

The Photos That Make Us Feel

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In case you missed it, the cameras were rolling at the APS 23rd Annual Convention in Washington, DC. Watch Kathleen E. Hazlett from Marquette University present her poster session research on “Self Selected Pictures Are More Effective than IAPS for Inducing Positive Emotion.”

According to Hazlett, your own photo album (or Facebook timeline, or Flickr account) might be the best pick-me-up when you're feeling down. Personal photos could also be the best way for researchers to elicit positive emotions in the lab.

Hazlett and her coauthors studied the effects of four photo sets on emotions: a standardized positive picture set (e.g., pictures of cute animals), a picture set with positive images that participants sent in prior to their participation, a set of neutral images from a standardized set (e.g., inanimate objects such as trees and buildings), and positive pictures that had been sent in by other participants in the study.

When compared to the standard positive images, participants' personal photos induced emotions that were more positive and more robust. The researchers also found that their standardized neutral photo set didn't inspire neutral feelings in the participants. Instead, they were frustrated and bored. Yet when the participants viewed photographs provided by other participants, they did experience neutral emotions. It was like looking at pictures of someone else's vacation, they said — not bad, but not *quite* as exciting as it is for the person who remembers the vacation.

Currently, most researchers use standardized pictures to elicit emotion, such as those from the International Affective Picture System. Hazlett's research indicates that, in some cases, researchers may be better off asking participants to bring pictures from home.