

# In test of wisdom, new research favors Yoda over Spock

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A person's ability to reason wisely about a challenging situation may improve when they also experience diverse yet balanced emotions, say researchers from the University of Waterloo.

The finding clarifies millennia of philosophical and psychological thinking that debates how wisdom is related to the effective management of emotionally charged [experiences](#).

Wise [reasoning](#) does not necessarily require uniform emotional control or suppression, says Igor Grossmann, professor of psychology at Waterloo and lead author of the new study. Instead, wise reasoning can also benefit from a rich and balanced emotional life.

Characteristics of wise reasoning include a sense of humility, recognition of a world in flux, recognition of diverse perspectives on an issue and an openness to integrate them and find compromise.

"With our new study, we wanted to test how the presence and balance of multiple emotions at the

same time influence one's ability for wise reasoning," said Grossmann.

To provide a richer understanding of the relationship between wisdom and emotion, Grossmann and co-authors Harrison Oaks, a Ph.D. candidate in psychology at Waterloo, and Henri C. Santos, a recent Waterloo graduate, expanded their wisdom research beyond isolated emotions.

The researchers focused on emodiversity —the ability to experience multiple yet evenly balanced emotions. They point out that past research indicated that emodiversity could reduce clinical psychopathology symptoms by preventing any one emotion from dominating a person's experience.

"The ability to recognize the diversity in one's [emotional experience](#) may not only promote physical and [mental health](#), but also afford wiser reasoning," said Grossmann. "Further, this study identifies several ways to boost wise reasoning when managing personal emotional experiences."

The researchers conducted six studies employing a wide range of methods that examined emotion-focused reflections by individuals nominated for their wisdom. The tests included manipulated wise reasoning, daily emotional challenges in a broader population, personal reflections on interpersonal conflicts, and wise reasoning about geopolitical challenges.

Discussing their findings, Grossmann, Oakes, and Santos draw on pop-culture icons Yoda from Star Wars and Dr. Spock from Star Trek. "It seems that wise reasoning does not align with uniform [emotional](#) down-regulation, as portrayed by Dr. Spock. Rather, wise reasoning accompanies one's ability to recognize and balance a wide range of emotions, as portrayed by Yoda," said Grossmann.

Uncovering the complex relationship between wise reasoning and emotion is ongoing, with future work

unpacking situational factors of emodiversity and their effects in wise reasoning.

The study, *Wise Reasoning Benefits from Emodiversity, Irrespective of Emotional Intensity*, is [published](#) in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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