

UNDERSTANDING

OPPRESSION:

THE ROLE OF EMOTION IN
BREAKING HARMFUL SYSTEMS

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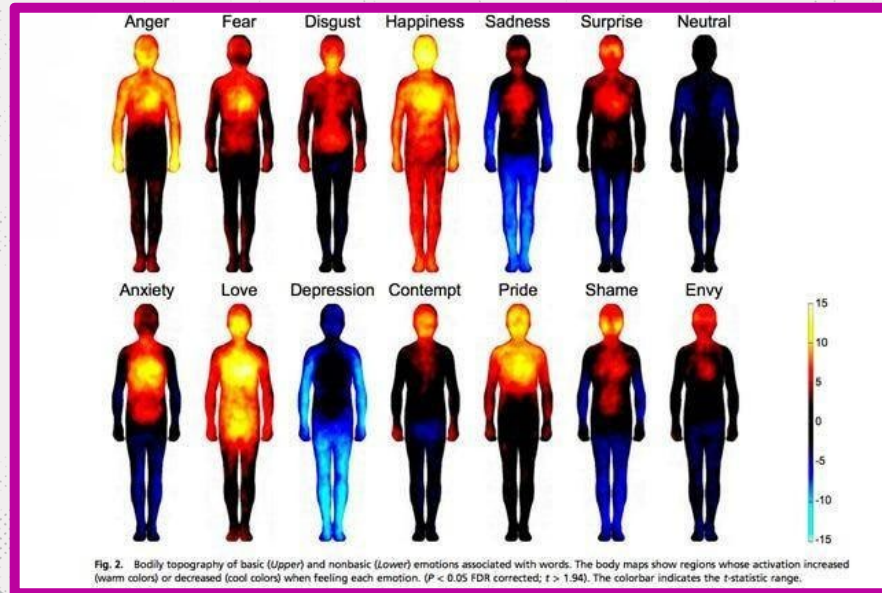
“WE ALL SUFFER FROM THESE
OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS OF
INJUSTICE IN OUR OWN WAYS.
BUT BECAUSE THEY FEED ON
DIFFERENCES AND
VULNERABILITIES, NOT ALL
HUMANS SUFFER EQUALLY.”

*ANTÓNIO GUTERRES
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS*

EMOTIONS ARE NORMAL

- Society makes us feel bad about emotions and teaches us to push them away.
- We have emotions for a REASON!
- Emotions give us important information about ourselves and the world around us.
- Emotions motivate us to act and help us make decisions.
- Emotions help us avoid danger.
- Emotions help others understand us better and deepen our understanding of ourselves.

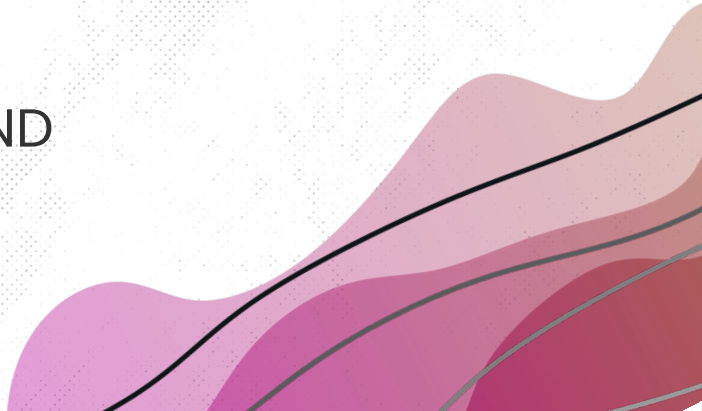
EMOTIONS — A BIOLOGICAL RESPONSE



- Core emotions are “programs” that make us move to promote survival and thriving.
- They are physical which is why we feel them deeply and react strongly.
- Blocking emotions leads to anxiety, depression and other psychological and physical symptoms.

WHAT IS SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION?



- INTENTIONAL MISTREATMENT OF INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS OF PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR IDENTITY
 - UPHELD AND IMPLEMENTED BY SOCIETY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS
 - CREATES POWER IMBALANCES AND DISCRIMINATION
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WHAT IS CULTURE?

CULTURE SHAPES HOW WE SEE THE WORLD. IT INCLUDES:

- Traditions, values, and social behaviors
- Communication styles and belief systems
- How we experience emotions and interpret mental health
- Passed down through generations, shaping identity

HOW DOES CULTURE IMPACT EMOTION?

*CULTURE DOES NOT ONLY SHAPE
IDENTITY—IT ALSO INFLUENCES HOW
WE UNDERSTAND AND EXPRESS
EMOTION*

- Your ethnic culture impacts the way you view the world and the language you use
- Different cultures may have different views about mental health emotions and topics
- Limited language around emotion
- Example: In the Hmong culture, mental health terms do not exist which leads to confusion, inter-generational disconnection, misconceptions, and stigma

EXAMPLES OF CULTURE CONDITIONING

BIAS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

- **Stereotypes (e.g., homophobia, Afrophobia, xenophobia)**
- **Racial bias in policing, media portrayals, hiring practices**

CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOR

- **Collectivism → Strong community support but may suppress individual identity**
- **Individualism → Encourages independent but may create isolation**

STIGMA

- **Mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person**
- **Creates negative attitudes, can create self-stigma, or structural stigma (systemic policies that limit opportunities)**

OUR PERSONAL PERCEPTION LENS & SHIFTS



We live our lives and tell our stories through our lens.

Challenge your own bias by stepping outside your perspective. Listen, not to debate, but to understand and connect.

If we can empathize through connection, we shift our worldview to an us vs. them to us vs. the issue.

INTERSECTIONALITY



Oppression does not affect everyone equally. The intersection of race, gender, ability and class shape how individuals experience discrimination.

Intersections of sex, gender, race, culture, etc. make us unique and gives us a unique outlook on life.



HOW SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION HARM INDIVIDUALS

BINARY THINKING



Erases complexity, forces rigid categories

HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURES



Reinforces power imbalances

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION



Leads to self-doubt and emotional suppression

VIOLENCE & FEAR TACTICS



Maintain oppressive structures

EMOTIONS & OPPRESSION

Emotions play a role in sustaining and reinforcing oppression.

Emotions play a crucial role in the internalization of oppression.

Emotions are involved in alienation.

Through emotional mechanisms, resistance to oppression is made more difficult.

Emotions are dismissed, ridiculed, invalidated, minimized, etc. by the oppressors.

OUTCOMES OF DELEGITIMIZING OF EMOTION



FEELING DEFECTIVE

FEELING DIVIDED AND DISORIENTED

FEELING ALIENATION AND SELF-LOATHING

FEELING ALIENATION AND ISOLATION




HEALING THROUGH CONNECTION & EMOTION

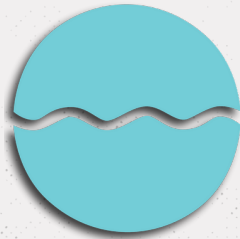
Healing starts with reclaiming emotion.
By validating our feelings and honoring
others' emotions, we rebuild connection.



CONNECTION IS MEDICINE

- “Pain witnessed is pain transformed”
 - Healing requires relationships. When emotions are acknowledged instead of dismissed, individuals regain power and connection.
 - The power of the connection within
 - Social connection is a protective factor
 - The core of connection is being seen and heard
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THANK YOU!



EBB & FLOW
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