

## Week 5 - Emotion In Relationships

### Feelings and relationships

- Emotion plays a central and critical role in our close relationships
- People talk about their relationships in terms of feelings (hot, cold, warm, cool, high, low..) and emotions (love, hate, anger, guilt, shame, pride, jealousy, joy, fear, etc.)

### Scientific interest in emotion

- The role of emotion in relationships has until recently been a neglected topic
  - Emotions “*come naturally*” – don’t need science to explain them
  - Emotions are “*too mysterious*” – leave for poets and novelists to explain

Where do emotions come from?

- Mandler’s (1970s) cognitive theory of emotion
  - To experience an emotion there must be:
    1. **An event or stimulus in the world (including within our own minds and bodies) and**
    2. **we must notice and pay attention to that stimulus**

- Mindlessness
  - For much of the time, people are ‘mindless’, relying on schematic knowledge to carry out Organized Action Sequences (OAS - routine behaviours) in pursuit of Higher Order Plans (HOPs) and goals

Paying attention: when?

- We sit up and pay attention whenever our routines (plans, goals) are interrupted in some way – remember “violated expectations”? = interruptions
- Outcome of interruption
  - Interruptions may then lead to cognitive activity (remember attributions? Why has this interruption happened?)
  - But they may also activate a more basic processing system – the emotion (limbic, or “trouble-shooting” system)

The ‘trouble-shooting’ system

- When we experience an interruption, we appraise it along two, critical (primary) dimensions:
  - **Valence – is it good/bad, helpful/harmful?**
  - **Relevance/importance – does it matter?**
- If a stimulus is appraised as harmful or helpful and important, emotion (feeling bad/good) is the likely outcome

### Applying Mandler’s theory

- Ellen Berscheid (1983) applied Mandler’s theory to explain the cause of emotional experiences in close relationships

Emotion in relationships

- Berscheid drew on Kelley’s interdependence theory (Person and Other)
  - P and O each has his or her own connected chains (*intra-chains*) of organized action sequences and higher order plans
- **Berscheid’s theory**
  - Has stood the test of time – e.g., Simpson (1987):
    - longitudinal study of 234 American dating students found the factors that best predicted emotional distress after breakup were the same factors that indicated relationship closeness and emotional investment (according to Berscheid’s four criteria)
  - problems with the theory
    - What determines the KIND of emotion we will feel after an interruptive stimulus?
    - We experience more than just ‘good’ or ‘bad’ feelings
  - So.. P and O live their lives along parallel tracks (like railway lines)
  - But - when P’s and O’s activities or plans interconnect, *inter-chain* connections are established

