

Emotions - The Science of How You Feel

by Brian Hazelgren

We have been told that there are three big emotional influencers in our lives: 1) our genes, 2) our parents, and 3) the world we grew up in. Experts differ as to which has more validity, though the ultimate determining factor in how you feel and behave is - you. I would like to add one more influencer: 4) the world in which we now live.

Let's break each one of these influencers down and give a little more information and scientific data that helps to clarify why they influence our lives.

Emotional Influencers

Genes – scientists think that between 30-60% of our Emotional makeup is inherited. I realize that is quite large range, but stay with me. Some of this comes by way of personality traits, such as neuroticism – or the tendency to worry and feel fear, anxiety, and anger; and emotional sensitivity such as feeling all emotions intensely. Scientists have also discovered a gene variance associated with feeling more or less of an emotion.¹ These are basic guidelines to follow and don't necessarily make you predisposed to being blue or feeling negative more times than not. On the flip-side of the coin your genes do not lock you into a 100% "Pollyanna" existence. We know that you can learn ways to overcome or amplify emotional presets. I have seen many people who have parents and grandparents who may be off the charts negative, yet their offspring and grandchildren want nothing to do with being negative. That is why we have to realize that only 30-60% of our emotions are inherited, but still recognize that genes can play a role in how we react to things.

Parents - As children, we learn how to express and regulate our emotions by watching our parents. They help us name, mimic, and respond to emotions. Most people as they grow, usually become better at recognizing and interpreting their feelings. (I say most people, because we all know of someone, or some people that are still very immature after being on the planet for decades!) Scientists tell us that we get some help from the hormone Oxytocin, known as the "bonding hormone" when it is released at birth and during breast-feeding. It strengthens the parent and baby bond, creating contentment and helping to draw babies closer to their parents - and take cues from them. Mothers have higher levels of Oxytocin during breast-feeding, but the fathers aren't left out of the hormonal picture completely - according to scientists. Research by James Rilling, a professor of anthropology, psychiatry, and behavioral health sciences at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta², found that fathers of toddlers have higher Oxytocin than men without children. Our parent's opinions, actions, and the culture they

¹ National Geographic - Your Emotions: Unpacking the Human Experience

² Emory University School of Medicine - Atlanta, GA

create in the home can become our traits as we see what they do, how they react, how they communicate, and share their beliefs - are all part of what we learn from them.

The World We Grew Up In - We learn emotions and how to navigate them from our peers, the physical world, our culture, our religion, the media, even our community/country. Not all of the lessons are positive, in fact the majority of the things we encounter as we grow up can bleed over into the negative category. We may learn to view the world as more threatening – those creating more fear – if we are repeatedly exposed to stressful situations or long-term verbal, physical, or sexual abuse. On the flip-side, positive interactions and safe, pleasantly stimulating environments can set us up for an optimistic outlook, even when faced with adversity. Sometimes. The real question is can you learn from your environment and make changes along the way to create a better life for yourself? And, the answer is a resounding YES!

The World in Which We Now Live - Just as the foundational period of our lives in the *World We Grew Up In*, there are also extenuating circumstances which helped shape our emotions and thought processes as we go through life. There are times when we feel angry or maybe even high anxiety, when we watch the daily news. Far too often news and media “reporters” have turned into opinion-givers instead of just reporting the news. We see political statements being made each and every hour of every day, which also elicits our emotions. We witness horrible acts of violence and terrorism each day through a barrage of media sources. We may have been the victim of senseless violent acts. We may have been the victim of natural disasters. We may have been the victim of IRS audits, or lawsuits. Our co-workers may have said or done something that effected us in a negative way. As we go through life spending time with others who have their own opinions, and different ways of doing things, these experiences help to form how we react emotionally to certain circumstances, and also how we think, and act upon those emotions. You may have heard someone say that they have become more cynical over the years due to their circumstances and life-altering events they may have experienced. When anyone feels “beaten down” for long periods of time, they can become depressed, or full of anxiety, or may have retreated to drugs and alcohol to get away. War changes people, and traumatic events along with war, can create Post Traumatic Stress. These external elements and experiences can alter how we feel, and the emotions we now have - which could have been completely different 20 years ago. The point is - we need to be aware of the emotions we now feel based on The World in Which We Now Live.

No matter where you currently find yourself, you can find the good to anything. You can make choices from this moment on to stay in front of negative feelings and thoughts. You are much stronger than you give yourself credit for. You are far too intelligent to allow negative thoughts and feelings overwhelm you. You have so many people around you who are willing to help, but sometimes you just need to ask for it. If the circumstances you find yourself in are not to your liking, then do something about it and take action to change it. How? Here’s a list of things you can do:

- Exercise Faith

- Pray
- Take a walk outside
- Listen to uplifting music
- Breathe Deep
- Take a break and watch a movie
- Call a friend
- Write something in your journal
- Read a few chapters of an uplifting book
- Look at your high school book
- Look at some old photos
- Clean the house or a room
- Organize your desk
- Take a drive
- Go and get ice cream
- Read the Scriptures
- Study your family history
- Listen to an audio book
- Cook a healthy meal
- Do a nice Workout
- Get a hug from your partner
- Spend a few minutes with a child
- Spend a few minutes with an elderly person and learn from their wisdom
- Watch a Hallmark movie

*Brian Hazelgren is a Best-Selling author, Motivational Speaker, Podcast Host, and CEO of RX2Live - a medical services company. This excerpt is from his book **Mastering Positive Thinking**. To learn more about this training system please visit www.positific.com or www.rx2live.com.*