

LANGUAGE FOR EMOTION:¹

Affect: -- *Affect is the feeling that you are expressing right now, in the moment.* It is like a “snapshot” of actions based on immediate feelings. Affect is a biologically based capability that we were all born with. Because biology is involved, we know that one person’s experience will differ from another’s; that is, some people will have a high level of affect in response to an event and others may have a low-level response. Example: *“His affect was that of anger even though he said ‘I’m not mad!’”*

Feelings: -- *This is a word used to indicate increasing awareness of the affect in our body, that is, what feelings we are experiencing at a given moment.* You may not understand your feelings but you are now more likely to have noticed them and have possibly begun to identify them. Feelings are quite physical so paying attention to our bodies usually gives us our first signals that feelings are present. From the vantage point of the brain, becoming aware of a feeling is a more complex operation than simply being in a state of affect. Self-awareness has become involved. Moving from simple affect to feelings involves a transition from behaviors based on biological actions to biology plus psychology. Example: *“My feelings were hurt by her mean comment.”*

Emotions: -- *Emotion is yet another level up in complexity from feelings.* Here’s how. Affect can be thought of as biological routines that have been simulated, run and rerun, over and over again since childhood. Memories and states of affect get associated with our feelings (physical states of affect held in awareness) over time and form *experience*. Experience, then, becomes crucial to how we interpret events at the emotional level. Emotions differ from simple affect primarily by, (1) affect is usually a reaction to an immediate situation at hand and can last as briefly as a few seconds, and (2) emotion is keyed to thoughts and ideas, memories and experiences, and the feelings of emotion can continue to be experienced for longer durations than affect, depending upon the power of the memories involved. Example: *“That song holds lots and lots of emotions for me.”*

Mood: -- A mood is a persistent state of emotions, a state that can last for hours or days. Mood is composed of all the above-mentioned components and is a highly complex ability. It involves our mind, body and our psychology, our personal experiences and our in-born biological makeup at a cellular level. Example: *“He’s been in a bad mood all week.”*

Other important words to discuss: -- Images, Ideas, Cognitions, Scenes, and Scripts. Character traits and Personality. Heart, Mind, Will, Soul, and Spirit.

¹Taken from “Two Faces of Sexual Shame,” Bradshaw, John. 04-28-2001.