

THE MAJOR-BLASCOVICH LECTURE SERIES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

INAUGURAL LECTURE

Wendy Berry Mendes, PhD

Chris Argyris Professor of Psychology
Yale University Psychology Department

DATE & TIME

Friday, October 9, 2026
11:00 AM

LOCATION

SAGE Room
Psychology Room 1312

Affect contagion: Physiologic synchrony among strangers and close others

ABSTRACT

Emotions, thoughts, and intentions are not simply concepts that live privately in one's minds, but rather, affective states emanate from us via multiple channels – voice, posture, facial expressions, and behavior – and influence those around us. Affect contagion, or the spread of affective states—including stress, emotions, motivation—from one person to another, is studied in a variety of ways in the social sciences: sociologists find that happiness is contagious within social networks, social psychologists show that mimicking others behaviors increases liking, and neuroscientists demonstrate that observing someone experience pain may produce similar neural activation as experiencing pain. In this talk, I will discuss a series of experiments exploring the antecedents and consequences of affect contagion using dynamic psychophysiological measurement. The experiments include ones focusing on mothers and children and explore how infants “catch” their mothers’ stress reactivity and how touch potentiates stress contagion. Another series of experiments explore how recently acquainted individuals can catch each other’s affective state and how moderators such as racial/ethnic group, socio-economic status, valence and empathetic tendencies moderate affect contagion.

The talk is supported by The Brenda Major and Jim Blascovich Fund for Social Psychology. [Support this initiative.](#)

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Wendy Berry Mendes, PhD



WENDY BERRY MENDES, PhD, is the Chris Argyris Professor of Psychology at Yale University. She received her PhD in social psychology from UC Santa Barbara in 2003 and completed a postdoc at UCSF in psychology & medicine. Her research focuses on how the brain and body respond to emotion and stress using a variety of methods including autonomic physiology, neuroendocrinology, and immunology. She applies this methodological approach to research areas such as racial health disparities, stereotyping and prejudice, emotion and decision-making, and dyadic and group physiological synchrony. Professor Mendes has won several awards including the Sage Scholar Award, the Gordon Allport Award for the best paper on intergroup relations, the APS Spence Award, and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology Career Trajectory Award. In 2023, she received the mentoring award from the Society for *Affective Science*. Dr. Mendes has served many editorial roles including senior editor at *Psychological Science*, an editor of *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 6th edition, and was one of the founding Editors-in-Chief of the journal *Affective Science*. Since 2014 she has served as the PI on the NIH-funded Stress Measurement Network.

Her research approach includes lab, field, and app-based studies. In one app-based research study called *MyBPLab*, she leveraged an optic sensor embedded in phones and wearables to estimate blood pressure responses. The study enrolled more than 250,000 people from over 100 countries and participants tracked their stress, emotion, and blood pressure providing more than 5 million daily check-ins.