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Psychological Theories of Stress

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The psychological theories of stress gradually evolved from the Theory of Emotion (James-Lange), The Emergency Theory (Cannon-Bard), and to the Theory of Emotion (Schachter-Singer).

Because stress is one of the most interesting and mysterious subjects we have since the beginning of time, its study is not only limited to what happens to the body during a stressful situation, but also to what occurs in the psyche of an individual. In this article, we will discuss the different psychological theories of stress proposed by James & Lange, Cannon & Brad, and Schachter & Singer.

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James-Lange: Theory of Emotion

In 1884 and in 1885, theorists William James and Carl Lange might have separately proposed their respective theories on the correlation of stress and emotion, but they had a unified idea on this relationship - emotions do not immediately succeed the perception of the stressor or the stressful event; they become present after the body's response to the stress. For instance, when you see a growling dog, your heart starts to race, your breath begins to go faster, then your eyes become wide open. According to James and Lange, the feeling of fear or any other emotion only begins after you experience these bodily changes. This means that the emotional behavior is not possible to occur unless it is connected to one's brain.

See the full article: [The James-Lange Theory of Emotion](#) [1]

Cannon-Bard: The Emergency Theory

This theory is quite the opposite of what James and Lange proposed. According to theorist Walter Cannon, emotion in response to stress can actually occur even when the bodily changes are not present. Cannon said that the visceral or internal physiologic response of one's body is more slowly recognized by the brain as compared with its function to release emotional response. He attempted to prove his theory by means of creating the so-called "decorticated cats", wherein the neural connections of the body are separated from the cortex in the brain of the cats. When faced with a stressful response, the decorticated cats showed emotional behavior which meant feelings of aggression and rage. This emotion was then manifested by bodily changes such as baring of teeth, growling and erect hair.

To further enhance Cannon's theory, theorist Philip Bard expanded the ideals of Cannon by arguing that a lower brain stem structure called the thalamus is important in the production of emotional responses. According to Bard, the emotional response is released first, and then sent as signals by the thalamus to the brain cortex for the interpretation alongside with the sending of signals to the sympathetic nervous system or SNS to begin the physiologic response to stress. Therefore, this theory argues that emotional response to stress is not a product of the physiologic response; rather, they occur simultaneously.

See the full article: [Cannon-Bard Theory of Emotion](#) [2]

The Schachter-Singer Theory

Theorists Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer argued that the appropriate identification of the emotion requires both cognitive activity and emotional arousal in order to experience an emotion. Attribution, or the process wherein the brain can identify the stress stimulus producing an emotion is also proposed by [Schachter and Singer](#) [3]. The theory explains that we become aware of the reason behind the emotional response, and when we the reason is not obvious, we start to look for environmental clues for the proper interpretation of the emotion to occur.

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