

Teaching *Current Directions in Psychological Science*

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[Babies Know: Emotions are Informative!](#) • [Getting to Know the Narcissism Hierarchy](#)

Aimed at integrating cutting-edge psychological science into the classroom, Teaching Current Directions in Psychological Science offers advice and how-to guidance about teaching a particular area of research or topic in psychological science that has been the focus of an article in the APS journal [Current Directions in Psychological Science](#).

Babies Know: Emotions are Informative!

By Beth Morling

[Wu, Y., Schulz, L. E., Frank, M. C., & Gweon, H. \(2022\). Emotion as information in early social learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30\(6\), 468–475.](#)

In their *Current Directions* article, Yang Wu and her colleagues ask the question: Can babies and young children use another person's emotions to infer what the person must have seen or thought?

We already know that little humans as young as 5 months can use positive and negative emotional expressions to reason and form expectations about how an adult feels. For example, when babies see an adult receive a treat, they expect the adult to smile (rather than scowl; see Widen, 2013). Emotions are part of social referencing: A 1-year-old might use their parent's face to decide if they should explore or avoid a new toy (Walle et al., 2017).

Student Activity 1

This activity reenacts Experiment 1 by Wu and colleagues (2022). Working in pairs, one student pretends to be the research assistant and the other is the “infant.” The infant should just look at the slides naturally. The research assistant should look at the infant while facing the back of the room. This way, the research assistant doesn't know what the infant is looking at. Show two slides, each with their accompanying emotional sounds.

[*You can use the slides available here*](#)

The first slide shows a young child acting silly (on the left) and a light-up toy (on the right). The emotional sound is a laugh. The second shows a cute baby and a yummy dessert. The sound this time is “Mmmmm!”

The first slide shows a young child acting silly (on the left) and a light-up toy (on the right). The emotional sound is a laugh. The second shows a cute baby and a yummy dessert. The sound this time is “Mmmmm!”

After each slide, the research assistant should record where the infant's eyes looked. With a show of hands, ask research assistants which way the infants' eyes moved—was it toward the silly child for the first slide? And was it toward the dessert for the second?

Your students have just reenacted the classic “preferential-looking paradigm”—a technique used in cognitive development research to figure out what infants know. In this case, Wu and her colleagues (Wu et al., 2017) found that infants between 12 and 17 months old are able to map sounds associated with specific positive emotions (e.g., amusement, surprise, deliciousness, and delight) to their probable causes (silly kids, cool toys, yummy foods, and cute babies).

Activity 2

The second activity illustrates infants' ability to rely on emotions to understand what others see. Bring to the classroom two brown paper bags; in each bag, hide a piece of fruit (or some other food). Invite two students to the front of the room. Start with the first bag and the first student. Look into the bag yourself and make the emotional sound “Mmmmm!” (as in, “Yummy!”). Place the bag on the table and ask the student to explore the bag themselves. (To really mimic the experiment, ask the student to explore using only their hands.) You and the rest of the class can observe how long this student searches the bag.

Next, pick up the second bag and address the second student. Look into this bag and say, with emotion, “Aww!” (as in, “How cute!”). Then place the bag on the table and ask this student to explore it. You

and the rest of the class can observe how long the second student searches.

You've just reenacted Wu and colleagues' second experiment. One-year-olds in their study explored a box longer when the adult made incongruent emotion sounds—such as “Aww!” for a piece of fruit. Just like your second student, the infants in the study probably thought, “That emotion doesn't go with *food*! There must be something else in there!”

Wu and her colleagues study a related process: the use of emotions as information. Upon seeing an adult's emotional expression, can infants and young children work *backward* to figure out what that person must have seen or thought?

Using eye gaze as a dependent variable (as in the first demonstration), the researchers learned that 1-year-olds can detect the difference between funny, adorable, sympathetic, delicious, and exciting. In addition, the study illustrated babies' ability to make reverse social inferences: Upon hearing “Haha!” or “Mmmmm!”, babies expected that an adult had seen a silly face or a cupcake, respectively (Wu et al., 2017).

Using search duration as a dependent variable (as in the second demonstration), Wu's team found that 12- to 17-month-olds can guess what an adult saw even earlier than some theory-of-mind tasks have suggested is possible. In the study, a toddler watched an adult open a box and say, “Awww!” The adult pulled out either a cute stuffed animal (in one condition) or a race car (in another). The adult allowed the infant to explore the box, and the infants spent more time searching in the car condition. Apparently, the infants inferred that because cars are not so cute, *something else* must have caused the adult to make that sound—an inverse inference.

In sum, young kids seem to know that emotions are rich sources of information about our external and internal social worlds. They infer what's safe or scary, what must be hidden in a box, and whether a toy has secret qualities (Wu & Gweon, 2021). As they get older, children can also use emotions to infer what team an adult roots for (Wu & Schultz, 2020) or whether a teacher thinks a classmate is competent (Asaba et al., 2020).

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Getting to Know the Narcissism Hierarchy

By C. Nathan DeWall

[Miller, J., Back, M., Lynam, D., & Wright, A. \(2022\). Narcissism today: What we know and what we need to learn. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30\(6\), 519–525.](#)

Over the past 20 years, “narcissism” has become a household word, and narcissism research has blossomed. Early theories gave rise to empirical research, which led to both agreement and disagreement. Psychologists have debated whether narcissists behave aggressively, whether narcissists like or dislike themselves, and whether Americans have become more narcissistic over time. Having established some key findings, narcissism research has entered its next generation. And according to Joshua Miller, Mitja Back, Donald Lynam, and Aidan Wright (2022), today’s narcissism research is concerned with understanding a constellation of traits that comprise a complex narcissism hierarchy.

At its base, narcissism is built on three personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (see Miller et al., 2022, Figure 1). Various combinations of these traits form higher-order factors. Before you can know someone’s overall narcissism levels, Miller and colleagues argue, you need to start lower in the narcissism hierarchy. At the bottom of this hierarchy are agentic extraversion, antagonism, and narcissistic neuroticism (Crowe et al., 2019; see Teaching Activity for all definitions). Once you understand how someone scores on these three factors, you can move to a higher level in the hierarchy by measuring their vulnerable narcissism and grandiose narcissism (Miller et al., 2011). Finally, you can use this complex structure of information to create an overall picture of someone’s narcissism levels—or dig deeper into how scores on lower-level factors in the hierarchy predict how they think, feel, and act (Miller et al., 2011).

View the [accompanying teaching activity’s instructions and scoring card.](#)

By understanding the narcissism hierarchy, researchers can bring light to phenomena that have remained obscure, unreliable, or hidden. Knowing people’s foundational narcissistic tendencies can offer clues about certain outcomes, whereas knowing their levels of vulnerability, grandiosity, or overall narcissism may prove more fruitful for understanding other outcomes. The bottom line is that today’s narcissism research is digging deeper than ever to understand what narcissism is and what it isn’t, giving us tools to

understand our place in the narcissism hierarchy.

Feedback on this article? Email apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org or scroll down to comment.

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