

Letter to the editors

Investigating emotion in psychiatry with the International Affective Picture System

Dear editors,

We would like to stress how important the investigation of emotion in psychiatry has been through a study published by our group in this journal.¹ This study aimed at determining Brazilian norms for subjective affective assessment of the photographs included in the International Affective Picture System (IAPS) following the methodology used in the original study.² Such photographs can be used for the study of emotional responses in normal subjects and for the diagnosis and assessment of emotional disorders in Brazilian clinical populations.

The IAPS, designed to be used in studies worldwide as a standardized emotional material, comprehends hundreds of high-resolution colored pictures which represent several aspects of the daily life (sports, fashion, landscapes, pornography, violence, etc.). They act as powerful producers of emotions, which can be easily presented in the laboratory, thus allowing precise experimental control of factors such as exposure time.³

Among the main psychiatric conditions in which the IAPS has been recently used to investigate emotion we can cite anxious patients,⁴ psychopaths,⁵ depressive patients,^{6,7} drug dependents⁸ and schizophrenics.⁹ Schizophrenic patients,⁹ for example, have shown higher emotional response to positive pictures, whereas drug dependents in abstinence periods⁸ have shown lower emotional response to these pictures, compared with the normal population.

Therefore, controlled studies to investigate reactions to emotional contents by psychiatric patients may lead to a better determination of psychiatric conditions, besides possibly helping in the selection of more specific treatments for each type of patient. They may also allow assessment of changes resulting from pharmacological and/or therapeutic treatments.

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Rafaela Larsen Ribeiro

Visiting associate professor, Department of Psychobiology, Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP), São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

Sabine Pompéia

Affiliate Professor, Department of Psychobiology, UNIFESP, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

Orlando Francisco Amodeo Bueno

Professor, Department of Psychobiology, UNIFESP, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

Correspondence:

Rafaela Larsen Ribeiro

Departamento de Psicobiologia, UNIFESP, EPM

Rua Botucatu, 862, 1º andar

CEP 04023-062 – São Paulo, SP – Brazil

Fax: +55 (11) 5572.5092

E-mail: rafa@psicobio.epm.br