

Defining the emotion inspired by 'cuteness'

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Credit: Griffith University

A cuddly animal, an adorable baby or an endearing gesture from a partner – whatever the cute level, it is usually met with a reaction of "aww."

Now, a Griffith University researcher has given new meaning to the response, suggesting it should be a new emotion.

Professor Ralf Buckley, of Griffith's School of Environment, highlights in *Frontiers in Psychology* that while there are terms for 'cute' across languages – for example, *kawaii* in Japanese – none contain a single term for the corresponding [emotional](#) response.

Kawaii may translate as loveable, but love is not the emotion of cuteness, in the same way that happiness is not the same as the reaction of "aww".

Professor Buckley says research in this field is forced to use blended terms such as cute-emotion, cute-affect, or *kawaii*-feeling.

"Indeed, there is remarkably little published research on this emotion, relative to other [human emotions](#) such as fear where social, behavioural,

physiological, and neurological as well as psychological perspectives have been studied," he says.

"Lots of cultures and languages have words for cute, but none have formal names for the emotion. Why does a name matter? Because people don't think about things without names."



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Professor Buckley says the linguistic deficiency is particularly surprising since cute-emotion has considerable biological significance.

"Cute-emotion is principally a response to neotenic or baby-animal characteristics, such as big round eyes, small size, and softness," he says.

"People experience a specific emotion when they see something cute.

"These characteristics are involved in human mate selection and human parental care. Cuteness also has social functions, used in design and sales such as clothing, toys and videos etc.



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"What do you say if you see something really cute? In English, probably, "aww", so that's the new name for cute-emotion!"

Professor Buckley proposes that cute-emotion deserves substantially greater attention in psychological research, building on existing studies, and adopting all the methodological approaches used widely in studying other [human](#) emotions.

More information: Ralf C. Buckley. Aww: The Emotion of Perceiving Cuteness, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2016). DOI: [10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01740](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01740)

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