The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

Culture and the Structure of Affect: A Bifactor Modeling Approach

Date: March 17, 2014 (Monday)
Time: 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Venue: Room 11.03, 11/F The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU
Speaker: Dr. Chen Fang Fang
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The present investigations were conducted to address three issues: (1) to test the competing views on the basic structure of affect cross-culturally. We sampled a full range of affective experiences by crossing affective valence (i.e., positive and negative) with different levels of activation (i.e., high, moderate, and low), which made it possible to examine whether the relation between PA and NA changes depending on the level of activation. (2) to use a novel statistical approach, the bifactor model, to examine cross-cultural similarities and differences on the basic structure of affect, and (3) Importantly, to use the basic as well as secondary dimensions of affect, identified by the bifactor model, to predict well-being, personality, and other individual difference measures.

Bifactor models reveal that the basic structure of affect is fundamentally different in the two cultures. For the U.S. participants, the general factor, which is the most basic dimension of affect, is defined by the moderate activation of pleasure-displeasure and this dimension is largely bipolar. A different pattern emerged for the Chinese participants. The general factor is largely defined by positive affect across different levels of activation. Negative affect across different levels of activation forms another important

dimension, independent of the general dimension, in both cultures. Beyond these basic dimensions, high activation PA, low activation PA, and low activation NA form secondary dimensions in both cultures, as they are mixtures of the basic dimensions and they form relatively weak unique factors, independent of the two basic dimensions.

Despite these differences in the structure of affect, the functions of these dimensions of affect are remarkably similar cross-culturally. The most basic dimension of affect, bipolar pleasure-displeasure in the U.S. and PA across activation level in China, had the strongest predictive power in well-being and approach related domains. In contrast, the effect of another important dimension, NA across activation level in both cultures, was either equally strong or even stronger than that of the general factor in ill-being and avoidance related domains. The secondary dimensions also demonstrated incremental prediction, independent of the basic dimensions, but the effects were generally small in both cultures. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.