

# The Nine Affects

## ANGER – RAGE

This NEGATIVE affect is *inherently punishing* and triggered by stimuli that have a pattern that is steady- state and even more dense and above optimal than those that trigger distress – anguish. This is the affect on overload. Imagine being stuck in heavy stop and go traffic on the way to work, with horns honking, with pressure building that you are going to be late for an appointment, with people calling your cell phone wondering where you are and asking questions that you can only answer from your desk. The very next thing that happens will probably trigger this affect, not because you are this kind of a person, but because the stimulus density is too great.

## DISGUST

This NEGATIVE affect is *inherently punishing* and provides us some protection against eating poisonous or rotten food. Of course, some things that are poisonous do not taste bad or cause a reaction in the stomach that triggers vomiting. However, many things that we should not ingest are foul tasting or caustic to the stomach lining. When this stimulus condition is met, this affect is triggered. It is “a built-in rejection mechanism specifically designed to enable the individual to avoid or eject food.”

## DISSMELL

This NEGATIVE affect is *inherently punishing* and is the only affect which Tomkins needed to invent a new word. It is the automatic response we have when we smell something rotten, like rotten mild or fresh feces or decaying organic matter. If, for example, it is triggered by rotten milk, no matter how hungry or thirsty you are, this affect will make it extremely unlikely that you will drink that milk. This affect has become an important force in our lives. First of all, no one wants to be considered “a stinker.” For this reason, there is a massive industry in deodorants and deodorizers of all kinds. We become embarrassed if our houses or our bodies stink, and most people go to great lengths to prevent that from happening.

## **DISTRESS – ANGUISH**

This NEGATIVE affect is *inherently punishing* and triggered by any stimulus that has a pattern that is too dense for too long. It is triggered whenever there is an above optimal, steady-state pattern of stimulus density. Steady intense noise, never getting caught up on work, the need to urinate while in traffic, constant thoughts of all we have to do on a busy day or during exam week, the persistent needs of young children and many others are all examples of this affect.

## **ENJOYMENT – JOY**

This is a POSITIVE affect that is *inherently rewarding*; Some level of brain activity must be taking place before a stimulus can trigger it. For example, you get home after being stuck in traffic for several hours with the pressing need to urinate bothering you the entire time. Needless to say, you are experiencing the steady state brain activity that triggers distress – anguish. Emptying your bladder ends your distress and causes a decrease in brain activity that triggers this affect, or contentment.

## **FEAR – TERROR**

This is the most toxic of the NEGATIVE affects and we are motivated to stop it as quickly as possible. It is *inherently punishing*.

## **INTEREST – EXCITEMENT**

A POSITIVE affect and is *inherently rewarding*; they direct your attention from one task to the next. You seldom think about it unless some stimulus triggers the more intense end of the range of this affect because throughout your lifetime you have become more or less unaware of the presence of a mild interest.

## **SHAME – HUMILIATION**

As an innate affect, in order to understand its power with respect to the complexities of human personality and the nature of interpersonal relationships, it is necessary to expand the definition somewhat from what we generally believe this concept to mean. This was the last of the nine affects to evolve biologically to solve a problem. The idea is that we evolved this affect as information about the stimulus condition of ongoing positive affect being interrupted when we did not want to be. This was and is critical information for us to have. Without this innate affect, we would not be motivated to take action when we are deprived of interesting and enjoyable things. When an impediment blocks our interest in something, the resulting affect can feel like: frustration or disappointment (I can't do what I want to do); rejection (my interest in my lover is blocked because she doesn't want me anymore); loneliness (my interest in people being interested in me is blocked because I'm all by myself and cannot find a date); feeling ashamed or embarrassed (my interest in people seeing me as perfect and loving me is blocked because I said a stupid thing or did something awful or have a blemish on my face and everyone will find out); and at its most intensely negative, mortification (what happened is so awful that my interest in living is blocked).

## **SURPRISE – STARTLE**

This is the only neutral affect that once triggered *resets* everything. It creates immediate attention to the triggering stimulus and clears away all else from consciousness. This affect is neither inherently punishing or rewarding. It is like a computer's reset button that rapidly clears the system and prepares us for whatever comes next.