The Emerging Field of Affective Science

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This article is part of a series commemorating APS's 25th anniversary in 2013.

By all accounts, one of the major events in 20th-century psychology was the birth of cognitive science. Prior to this time, the study of cognitive processes was siloed. Philosophers, linguists, computer scientists, neuroscientists, psychologists, and anthropologists rarely interacted. Mid-century, however, several universities and foundations, such as the National Science Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Sloan Foundation, set out to change all this. They funded centers, conferences, symposia, graduate training programs, and research. In so doing, a new interdisciplinary field was formed, one focused on the many faces of cognition.

Now, a parallel process is under way in the affective domain (which includes the study of emotions, moods, preferences, attitudes, value, and stress). The origins of this emerging interdisciplinary field of affective science can be traced to the 1980s, when a group of intrepid pioneers founded the International Society for Research on Emotion, and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded a multi-university consortium for postdoctoral training in emotion in the San Francisco Bay Area. With the help of many other societies (including, most notably, APS, but also the American Psychosomatic Society, the Society for Neuroeconomics, the Society for Psychophysiological Research, the Social and Affective Neuroscience Society, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, just to name a few), affective science has now firmly taken root and is beginning to provide an integrated framework for understanding a variety of psychological phenomena that have long been studied in isolation from one another.

These societies have provided a powerful impetus for like-minded scientists to share their research, inspire one another, and chart a new course for understanding the role of affect in the mind and behavior. In particular, the emergence of affective science owes a debt to APS, whose intensive focus on science (in contrast to the broader, more clinically oriented focus of APA) has provided a common stage for affective scientists from a variety of research domains to interact. APS has also supported the emerging field of affective science by honoring many leading affective scientists with research and teaching awards (including APS William James Fellows Gerald Clore, Richard Davidson, Edward Diener, Nancy Eisenberg, Paul Ekman, Elaine Hatfield, Richard Lazarus, Bruce McEwen, Shelley Taylor, Robert Zajonc, and APS Past President Robert Levenson).

Today, the field of affective science is growing as never before. The importance accorded to affective science is evidenced by the attention it is now receiving in our field's highest-tier journals, as well as by the growing number of journals dedicated to research in affective science (including, in the last few years, *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience*; *Emotion*; *Emotion Review*; and *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*). The translational significance of research in affective science is also clear. For example, affective science is prominent in NIMH's Research Domain Criteria Project, which seeks to "Develop, for research purposes, new ways of classifying mental disorders based on

dimensions of observable behavior and neurobiologial measures." Affective science is also central to the National Cancer Institute's mission to better understand the factors that contribute to cancer control, including the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer. A better understanding of the nature of stress and emotion have the potential to attenuate the public health burden of cancer by reducing incidence and mortality and increasing quality of life of cancer patients and survivors.

At the dawn of scientific psychology, Wilhelm Wundt described affect as a fundamental ingredient of the human mind, and we now know that affect is a central feature in almost all phenomena that are labeled "mental" and some that are labeled "physical." These include all categories of mental illness, health and physical illness, resilience to stress and well-being, immune function, memory, marketing, attitudes, stereotyping and prejudice, interpersonal relationships, verbal communication and negotiation strategies, judgment and decision-making, financial decision-making, predicting the future, work motivation, politics, aesthetics, and personality.

The emerging field of affective science represents an opportunity to consider the links between these phenomena, and, indeed, may even ultimately provide an avenue for bridging the mind-body problem. These are exciting times in affective science, and many of us think the best is yet to come.