Movement and Emotions

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Introduction

There is no uniform conception in the literature about what an emotion is and consists of [1,2]. Consensually, essential aspects have been considered to understand emotion: the presence in emotions of physiological changes, the mobilisation of bodily actions or “tendencies of action” and the subjective experience that involves; and emotion has been approached as a result of a system of analysis and processing of information. But taking each of the elements indicated separately has not favoured knowledge of emotion being presented in an integrated manner [3]. Moreover, the investigators have been supported in their work by different a theoretical orientation, which makes it even more difficult to integrate all the knowledge. One perspective that tackles this question is the theories of Embodiment, which have their origin in the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), according to which psychological processes are based on bodily states. From the perspective of Embodiment, perceiving, recognizing and interpreting an emotion in ourselves or in others requires information from bodily systems. In this way “experiencing emotional states affects somatovisceral and motoric systems” and vice versa. In other words, “bodily states have effects on how emotional information is processed” [4].

The research not only supports the intimate relationship between emotion and cognition [5], but is also argues that current neuroscience vindicates the importance of information from the body in processing emotional information [6]. Currently, the perspective of Embodiment is an appropriate framework from which to understand and consider body and somatic elements which form part of emotions. This interest is reflected in important scientific papers [7-9]. There is extensive literature linking the posture and body movement to states of emotion and affection. Riskind & Gotay [10] found that posture affected the self reports of the mood of the participants as well as the task that they were performing. For example, the subjects who had been temporarily placed in a slumped, depressed physical posture (subject’s torso was bent forward at the waist, and his chest and neck dropped downward) later appeared to develop helplessness more readily, as assessed by their lack of persistence in a standard learned helplessness task, than did subjects who had been placed in an expansive, upright posture (straight back, open shoulders, chest in a full and expansive position, head raised slightly at the chin, looking forward and slightly upward).

Duclos et al. [11] determined the influence of posture in the emotional self-reports. Subjects were induced to adopt postures characteristic of fear (seated on the edge of the chair, feet together under the chair; torso turned and leaning backwards, shoulders inwards, hands raised to the level of the mouth, arms bent at the elbow), anger (seated in a chair, the feet in contact with the floor directly under the knees, forearms and elbows on the arms of the chair, fists clenched, upper part of the body leaning slightly forwards) and sadness (lying back on the chair, the back supported on the chair back, feet under the chair, hands together in the lap). The results indicated that subjects induced to adopt emotionally expressive behaviours (postures) reported feeling the emotions they were expressing. These findings were replicated and corroborated by Flack et al. [12]. These authors observed not only that the postures relative to an emotion increased the emotional response, but that in combination with the facial expression appropriate to that emotion it produced more intense emotional responses than the posture and the facial expression separately.

More recently, Shafir et al. [13] suggest that different postures induce different emotional states: an upright position, pride; a slouching position, sadness; and an expansive position, power. Likewise, they suggest that deliberate control of motor behaviour could regulate the feelings. Thus, the motor execution of movements of happiness, jumping for example, significantly increases positive affect; the execution of movements of fear, protecting oneself for example, significantly increase negative affect; the execution of sad movements, bowing the head for example, increases sad feelings; the execution of emotionally neutral movement’s increases neutral feelings. Therefore, engaging in movements associated with a certain emotion would enhance that emotion and/or the corresponding valence. The influence of the way of walking on mood was also studied. Michalak et al. [4] studied the effects of the sad and depressive mood on gait and the results of their investigation show that individuals with dysphoric mood are characterised by a specific pattern of walking, that is to say, “reduced walking speed, arm swing, vertical movement of the head, stronger lateral body
psychologically healthy because it permits greater congruence with painful emotions, since sometimes feeling these emotions is expression but also makes it possible to redirect the emotions. Body movement not only facilitates emotional regulation. Body movement not only facilitates emotional regulation (for example, jumping and happiness). However, before modifying it, it must be understood, since the emotions provide people with information about what is happening to them and about how to experience what is happening.

References


