

# New research has potential for 'unpacking' complex simultaneous emotions in adolescence

24 July 2019

Shows for the first time that complex, mixed simultaneous emotions in adolescents could be assessed using an Analogue Emotion Scale. Potential to supplement traditional emotional assessments where emotions are complex and people 'may not have the words'. Next step: trials to test the findings in practice.

When faced with [emotional challenges](#) or [traumatic experiences](#), we may well have different, mixed feelings both at the same time and sequentially. In adolescence, when complex emotions are experienced as part of everyday life, the effect of challenge or trauma combined with difficulty expressing [emotional](#) complexity can exacerbate a given situation and limit the communication needed between [young people](#) and professionals.

New research published (23rd July 2019) in the *Journal of Adolescence* by a research team from the University of Chichester has, for the first time, examined types of reported simultaneous mixed emotion experiences in adolescents for conflicting, bipolar emotional pairs (eg: happy/sad) using an Analogue Emotion Scale (AES). This is a comparatively simple, flexible graph which can track mixed emotions over time and is especially useful where people cannot find the words to explain how they are feeling.

There is use of an AES to assess adult emotions, and growing use in the assessment of children, but to date there has been no research to support its use in assessments in adolescence—a period of life when, arguably, it would be of most benefit.

The study investigated 163 participants based at schools in the UK. They reported experiencing mixed emotions one after the other (sequentially) and simultaneously. They felt that others experienced mixed emotions sequentially, while

they themselves experience more emotions in a highly simultaneous way. Their experience was different depending on the conflicting emotional pairings and age.

The study was led by Dr. Esther Burkitt, Reader in Developmental Psychology at the University of Chichester. She said: "An AES could be a useful tool for professionals to assess the emotional state of an individual, especially in situations where they are upset or find it hard to verbalise how they feel. Ours is the first piece of research to investigate simple and simultaneous types of mixed emotions in adolescence using an AES."

She added: "Our findings show that there is potential for an AES to be an effective supplementary tool for professionals working with [adolescents](#) experiencing complex emotions at a difficult time. This is an important finding, given that background emotions can be complex and conflicting in adolescence even without the added complication of trauma and/or emotional challenge. Our next step will be the development of trials to see how our findings play out in practice."

**More information:** Esther Burkitt et al, Mixed emotion experiences for self or another person in adolescence, *Journal of Adolescence* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.07.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.07.004)

Provided by University of Chichester

APA citation: New research has potential for 'unpacking' complex simultaneous emotions in adolescence (2019, July 24) retrieved 12 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-07-potential-complex-simultaneous-emotions-adolescence.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*