, the face often shows a blend of surprise and the subsequent emotion. If you are already experiencing an emotion when a surprise event occurs, a blend is evident on the face.

Surprise blends with many emotions. You can blend surprise with Anger, Sadness, Disgust Contempt, Fear and happiness. You can be experiencing any one of those emotions and add a surprise event to it.

Startle

Special note: The *Startle* reaction differs from Surprise in facial appearance. The eyes blink, the head moves back, the lips retract and there is a jumping or starting movement. This often occurs

when there is an extreme or sudden change in stimulus. For example, a gunshot or a car backfiring can produce a startled reaction. Someone sneaking up from behind you can produce a startled response. Unlike Surprise, we can be startled by the same stimulus repeatedly, such as the continuous firing of a gun. Most people are usually startled by a sudden and extreme sound, site or touch. The Startle reaction is usually used to describe the most extreme form of Surprise. Startle reaction is also a closely related to Fear.

Anger

Anger is probably the most dangerous emotion. When angry, you are most likely to hurt others purposefully. Part of the experience of Anger is the risk of losing control. When a person says he was "angry," that offers explanation why he did something he now regrets. "I know I shouldn't have said that to him or hit him, but I was furious. I lost my head."

Anger may be aroused in a number of different ways. Frustration resulting from interference with the pursuit of your goals is one route. The frustration may be specific to a task you are engaged in or, more generally, specific to a path or direction in your life. Your anger will be more likely and more intense if you believe that the agent of the interference acted arbitrarily, unfairly or spitefully. If a person wants to frustrate you or frustrates you simply because he fails to consider how his actions might affect your activity, you're more likely to be angry than if you believe he has no choice. The frustrating obstacle need not be a person. You can become angry at an object or natural event that frustrates you, although you may feel a bit embarrassed or less justified in your anger.

Presumably when frustrated, your course of action is to remove the obstacle by physical or verbal attack. Of course, the frustrater may be more powerful than you and unconcerned with your protestations. Yet, Anger may still be aroused and may manifest directly at him. You may curse him, beat him, etc...or you may manifest your anger indirectly by shouting or cursing the frustrater when he is not around punishing you for your anger. You may express your anger symbolically by attacking something that represents him or by displacing your anger onto a safer or more convenient target, i.e. a scapegoat.

A second major provocation to Anger is a physical threat. But if the person threatening injury is insignificant and is obviously unable to hurt

you, you are more likely to feel Contempt than Anger. If the person threatening injury is obviously much more powerful than you, you will probably feel Fear rather than Anger. Even if the match is fairly equal you may experience a blend of Anger and Fear. The course of action when anger is aroused by a threat or physical injury may be to attack and flght, to warn verbally, bluff or to ‡ee. Even in ‡ight, though you are presumably afraid, you may still also continue to feel anger.

A third major source of Anger is someone's action or statement which causes you to feel psychological hurt rather than physical hurt. An insult, a rejection or an action which shows disregard for your feelings may anger you. You must care in some way about the person who psychologically hurts you in order to feel hurt and angry about it. An insult from someone you have little regard for, or rejection by someone whom you would never consider a friend or lover, at best would call forth Contempt or surprise. At the other extreme, if the hurt comes from someone you care greatly about, you may feel Sadness instead of or in addition to Anger. In some instances, you may care so much about the person who has hurt you, or be so unable to be angry with him that you rationalize his hurtful acts by flnding some bases in your own actions for his hurtful behavior. You then feel guilty rather than angry. Put in other terms, you may become angry with yourself rather than with the one who hurt you. Again, as with frustration, if the person who hurts you appears to have done so deliberately, you are more likely to be angry with him than if the hurt seems accidental or otherwise out of his control.

A fourth major type of Anger may come from observing someone doing something which violates dearly-held moral values. If someone treats another person in a manner you consider immoral, you may become angry even though you were not directly affected. An obvious example is the anger you may feel when observing an adult punish a child in a fashion you consider too severe. If you hold different moral values what you perceive as an adult's leniency towards a child may anger you. The victim need not be as helpless as a child in order for you to be angered. The husband who leaves his wife or vice versa may anger you if you believe that marriage is "until death us do part." Even if you are wealthy you may be angered by the economic exploitation of certain groups in society or by the government pampering wastrels. Moral anger is often self-righteous, although we tend to invoke that term only if we disagree with the moral value held by the angered person. Anger concerning the

suffering of others or anger because our moral values are being violated are important motives for social and political acts. Such anger in addition to other factors may motivate social activism-whether it be by social reform, prayer, assassination, or terrorism.

Two other events that can cause Anger are related but probably less important than the aforementioned. A person's failure to meet your expectations may arouse your anger. This failure need not directly hurt you; in fact, it might not be directed at you per se. Most commonly this is a parental reaction to a child. Your patience and irritation with his failure to follow instructions or otherwise meet your expectations need not require that the person hurt you by his failure to comply. It is the failure to meet expectations itself that provokes anger.

Another cause of Anger is another person's anger directed at you. Some people characteristically reciprocate anger. This may be particularly pronounced if there is no apparent bases for the other's anger at you or if his anger seems in your evaluation not to be justifled.

The experience of Anger very often includes certain sensations: Blood pressure increases, the face may redden, the veins on the forehand may become noticeable, breathing changes, the body may become more erect, muscles tense, and there may be a slight movement toward the offender.

In intense Anger or rage, it may be impossible to stay still; the impulse to strike may be great. Although attack or flghting may be a common in the angry response, it need not occur at all. A furious person may only use words, he may shout and scream or be more controlled and only say nasty things. He may even be more controlled and not betray his anger with words or in vocal tone. Some people habitually turn anger inward upon themselves and at the most make a joke at the expense of the anger-provoking person or at their own expense.

Anger varies in intensity- from slight irritation or annoyance to rage or fury. Anger may build gradually starting with irritation and slowly accumulates or it may suddenly occur full-blown.

People differ not only in terms of what makes them angry or what they do when they're angry but also in terms of how long it takes them to

become angry. Some people have short fuses and are known for exploding in anger; rarely going through the "annoyed" stage no matter what the provocation. Others may rarely be aware of feeling more than an annoyance. No matter what the provocation they never become really angry, at least in their view of themselves. People also differ in how long they remain angry once provocation has passed.

Anger blends with any of the other emotions. A person may feel Anger-Fear, Anger-Sadness or Anger-Disgust. A person may also feel angry and Surprise or angry and Happiness while at the same time showing scorn or smugness.

Fear

People fear harm. Fear may be physical or psychological, or both. The physical harm may vary from something minor, such as the vaccination puncture, to actual life-endangering injuries. Psychological harm can vary from minor insults or disappointments to extreme assaults on one's well being, rejection of one's love or attacks on one's worth. The psychological harm may involve damage (to self-esteem, confidence, sense of security) or loss of love, friendship, possessions, etc. Harm may involve both physical pain and psychological suffering. For example, a teenager being beaten up by a rival in view of his girlfriend may both physically and psychologically bruise.

Very often you feel Fear in advance of harm. You fear both real and imagined threats of harm. You fear any event, person, animal, thing, or idea that appears dangerous.

Fear may be experienced virtually simultaneously with harm. A sudden sharp pain causes fear. You do not pause to think about whether you are hurting or what is hurting. You hurt and are afraid. Fear experienced simultaneously with harm can also occur with psychological suffering. If the boss comes up to the office worker who is dozing off at his desk and shouts "you're fired, you lazy idiot!' Fear and possibly Startle are experienced as well.

Fear such as terror is probably the most traumatic or toxic of all emotions. The skin of a terrified person may become pale. He may sweat.

His breathing may become rapid, his heart pounds, his pulse throbs, the stomach may become queasy or tensed. His bladder or bowl may open and his hands tremble. He may find it hard not to move backwards away from the threatening event and even if he is frozen, his posture is one of withdrawal. You cannot be extremely afraid for long periods of time, for the state of terror depletes and exhausts you.

You can be afraid of something familiar, something that you know is going to happen, such as going to the doctor or dentist, getting ready to give a speech or step on stage.

When Fear is felt suddenly (when there is no anticipation of danger) but the fear is simultaneous with harm, the experience may be tinged with Surprise. Thus, in many of these sudden fear experiences, you will experience a blend of Surprise and Fear or of Startle and Fear.

So, you can anticipate Fear or it can be a Surprise. Fear may build up slowly- such as hearing a noise at night. You may hear a noise in the middle of the night and get up to find out what happened. As you think about the possible danger, fear can grow. If the danger comes and leaves quickly, leaving you ignorant of the danger you were in until you are no longer in it (as in a near miss in an automobile) you may experience the fear only afterwards.

Fear varies in intensity from apprehension to terror. The intensity of the experience of fear depends upon the event or your appraisal of the event. In a threatening situation you may merely feel apprehensive if you know you can avoid the threat by flight or if you know that the pain will not be truly horrible. But when flight is not possible and if the harm anticipated is great, your apprehension may turn to terror as you become immobilized-frozen in a posture of helplessness.

Fear may be followed by any of the other emotions, or by no emotion at all. You may become angry and attack the agent that posed the danger, or angry or disgusted with yourself for having placed yourself in jeopardy, or for having responded to jeopardy with fear. Sadness may follow Fear if the harm is enduring, or if in other ways the danger had a regrettable consequence. There may be an extended sequence of emotions; you may feel fear, then Anger, then Sadness, etc. Fear may also be experienced as a blend with another emotion if the event provokes two feelings at once.

For example, someone threatens you and you feel both afraid of the attack and angry at the provocation.

Happiness may also follow Fear. You can be happy that the threat has been avoided or, even if the harm has been endured, you can feel happy that it is over. Some people are able to enjoy the emotion of fear.

Disgust

Disgust is a feeling of aversion to something; to taste, smells or things you touch. Disgust usually involves getting rid of or getting away from responses. Removing the object or oneself from the object is the goal.

It is not only tastes, smells, touch, the thought of or the sight or sound of something repulsive that can bring forth disgust but also the actions and appearance of people or even ideas. People can be offensive in their appearance; to look at them may be distasteful. Some people experience Disgust when seeing a deformed crippled person or an "ugly" person. An injured person with an exposed wound may be disgusting. The sight of blood or the witnessing of surgery provokes Disgust in some. Certain human actions are also disgusting. You may be revolted by what a person does. A person who mistreats or tortures a dog or cat may be the object of Disgust. A person who indulges in what others consider sexual perversion may be disgusting. A philosophy of life or way of treating people that is considered debasing can disgust some people.

Disgust can vary in intensity-from mild dislike to vomiting or nausea. Mild Disgust - the getting away from or getting rid of impulses, may be contained or not acted upon but there is a dislike for the object. You might have a mild reaction of Disgust to the smell of a new dish prepared by your host, but be able to bring yourself to try it. A person with rancid body odor might make you feel slight Disgust (you would dislike contact with him) but be able to manage it. When you hear how your friend disciplined his child you may feel a mild Disgust if you disapprove of this method but your friendship might be able to survive it .

Often Disgust or Contempt will be experienced together with Anger. You can be angry at someone for being disgusting. For example, if a man drinks too much at a party and begins acting "sloppy," his wife may be

both disgusted and angry- angry that he is being disgusting. Or, the child molester may be the object of both Disgust because his sexual act and Anger for his moral wrongdoing. If a person=s actions make you disgusted rather than angry, it is usually because they pose no threat to you. Your response is to ‡ee rather than to defend yourself or attack him.

Often, Disgust will be used to mask Anger. In parts of our society there is a taboo against expressing anger. Paradoxically, people may prefer to be the recipient of Anger then Disgust. If you are disgusting then you are repulsive in your offense. Whether you prefer to cause Disgust or Anger depends upon the intensity of Disgust or Anger and whether it is seen as aimed at particular act or at you yourself.

Contempt

Contempt is a close relative of Disgust, however, it differs in some ways. Contempt is only experienced for people or the actions of people, but not concerning taste, smells or touches. Stepping onto dog droppings might call forth Disgust, but never content. The idea of eating calves' brains might be disgusting but it would never evoke Contempt. You might, however, feel contemptuous toward people who eat such disgusting things, for in Contempt there is an element of condescension toward the object of Contempt. You may feel disdain or extreme dislike for the person or their actions-you feel superior (usually morally) to them. . Scorn is a variant of Contempt in which the object of Contempt is derided for his failings. It often comes with some element of humor which amuses the person showing the scorn and hurts the recipient.

People who are full of Contempt for others are often the object of respect and admiration because of the power in principle implied in their disdain and distaste. Some people perfect contemptuousness as their predominant interpersonal style; it's displayed toward everyone worthy of their Contempt; haughty, smug and superior they looked down at the world and may enjoy status for maintaining a lofty posture.

Sadness

In Sadness your suffering is muted. You do not cry aloud but more silently endure your distress. Anything can make you sad, but most often you are sad about loss. Loss through death or rejection from loved ones, loss of an opportunity, loss of rewards for your own mistaken effort or circumstance or another's disregard. It can be the loss of your health or some part of your body to illness or accident. Sadness is rarely a brief feeling. You are usually sad for at least minutes and more typically for hours or even days.

Sadness is a passive rather than an active feeling. You suffer in Sadness. It is not the suffering a physical pain, it is the suffering of loss, disappointment, or hopelessness. The suffering in Sadness can be extreme, but in its extremity it is more tolerable than this suffering of fear. You can endure Sadness for longer periods of time and survive.

Sadness is a variation or form of distress, which is the most general negative emotion. The distress is most easily and often aroused by physical pain. Loss can also call forth distress. You suffer in distress, but the suffering is loud, not quiet; the cry is audible, not muted. There is activity rather than passivity. In distress you attempt to cope with that which causes the distress. The coping may be purposefully removing the source of the stress. For example, removing a tack from your heel. Often the coping in distress appears purposeless because there is little that can be done to remove the source of distress, as for example, the wailing while mourning the death of a loved one.

Sadness often follows distress if the distress is prolonged or if the coping actions to remove the source of the distress are unsuccessful. As distress lingers, the cries become muted, the activity decreases, the suffering is more silent. Often a memory or someone's action will stimulate the distress and the sequence recycles; loud complaining distress followed again by Sadness. The word "Sadness" can be applied when the distress is controlled deliberately -- when the loud, active elements are not visible, but only the more socially acceptable signs of Sadness.

If an automobile has just killed your child, your immediate reaction will not be Sadness. It will be distress, or perhaps shock or Anger blended with distress. The Sadness will come later- hours or maybe even days later when you are still suffering the loss, but stopped weeping and audible crying for a period of time. In distress there is more of a protest against

loss. In Sadness, you are resigned to the loss. Grief and mourning imply the cause of feeling -- death of a loved one -- but not whether the person is in distress or Sadness. Typically, there is a sequence in which distress is followed by either disbelief or Sadness, which recycles back to distress and some new remembrance of the deceased or some new reminder of his death occurs with the sequence repeating over and over. As time elapses, all that may remain are periods of Sadness perhaps lasting over months or years.

In a romantic loss the pattern is similar. The rejected lover initially shows stress with shock and Anger, or some combination of these. Sadness comes later, perhaps followed by disbelief to the rejection while recycling of the whole suffering experience.

If the rejected lover never showed distress —if there was never any crying or agitation -- you would suspect that this is a highly controlled person, or someone who doesn't care that much about the lost lover, or a person exhibiting stereotypical American masculine behavior. It is not proper for men to show distress in public, even funerals. They are limited to Sadness. The cry must be inhibited, the agitated movements and the protestations must be held in check or shown only as Anger. Although Anger is often experience with distress or Sadness, it is often used as a mask to cover distress. Interestingly, while social conventions prohibit the appearance of distress and in its place allow the show of anger for men, just the opposite is prescribed for women. Women who are following the American stereotype demands of femininity will not show anger towards others openly but instead will turn anger inward upon themselves, or show distress, angry tears, or sulking.

When Sadness results from controlling distress, it probably appears the same as the Sadness that is the aftermath of shown distress, but the experience is likely to feel different. When you control the appearance of distress, your face may look sad, but the experience you are having- what you are aware of, sensations, images, memories, and concerns, all are changed by the necessity to control your behavior. It doesn't feel the same as if you were crying in distress, and doesn't feel the same as if you had been previously crying in distress and were now in the post-distress Sadness. Sadness varies in intensity, from blue or gloomy to the extreme felt during mourning.

Happiness

Most people enjoy the emotion of happiness. It feels good. Happiness is a positive emotion. There are many ways to experience happiness and many ways to define it.

When we talk about pleasure we are referring solely to positive physical sensations. This pleasure is the opposite of the physical sensation of pain. Pain hurts, all pleasure is intrinsically good or rewarding in the way it feels. You value, appreciate and prefer pleasurable sensations. We do not know all the ways that pleasure sensations can be invoked. Certainly tactile stimulation and taste can bring on pleasurable sensations and so can some sounds and sights. Usually you feel happiness when you experience pleasurable sensations unless you have been punished for having such sensations and feel guilty about them or about your way of obtaining pleasure. Often you feel happiness in anticipation of an event which you know will cause pleasurable sensations, or happiness in a contented way afterward. But you do not need to experience pleasurable sensations to be happy. There are some routes to happiness which don't involve pleasurable sensations.

Excitement is the opposite of boredom. You become excited when something arouses your interest. Often it is something novel. If it is familiar, it is not merely repetitive. You become attentive, involved, and quite aroused with what has excited you. In boredom, nothing holds your attention, nothing seems to be happening, nothing is new, nothing interests you. You may be happy at the prospect of something exciting, particularly if it is going to relieve the boredom state and often, you are happy after excitement. But that is only one kind of happiness. You can be happy without excitement as an accompaniment.
It's also quite possible to be excited and in no way happy. Excitement can blend instead with Fear, as in the terrorized state, or with Anger or as a state of fury.

In sexual experiences you can and usually do experience all three states, pleasure from the erotic sensations prior to and during orgasm, excitement prior to orgasm, and happiness in anticipation of the sexual encounter and happy contentment subsequent to the drop in excitement

following orgasm. Though this is the likely combination, is not a necessary one. The emotion subsequent to orgasm may be disgust or Sadness. Or during the excitement/ pleasure phase, you might experience Fear or Disgust. This and the excitement may abort the sexual encounter. Anger may coincide with sexual arousal, excitement, and pleasure and may or may not interrupt the encounter.

Many people think of happiness as either pleasure or excitement or both, failing to distinguish between these experiences. Pleasure and excitement are separate experiences which often involve happiness and thus can be considered two possible routes to happy feelings. Each of these routes involve somewhat differently colored happy experience, so that we can speak of pleasure -- happiness or excitement -- happiness.

The third round is relief/ Happiness. When pain stops, you are usually happy. Similarly, when hunger or thirst is met, you are happy. The same is usually true for the negative emotions. When you are no longer afraid when anger ends, when the Disgust is over, when the Sadness lifts, commonly you feel Happiness- the happiness of relief.

It may also involve happiness in accomplishment, if it is by your own efforts that the experience of the negative emotion or sensation is terminated. As with pleasure and excitement, some people fail to distinguish relief from happiness. For some people it is the only kind of happiness they experience often. Their lives are primarily organized to obtain relief rather than to experience pleasure or excitement. Relief / Happiness is a somewhat different experience. Sensations, the images, the likely actions, the general feelings register -- from pleasure-happiness, excitement - happiness, or happiness reach by

The fourth type of happiness involves the self-concept. Something happened that enhances your view of yourself- something that afflrms or further elaborates favorable self-concept. If you flnd that somebody likes you, you will often feel Happiness -- not because you expect the person to cause pleasurable physical sensations or sexual excitement, but because being liked makes you feel good about yourself. If someone tells you that you have done a good job at something, you feel happy. Praise, friendship, and the esteem of others is rewarding and makes you feel happy. It's not the kind of happiness in which you usually will burst out laughing. It is a more contented, smiling happiness. This kind of happiness

originally developed from the experiences in which those who gave approval -- such as parents -- also physically stroked, fed, and relieved pain. As a child develops, social approval becomes rewarding in itself. As with happiness experienced by the other routes, anticipating or remembering a boost to your self-concept will produce happy feelings.

If you think of the situations and events that cause you to feel happy, you will probably find that they involve one or more of the four routes described. For example, the enjoyment you experience while engaging in sports activity may involve excitement -- happiness associated with the contest, pleasure -- happiness from movements, and exertions, self concept happiness because you are playing well, and relief happiness because haven't let the team down, missed a shot or broken your neck, etc. It is not necessary for our purpose here to claim that these are the only routes to happiness. There may be more, but we believe these four are common and important and their description should demonstrate clearly what we mean by the happiness experience.

Happiness varies not only in type, as we've discussed, but also intensity. You can be mildly happy and you can experience ecstasy or joy. Happiness can be shown silently or audibly. It can vary from a smile to a broad grin, from chuckling to laughter or, in the most extreme form, laughter with tears. The presence of laughter or chuckling does not indicate intensity of the happiness. You can be extremely happy and not laugh; laughing or chuckling occurs with particular types of happy experiences. Play of one kind or another, in children or adults, if sufficiently exciting, will often produced a laughing type of happiness. Certain jokes can produce the laughing at us

Smiles, which are part of the happiness facial expression, often occur when a person is not happy. You smile to mask other emotions or to qualify them. Smiles may comment on another emotion being shown, such as smiling after a Fear expression to let the nurse know that, though afraid, you will not ‡ee but let her take blood from your arm. Smiles may indicate submissiveness to anything unpleasant, not just the in‡iction of pain. Commonly smiling may be a submissive response to ward off or halt to another's attack. Smiles may be used to make a tense situation more comfortable; by smiling you can cause the other person to smile also, because it's hard to resist returning a smile.