

Darwin complicit in manipulating photos

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When Darwin came to publish *The Expression of the Emotions* in 1872, he employed images made by five photographers to illustrate the wide variation in human facial expressions. A new study of the way that two of these photographers operated reveals the extent to which Darwin's photographs were manipulated.

The photographic image can be seen both as a mirror of reality and a construction of reality. But in the nineteenth century, few people appreciated the subtle ways in which the photographer, the subject and the camera itself could interfere with the representation of reality.

For scientists like [Charles Darwin](#), the photographic image promised unprecedented objectivity, apparently removing the subjectivity of the photographer from the equation altogether. And when it came to preparing his book on *The Expression of the Emotions*, published in 1872, Darwin yielded to this promise.

The two photographers analyzed here had rather different backgrounds: French physician and physiologist Guillaume Benjamin Amand Duchenne and Swedish-born artistic photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander. But both of them manipulated the construction of the images to give Darwin what he needed for his theorizations, says Tatiana C. Gonçalves of the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine in London and the University of Campinas in São Paulo, Brazil.

In spite of his scientific training, Duchenne got his subjects to pull facial movements that did not necessarily correspond to real expressions, says

Gonçalves. And in order to capture the quick movements that Darwin wanted, Rejlander had to fake situations to photograph, she says. Gonçalves will present her full argument on Thursday 2 July at the annual meeting of the British Society for the History of Science in Leicester, UK.

“The images made by these two photographers offers an excellent case-study for investigating the general assumptions, intrinsic characteristics and particularities of the photographic medium as it was used in late nineteenth-century science,” concludes Gonçalves.

Source: British Society for the History of Science

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