

Crocodile tears don't fool us all

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How easy is it to fake remorse? Not so easy if your audience knows what to look for. In the first investigation of the nature of true and false remorse, Leanne ten Brinke and colleagues, from the Centre for the Advancement of Psychology and Law (CAPSL), University of British Columbia and Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada, show that those who fake remorse show a greater range of emotional expressions and swing from one emotion to another very quickly - a phenomenon referred to as emotional turbulence - as well as speak with more hesitation. These findings have important implications for judges and parole board members, who look for genuine remorse when they make their sentencing and release decisions. Ten Brinke's work is published in Springer's journal *Law and Human Behavior*.

Deception is a common aspect of human social interaction that can have major implications if undetected, particularly in the context of crime sentencing and parole hearings, where the perceived credibility of the defendants' emotion during their testimony informs decisions about their future.

Ten Brinke and colleagues examined the facial, verbal and [body language](#) behaviors associated with emotional deception in videotaped accounts of true personal wrongdoing, with either genuine or fabricated remorse, among 31 Canadian undergraduate students. Their analysis of nearly 300,000 frames showed that those participants who displayed false remorse displayed more of the seven universal emotions ([happiness](#), sadness, fear, disgust, anger, surprise, and contempt) than those who were genuinely sorry.

The authors grouped the emotions displayed in [facial expressions](#) into three categories: positive (happiness), negative (sadness, fear, anger, contempt, [disgust](#)) and neutral (neutral, surprise). They found that participants who were genuinely remorseful did not often swing directly from positive to [negative emotions](#), but went through neutral emotions first. In contrast, those who were deceiving the researchers made more frequent direct transitions between positive and negative emotions, with fewer displays of neutral emotions in between. In addition, during fabricated remorse, students had a significantly higher rate of speech hesitations than during true remorse.

The authors conclude: "Our study is the first to investigate genuine and falsified remorse for behavioral cues that might be indicative of such deception. Identifying reliable cues could have considerable practical implications - for example for forensic psychologists, parole officers and legal decision-makers who need to assess the truthfulness of remorseful displays."

More information: ten Brinke L et al (2011). Crocodile tears: facial, verbal and body language behaviours associated with genuine and fabricated remorse. *Law and Human Behavior*; [DOI:10.1007/s10979-011-9265-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-011-9265-5)

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