CHAPTER 13 SUMMARY

The literature on affect and cognition is moving in numerous different directions simultaneously, some focusing on physiological responses and some on the ways that cognitive structures – either interrupted or successfully applied – influence affect. Some of these theoretical efforts are supported by considerably more empirical evidence than others. Nevertheless, some central themes emerge as directing research and theory.

Affect is a generic term encompassing all kinds of evaluations, moods, and emotion. Preferences include relatively mild subjective reactions that are essentially either pleasant or unpleasant. Moods typically do not have a specific target, are considered as simply positive or negative, and have some duration. Emotions are more complex and differentiated, often include physiological responses, and can be relatively brief. The two most common ways of distinguishing among emotions are along the two dimensions of pleasantness and arousal or along two independent dimensions of positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions, analyzed separately, have a simpler structure than negative emotions. Prototype and social-role approaches describe people's culturally shared categorization of specific emotions and the concept of emotion in general.

Early emotion theories asked whether physiological responses precede (James, Lange) or follow (Cannon) the experience of differentiated emotions. Subsequently, many physiological theories of emotion assumed that autonomic arousal was undifferentiated and that other mechanisms must account for the complexity of emotional experience. Facial feedback theory posits that the face's complex, subtle musculature provides the detailed patterns of feedback that underlie different emotions, particularly their valence and intensity.

Excitation transfer theory proposes that autonomic arousal from emotions or exercise decays slowly, and that people often cannot distinguish the source of their arousal. Consequently, prior excitation can spill over to intensify new affective responses, even those of a different valence. These physiological theories de-emphasize cognition's role in generating emotion.

In contrast, how might cognition contribute to affect? Some approaches examine the interplay between arousal and cognition, building on Schachter's two-component theory of emotion (Chapter 6; unexplained arousal leads people to search their environment for cognitive labels for their emotions). Mandler's theory of mind and emotion extends this analysis: Physiological arousal originates in the interruption of perceptual schemas or complex goal sequences. The degree of disconfirmation of a perceptual schema determines its experienced pleasantness. The interruption of a goal sequence also prompts cognitive interpretation that determines the nature of the experienced emotion. Berscheid's theory of emotion in close relationships extends this analysis

to complex goal sequences in which people are interdependent: The more intimate the relationship, the more interdependence, and the more potential for interruption and, consequently, emotion.

Other social cognition theories focus on how cognitive structures impact affect. Keltner's theory posits that high power leads to positive affect. Fiske's theory of schema-triggered affect posits that affective values are stored at the top level of a schema, accessible immediately upon categorization of an instance as matching the schema. Linville analyzes how informational complexity influences affect; more complex knowledge structures often moderate affect, whereas simple ones allow more extreme affect. Over time, thought polarizes affect, in Tesser's analysis, if thought organizes the relevant schema, the schema contains correlated dimensions, and the person has publically committed to the initial affective response.

Other theories examine emotional reactions to own or others' obtained outcomes. Weiner's attributional dimensions theory proposes that different configurations – internal-external locus, stability over time, and controllability – result in specific emotional and behavioral responses.

Besides already-obtained outcomes, some theories emphasize alternative outcomes: What might have been or might yet be. Kahneman and Miller's norm theory describes an outcome's surprise-value compared to the ease of imagined alternatives, and then the intensity of emotional response. Thus, interruptions variously cause emotion.

Emotions also cause interruptions. Emotions may manage goal priorities, interrupting to cue changing priorities. In Simon's view and Oately and Johnson-Laird's related view, emotions serve as alarm signals, providing arousal and interruption that alert the organism to an unmet need that has shifted its urgency while the organism has been pursuing another goal. Carver and Scheier's cybernetic model posits an affective feedback system that regulates the rate at which the organism pursues the goal.

Finally, based on Arnold and Lazarus, cognition generates affect via appraisals: How people assess the environment to ascertain its significance for their concerns. The appraisal of personal meaning involves preconscious and conscious cognitive assessments of, first, personal relevance and, second, coping options. Cognitive appraisal assesses particular dimensions of the current situation, determining particular emotional responses. Other theories have identified similar dimensions of appraisal leading to emotion, in particular, pleasantness, agency, certainty, and attention. People's affective forecasts for the future tend to over-estimate the emotional impact of life events.