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**Emotions of  
Normal People**

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# Emotions of Normal People

By

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To  
MY TEACHERS AND COLLABORATORS

MY MOTHER  
CLARIBEL MOULTON WATERMAN  
ELIZABETH HOLLOWAY MARSTON  
MARJORIE WILKES HUNTLEY  
OLIVE BYRNE

# EMOTIONS OF NORMAL PEOPLE

## CHAPTER I

### NORMALCY AND EMOTION

ARE you a "normal person"? Probably, for the most part, you are. Doubtless, however, you have occasional misgivings. Your "sex-complexes", your emotional depressions, or your "hidden fears" seem to you, at times, distinctly abnormal. And so psychology might adjudge them. On the other hand, you undoubtedly experience milder fears, furies, petty jealousies, minor hatreds, and occasional feelings of trickery and deception which you have come to regard as part of your *normal* self. And psychology aids and abets you in this notion, also. In fact, many psychologists at the present time frankly regard "fear" and "rage", not only as *normal* emotions, but even as the "major" emotions. By some writers<sup>1</sup> "choc", or emotional shock is suggested as the one element essential to normal emotion. Some psychological experimenters have compelled women subjects to cut off the heads of live rats, proudly presenting reaction data thus obtained as a measure of normal emotional response to an adequate stimulus. One of the most eminent investigators of emotion<sup>2</sup> goes so far as to advocate retention of "fear" and "rage" in normal human behaviour, for the purpose of supplying bodily strength and efficiency! This suggestion seems to me like recommending the placing of tacks in our soup for the sake of strengthening the lining of the alimentary canal. I do not regard you as a "normal person", emotionally, when you are suffering from fear, rage, pain, shock, desire to deceive, or any other

<sup>1</sup> D. Wechsler, *The Measurement of Emotional Reaction*, New York, 1925, Chapter X.

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage*, New York and London, 1920, Chapter XV.

emotional state whatsoever containing turmoil and conflict. Your emotional responses are "normal" when they produce pleasantness and harmony. And this book is devoted to description of normal emotions which are so commonplace and fundamental in the every-day lives of all of us that they have escaped, hitherto, the attention of the academician and the psychologist.

*Normal Emotions are Biologically Efficient Emotions.*

If, as psychologists, we follow the analogy of the other biological sciences, we must expect to find normalcy synonymous with maximal efficiency of function. Survival of the fittest means survival of those members of a species whose organisms most successfully resist the encroachments of environmental antagonists, and continue to function with greatest internal harmony. In the field of emotions, then, why should we alter this expectation? Why should we seek the spectacularly disharmonious emotions, the feelings that reveal a crushing of ourselves by environment, and consider these affective responses as our *normal* emotions? If a jungle beast is torn and wounded during the course of an ultimately victorious battle, it would be a spurious logic indeed that attributed its victory to its wounds. If a human being be emotionally torn and mentally disorganized by fear or rage during a business battle from which, ultimately, he emerges victorious, it seems equally nonsensical to ascribe his conquering strength to those emotions symptomatic of his temporary weakness and defeat. Victory comes in proportion as fear is banished. Perhaps the battle may be won with some fear still handicapping the victor, but that only means that the winner's maximal strength was not required.

I can still remember vividly the fear I once experienced, as a child, when threatened, on my way to school, by a half-witted boy with an air-gun. I had been taught by my father never to fight; so I ran home in an agony of fear. My mother told me, "Go straight by F—. Don't attack him unless he shoots at you, but if he does, then go after him". I was an obedient child, and followed orders explicitly. I marched up to F— and his gun with my face set and my stomach sick with dread. F— did not shoot. I have known, ever since that well-remembered occasion,

that fear does *not* give strength in times of stress. Part of the strength with which I faced F——'s air-gun came from my own underlying *dominance*, newly released from artificial control. But most of it belonged to my mother, and she was able to use it in my behalf because I *submitted* to her. *Dominance* and *submission* are the "normal", strength-giving emotions, not "rage", or "fear".

*Present Emotion Names are Literary Terms, Scientifically Meaningless*

Yet my initial researches in emotion were not concerned with normal, biologically efficient emotions. I began to try to measure the bodily symptoms of deception in the Harvard Psychological Laboratory, in 1913,<sup>1</sup> and later continued this work in the U.S. Army, during the war,<sup>2</sup> and in some court cases.<sup>3</sup> But the more I learned about the bodily symptoms of deception, the more I realized the futility of trying to measure complex conflict-emotions, like "fear", "anger", or "deception", without in the least knowing the normal, fundamental emotions which appeared in the process of being melodramatically baffled in laboratory or court-room torture situations.

What does the average teacher of psychology mean when he glibly rattles off the words "fear", "rage", "anger", and "sex-emotion"?<sup>4</sup> Almost any literary light of the Victorian era, if asked to define these words, would have answered, readily enough: "They are names for emotions possessing distinctive conscious qualities, experienced by everybody, every day. These easily recognized, primitive emotions constitute the very backbone of literature." I submit that the backbone of literature has been transplanted intact into

<sup>1</sup> For reports of these researches see: W. M. Marston, "Systolic Blood Pressure Symptoms of Deception," *Jr. Exp. Psy.*, 1917, vol. 2, p. 117. W. M. Marston, "Reaction Time Symptoms of Deception," *ibid.*, 1920, vol. 3, pp. 72-87. W. M. Marston, "Negative Type Reaction Time Symptoms of Deception," *Psy. Rev.*, 1925, vol. 32, pp. 241, 247.

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Yerkes, "Report of the Psy. Committee of the National Research Council," *Psy. Rev.*, 1919, vol. 26, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Marston, "Psychological Possibilities in the Deception Tests," *Jour. Crim. Law and Crim.*, 1921, vol. XI, pp. 552-570. W. M. Marston, "Sex Characteristics of Systolic Blood Pressure Behaviour," *Jour. Exp. Psy.*, 1923, vol. VI, 387-419.

<sup>4</sup> The substance of the following paragraphs appeared originally in an article by the writer, entitled "Primary Emotions," *Psy. Rev.*, and is reproduced with the kind permission of its editor, Prof. H. C. Warren.

psychology, where it has proved pitifully inadequate. The whole structure of our recently christened "science", in consequence, remains spineless in its attempted descriptions of human behaviour. Most teachers of psychology, it would seem, are still unable to define these time-worn emotional terms with greater exactness or scientific meaning than that employed by literary men of the last century.

Nor can the average teacher be blamed. Theorists and researchers upon whom the teacher must depend for his scientific concepts have written many hundreds of thousands of words on the subject of emotions, without attempting definite, psycho-neural description of a single basic, or primary emotion. On the other hand, nearly all writers seem to accept the old, undefined literary *names* of various "emotions" without question; each writer then giving these terms such connotation as they may happen to hold for him, individually.

Consider, for example, the term "fear". This word seems to find its way, unquestioned, into nearly every emotions research reported to the literature of psychology and physiology. What does it mean? The James-Langeites say "fear" is a complex of sensations, perhaps largely visceral, perhaps not; perhaps the same in all subjects, but probably differing importantly in different individuals. Surely the unfortunate teacher of psychology can extract little comfort from such vague guess-work. Besides, the physiologists have proved, with their customary thoroughness, that the condition of consciousness traditionally termed "fear" in popular and literary parlance, cannot be composed characteristically of sensory content.<sup>1</sup>

What then of the physiologists? They use the term "fear", it appears, quite as blithely and trustfully as do the James-Langeites. Cannon uses the word "fear" throughout the entire course of his extremely valuable work entitled, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage*.

But how does he differentiate it from "rage", or from "pain"? He points out physiological similarities, but no measurable differences between these "major emotions". Cannon assumes that the so-called sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system is always activated by the "fear"

<sup>1</sup> For summary of investigations touching this point see W. M. Marston, "Motor Consciousness as a Basis for Emotion," *Jour. Abn. and Soc. Psy.*, vol. XXII, July-Sept., 1927, pp. 140-150.



pattern. But he cites various other effects of "fear", such as nausea, weakness, vomiting, etc., which would be ascribed, by many writers, to vagus impulses. Moreover, "rage", "pain", and other "major emotions" also discharge characteristically into the sympathetic, as Cannon himself emphasizes.<sup>1</sup> So we are left, again, high and dry in our search for any specific meaning for the famous word "fear".

What must be done is to give up attempts to define conflict-emotions, and go down to the very roots of biologically efficient behaviour and discover the simple, normal emotions that lie buried there. This book attempts that task. It attempts to describe the emotions of *normal* people, and *people are not normal when they are afraid, or enraged, or deceptive*. When the simplest normal emotion elements are revealed, it becomes a comparatively easy matter to put them together into normal compound emotions—in real life or in the psychological laboratory. It becomes comparatively easy, moreover, to detect—and to remove—the *reversed inter-relationships between normal emotion elements which are responsible for these conflicts and thwartings in "fear", "rage", "jealousy" and the other abnormal states*.

#### *In What Terms can "Normal Emotions" be Described?*

But a person who calls himself a psychologist is in a peculiar position these days. Before he can write about the psychology of emotion, or intelligence, or, in fact, about the psychology of any human behaviour, he must define what he means by psychology. The introspectionistic psychologists, now considered unscientific, regarded any exposition as psychological which described its phenomena in subjective or introspective terms. Now the introspectionists are pushed into the background. In their place we find a great variety of teachers and researchers all naming their diverse methods and observations "psychology". We have, for instance, in the field of emotions, the physiologists, the neurologists, the physiological psychologists, the behaviourists, the endocrinologists, the mental-tester-statisticians, the psycho-analysts, and the psychiatrists. Each of these types of worker confesses himself to be a psychologist, and, moreover, each maintains that his are the only psychologically worth-while results. Psychology

<sup>1</sup> W B Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear, and Rage*, New York and London, 1920, pp. 277-279

to-day, like Europe in the Middle Ages, is being fought over by feudal barons who have little in common save tacit acceptance of the rule that spoils shall be taken whenever and however possible.

In what terms, then, can we describe simple, normal emotions, with any expectation that one or all of psychology's warring factions may regard our terminology with aught but disdain? I once made the mistake of using the term "will-setting" in a discussion of bodily emotion mechanisms; and, although several American psychologists of various sorts strove manfully to read the article in question, all gave it up in the end. I once asked Dr. Watson a question containing, stupidly enough, the word "consciousness". "I'm sorry", said Watson, in a tone of genuine regret, "I *don't* understand what you mean, and so I can't answer your question." I once remarked to an eminent psycho-analyst, that I had enjoyed the play "Outward Bound". "O ho!" this friend triumphed. "So you have an Oedipus complex!" then added, plaintively, "When *are* you going to learn psycho-analytical terms? You might have told me about that Oedipus, instead of letting it out of the bag in that round-about fashion!" In the first two instances I thought I had said something, but found I had not. In the last instance, I did not think I had said anything, but found that I had committed myself irretrievably. What is one to do in describing normal emotions?

Only this. One may try, at least, to "reinterpret and correlate the old fog signals", as Ogden aptly puts it,<sup>1</sup> and so correct some "errors in manipulating the logos" by an attempted application of "the science of orthology". Which means, of course, that we first have to find out what the various types of psychological writers really are talking about, each in his own peculiar dialect. And then we have to devise a sort of psychological Esperanto, defining each new term, as we use it, with meticulous exactitude. The task is not an easy one. But to induce the different types of researchers in psychology of emotion to unite their efforts toward describing *normal primary emotions* would be worth any amount of effort. Each of the varieties of psychologist named has something vital to contribute to this central problem, if he would only get over his language difficulty and play the game.

<sup>1</sup> C. K. Ogden, Editorial: "Orthology", *Psyche*, July, 1927.