

Welcome back to a new school year! One of my goals for this school year is to be a more regular contributor to the KGMS newsletter in order to share recent research findings and other psychology news that pertains to the well-being of our students. To start, I will summarize a recently published article: "Why Distinguishing Your Emotions Can Buffer Depression – A bigger emotional vocabulary can help reduce negative emotions and brooding."

As a clinician I have often seen that strong experiences can lead to equally strong vocabulary to describe the emotions associated with those experiences. Conversely, I have also seen that the use of strong emotional vocabulary to describe an experience contributes to a tendency to brood or ruminate with negative thinking. Guy Winch PhD, in his article, makes the point that how granular we get in our ability to differentiate our emotions matters. The more nuanced our vocabulary, the more nuanced our emotions. Studies show that our ability to draw from a wider range of emotional vocabulary affects not just how we think about our emotions but also how we manage them. People who can better differentiate between their emotions and better recognize that an experience generates multiple emotions rather than just one are likely to notice more granular distinctions in how their emotions change. Imagine if we only had the vocabulary of primary colours to describe, for instance, a sunset! I have witnessed multiple times the ending of friendships amongst students due to one of the students consistently expressing themselves with strong and often volatile emotional vocabulary.

The less differentiated our emotions, the more extreme the emotional language, the greater the tendency to ruminate. Rumination tends to cause a vicious cycle in which focusing on upsetting events and perceptions increases negative thinking and decreases problem-solving, which in turn, increases depressive and anxious thoughts. Research has shown that when there is an increase in emotional vocabulary that there is a decreased amount of rumination and negative thinking. There is less tendency to get stuck in a strong emotion. The article states that the good news is that identifying and differentiating our emotions is a skill, one that we can practice and improve.

Keeping this in mind see: <http://humanemotionschart.com> for a list of emotions grouped as either strong, moderate or mild. I think you will be surprised at the length of the list. The article concludes by asserting that it is important to question emotional statements and to question whether or not other terms might be more accurate (e.g. "when you stop to think about it are you furious, or more frustrated, disappointed and upset?"). This questioning can help students develop a larger bank of emotional vocabulary and differentiate their emotions.

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