Perception of Real and Perceived Anger in Various Races

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PERCEPTION OF REAL AND PERCEIVED ANGER IN VARIOUS RACES

by

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Abstract

Research of emotional expressions has suggested that facial expressions of emotions are universal between cultures (Ekman, 1989). However, because of in-group biases, misidentification of emotions in other races can predictably occur. The misidentification of facial expressions of emotions can lead to predictable and specific racial biases. One important instance of this is that groups of White individuals often make the error of perceiving anger in an African American who is actually experiencing fear. This has important implications of accidental discrimination. The current study aimed to determine whether a brief training in accurate identification of various facial expressions would improve accuracy in identifying expressions between races and decreasing the anger-race bias in African Americans. A total of X students from two upper-division social work classes participated in both baseline and post surveys at the beginning and end of a single class period. The experimental group received a seven-minute training on accurately identifying traits of both fear and anger. Results indicate that the training was generally effective in increasing accuracy of identifying facial expression of fear and anger. Results also indicate that training resulted in a lower rate of misidentified anger or fear, including across races. Based on the results, it can be concluded that a training in the accurate identification of emotions may be beneficial to decreasing the anger-race bias against African American individuals.
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Introduction

Emotions and the accurate identification of them are important to the development of social and personal interactions and relationships, in that they signal intentions and foster social relationships by giving information concerning previous events, related responses and possible next actions. (Kubota, 2014; Ekman, 1977). The way that we perceive emotions in turn determines the actions we take towards that individual or toward the situation (Seidel, 2010). Facial expressions of emotion are useful in communicating to other individuals what that person is experiencing, indicating behavioral intentions of the individual, and in many cases can communicate information about the environment, or what social behaviors would be appropriate for a given situation. Evidence has shown that there is a tendency for people to be more sensitive to both perceiving and reacting to negative emotions, such as fear and anger, because they can signal danger in the environment; therefore, their early detection and quick behavior in response can aid in keeping us safe (Marsh, Ambady and Kleck, 2005).

In general, people tend to look to emotional expression to determine how to act in response to a person or situation, as they provide us with social cues for what to do and what not to do (Seidel, 2010). These predictable elicitations of behavior in response to another’s emotional expression are called behavioral tendencies. Correctly evaluating a person’s emotion and having the appropriate behavioral tendency elicited becomes an evolutionary advantage as shown by Marsh, Ambady and Kleck (2005), where was associated with avoidance for safety reasons, and fear was linked to approach tendencies. However, it should be clarified that although fear indicates an approach tendency, the perceiver is approaching the fearful individual, while avoiding the situation. In a related study, Seidel et al. had participants view 12 different Caucasian photos, including emotions of sad, anger, fear and disgust. Participants had the task of
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pulling forward on a joystick if the emotion viewed elicited an approach tendency, or to push the joystick back if they felt the emotion was signaling to avoid the individual in the photo. A nine-point scale was administered, asking participants how likely they were to approach or avoid the person in the photo. Results showed that anger faces indicated a strong trend of avoidance. Notably, it found that the gender of the photo elicited different reactions. Angry and disgusted male faces were rated more negatively and had quicker reaction times than female faces of the same emotion. This is important to the current work in the fact that the anger-race bias applies to Black men particularly. The study implied that social learning was an important key to this, by teaching that male’s negative emotions communicate stronger avoidance and more danger.

Anger is a negative emotion because it signals danger. It is in this angry state that an individual is most likely to hurt another (Ekman, 2003). Individuals risk losing control when in anger, which poses a natural threat to nearby individuals, whether the anger is directed at them or not. Anger is also dangerous in the fact that not only do people act irrationally when in this state of mind, but depending on the individual, may act in different ways; some may deal with their anger internally, while others lash out violently, making anger a most unpredictable state (Ekman, 2003). Because anger has the potential to be such a dangerous emotions, it is important for the perceiver to accurately identify this emotion in the other individual, as to react appropriately and either escape the situation, or interact with the angry individual accordingly.

Fear, on the other hand, is a vulnerable emotion (Ekman, 2010). Fear is an emotion intended to protect ourselves from harm. Often, feelings of fear present themselves well before the presence of any danger (Ekman, 2010). Similar to anger, fear can be felt on a range of intensity, ranging from mild apprehension to full terror, and the strength in which we feel fear determines on our appraisal of the potentially harming event (Ekman, 2010). When an individual
perceives fear, although it is a negative emotion, there is no threat posed by the individual expressing this emotion, but because fear signals danger in the environment, the behavioral tendency for the perceiver would most likely find a way to escape the situation.

There is evidence to suggest that emotions are universal, and emotional expressions are instinctive and not a result of culture or social learning (Ekman, 1971). However, because of a phenomenon known as anger-race bias, individuals tend to see other races, especially Black men, angrier than they actually are (Hutchings, 2008). Threat detection biases, occur because of implicit prejudices or stereotypes. This is an issue because of potential behavioral tendencies discussed previously. If an individual perceives that an individual as angry, true or not, the perceiver will take the action they feel is necessary to keep them safe. An individual is more likely to make cognitive errors resulting in misperceptions when the person they are viewing is a Black person, or specifically a Black man.

This has serious implications to real world situations, especially in law enforcement, where officers use split second judgments are used to decide whether to they are safe enough, or whether shooting a target is necessary for their own safety. In one study, law enforcement officers (84% White) participated in a video game simulation (Plant and Peruche, 2004). The officers played a simulation game in which both Black and White suspects holding neutral objects or guns, and were instructed to shoot only those holding guns. Results showed that these officers were more likely to shoot unarmed Black males than they were to shoot unarmed White males in the simulation. These findings are concerning because they show that officers may tend to engage in this same anger-race biases in determining whether an individual is a threat (holding a gun) or not, and they respond to these split-second determinations as though there is a threat (a gun) when there is not, based not on the threat but on the race of the person in front of them. And
their reactions to these biases have real-world implications — in the simulation, when they detect a threat even when one was not present, the officers tended to shoot. While it is noteworthy that a simulation is only an analog approximation and not an adequate measure of whether officers will shoot in an actual situation where there may or may not be actual danger, it is also noteworthy that these simulations would seem to predict the real-world implications that we see covered in the real world. It is also worth noting, that the police shooting simulation study suggests that with further training and exposure, racial biases towards criminal suspects may be decreased (Plant, 2004).

There is significant extant research on the anger-race bias, and a tendency for predictable error in cross-cultural perception of facial emotions. In one such study, nine identical faces were computer-generated to show three races by altering the skin tone (White, Black and ambiguous) by three emotions (happy, angry and neutral). Participants were asked to identify which emotion was being displayed, how intense the emotion was, how confident they were in their decision, and what race they thought best described the individual. The results showed that overall, the angry faces that were racially ambiguous were reported to be Black at higher rates, compared to the racially ambiguous neutral or happy faces. (Hutchings, 2008). These results are an important addition to this body of literature because it shows that if an individual is perceived to be Black, they are also more likely to be perceived as angrier than they actually are.

In another similar study conducted by Hugenberg and Bodenhausen (2003), four animations were constructed using animation software that Skin color, hair color and style were modified to the same faces to make the animations look White, Black or racially ambiguous, while keeping facial structure the same. In a following study, the software was used to create two Black and two White movies where the animation’s facial expression morphed over time. The
movies were randomized for each participant. The movies began with a hostile face, and the participant's task was to press the space button at the precise moment when they perceived the facial expression to no longer be hostile. After the conclusion of all movies, participants took a Race IAT test. Results showed higher implicit prejudice scores were related to a slower latency in detecting that the Black faces were no longer hostile. The second study done was identical to the first in methods and procedures, except instead the faces began in a neutral position and morphed to hostile. Participants were asked to indicate the moment when they saw the hostile onset. These results showed that high implicit prejudice scores were related to a faster recognition of hostility in Black faces (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003).

It's logically plausible that another possibility in training to reduce the anger-race bias would be in training facial emotion recognition. Several emotion recognition trainings have been validated and are available for use in research settings. Ekman developed a precise and intricate coding system for each of the facial muscles called the Facial Action Coding System (FACS). In approximately 100 hours of training, participants learn the break down of each of the individual facial muscle, how each moves, what changes each muscle makes in the face. Trainees also learn how to code for intensity of each muscle change. Though FACS has excellent reliability and validity, the training burden is far too significant for regular use outside of research. Additionally, FACS only codes facial muscles, but does not train what each facial muscle movement or combination of muscle movements mean in terms of emotional expression.

Facial Expression Coding System, or FACES, was developed by Kring and Sloan (2010) in part to create a system with a less significant training burden. Whereas FACS gives precise information about every muscle in the face and the intensity of every movement, FACES focuses instead on the frequency, duration, intensity and valence of a given facial expression. An
expression is coded every time the target moves from a neutral face. Although a good alternative to FACS for time reasons, but valence alone does not give the trainee the information between anger and fear, which are both negatively valenced emotions.

Research has gradually begun to explore facial emotion recognition trainings that are more feasible for broad use due to a decreased training burden. For example, a facial emotion recognition training was implemented in male youth offenders in a study by Hubble (2015). Participants began with a facial emotion recognition measure that took the neutral faces of three male and three female faces and morphed them into one of what is considered the five basic emotions: happy, sad, angry, fear and disgust in varying intensities (Ekman, 1999). The initial assessment consisted of one hundred fifty slides where participants were asked to identify what emotion they saw in each slide. Participants had several tasks in the emotion training portion of the study. First, they would identify the emotion they saw in the slide, describe an event that made them feel that emotion, mimic the emotion on their own face, point out distinct facial features of the emotion and select the best emotion label. This training gradually increased in difficulty as they increased in identifying the emotions correctly. Participants completed this training in two to three sessions over two weeks. The total amount of time spent training was about two hours. Results indicated that there were significant improvements on identification of negative emotions, including fear, sadness and anger. The control group who did not receive training did not show similar improvements, and in the case of sadness this group showed a decrease in accurate identification (Hubble, 2015). Although the purpose of training emotion recognition for the sake of emotion regulation training is quite different than training emotion recognition for the sake of decreasing the anger-race bias, the results are important in showing that brief emotion trainings can have significant effects.
For the current study, we aimed to determine whether a brief training on accurate identification of fear and anger facial expressions would decrease the anger-race bias in a group of college students. For the purpose of this study, we primarily focused on the emotions fear and anger, due to the fact that these emotional expressions are highly communicative of danger (Ekman, 2003). The current work examined if a training in specific facial differentiations help in decreasing the anger-race bias against black men. This becomes an issue in our society when implicit biases lend false information to the recognition of such expressions, leading to threat detection and sometimes automatic behaviors based on the detection of threat, when no such threat is present (Hutchings, 2008).

Method

Participants

Eighty five students from two upper class social work classes at Utah State University participated in this study. Twelve males and 73 females comprised the sample, with 82% being White, 11% Latino, and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander and 2% Black. Ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 57 years old. The mean age for participants was 24. There were no major differences between the intervention and control groups in demographic profiles.

Procedure

The study took place during a single class period for each of the two classes, both of which were 75 minutes long. Before administering the study, a coin was tossed to determine which class would receive the training, and which class would be the assessment-only control condition. At the beginning of the class period, both classes were read a recruitment statement which told the students that the purpose of the study was to determine if better emotion recognition education was needed in the Social Work program. Participants of both classes were
later debriefed on the true nature of the study. Professors left the room to minimize any coercion their presence may have introduced. Students were then given a letter of information, however, the letters were different for the control and experimental group, so that the control group was not aware that a training was given to another class. Both the control and experimental class took the baseline survey at the beginning of class, and the post-survey at the end of class. After completing surveys, students were asked to turn their packet upside down and pass them to the end of the row for collection. For the control class, after all surveys were collected, class was conducted as usual until the last few minutes. In the experimental class, immediately following the collection of the pre-test, a seven-minute PowerPoint training was given, after which, class was conducted as usual until the last few minutes. For the last 15 minutes of each class, the post-intervention surveys were distributed and collected in the same manner as the baseline surveys in both the control and experimental classes. A debriefing statement was read that specified the true purpose of the study and gave them the necessary contact information and instructions to withhold their data if they wished.

**Measures.**

**Demographics.** A demographic cover page preceded the surveys asking the participant their age, race, and gender. Participants also gave a 5 digit code that only they knew or could replicate for the purpose of matching their pre and post tests.

**Survey.** Both pre and post surveys contained 16 pictures which consisted of seven Black faces, six White faces, and three Asian faces so that participants may not suspect the true nature of the study. Two of the Black portraits contained traces of anger, three contained fear, and two had neutral faces. Three White faces were of anger, two were of fear and one neutral portraits were included. The three Asian portraits were of sadness and anger. These pictures were
evaluated separately by an additional undergraduate student who had the Facial Action Coding System training as well. The students coders used their training in the Facial Action Coding System to code each potential picture to be used in the survey. The students looked for traces of anger, disgust, and fear specifically in each face. Any faces with traces of multiple emotions were eliminated. There were no faces included in the survey that had blended, or more than one, emotion shown in the face. With each picture, participants answered a Likert scale from one to four how much they saw anger, how much they saw fear and how confident they were in their answer regarding fear and anger rankings (see Figure 1 below). Pre and post test surveys were identical in faces presented and order.

Figure 1. Survey Excerpt

Qualitative Evaluation. The post survey contained a manipulation check in the form of several open ended questions immediately following the survey. These included what they liked most about the training, what they liked least, what they thought could be improved, and what
they thought was useful. These questions were added to know what steps needed to be taken if the training did not produce effects. The overall findings from these questions included what areas that were addressed to go into detail further, as well as requests for a longer training.

**Training.** The training was created and presented by the undergraduate student researcher who had completed the over 100 hour training for FACS. The training was based on the FACS coding system, and all materials in the training were independently evaluated for accuracy of facial expressions by a separate undergraduate student who had also completed FACS training. This training included teaching distinctions between major and minor facial movements that change between a neutral and angry or fearful faces. The presentation included photos of the student researcher’s face in displaying different muscle movements as examples throughout the presentation. The training began with an explanation of what facial muscle movements to look for in anger that are unique to that emotion, including a lowered brow, tightened or pressed lips, and tightened eyelids. Demonstrations and explanations were given by the presenter throughout the training. The same was done for fear, including explanations of the fear versus anger brow; whether the eyebrows are pulled down and furrowed, or if the eyebrows are pulled up, the position of the eyelids, tensed mouth and certain wrinkles, such as crows feet around the eyes, bulges under the eyes, and vertical wrinkles at the corners of the mouth, to look for. The presentation ended with an explanation that emotions are very rarely pure and singular, and are often blended with other emotions. Fear and anger blends were discussed and what facial muscle movements to look for in these blends, and other facial changes, such as wrinkles, that would be masked by the mix emotion expressions. The presenter took any questions the participants had for clarification at the end of the power-point.
Figure 2. An example of a slide shown in the presentation detailing what an anger lip may look like.

Pressed Lips

- Tight or tense
- Chin pushes up to tighten bottom lip
- Pressed together
- 2 types of presses

Results

Basic descriptive statistics were run to analyze and report demographic data. Eighty-five total surveys were collected and entered, 48 from the treatment group and 37 from the control group. Results from the treatment group showed an overall intervention effect shown by the significant changes in answers from the treatment group, such that the treatment group showed improvement in accurately identifying facial expressions from pre to post. There were no significant results for the control group.

Paired and independent t-tests were conducted to compare pre and post test survey responses in the control and treatment classes. There was a significant mean difference in the scores for post-test responses of seeing presence of fear in fear-coded Black faces in the treatment group (M=2.73, SD=.72) compared to their pre-test scores (M=2.27, SD=.7); t(47)=-4.8, p=.000. In the treatment group there was less misidentification of anger in fear faces in the post-test (M=1.68, SD=.51) than was seen in the pre test (M=1.9, SD=.57); t(47)=3.4, p=.001,
as well as less misidentification of fear in anger faces in post test responses (M=1.63, SD=.76) compared to their previous responses (M=2.0, SD=.6); t(47)=3.57, p=.001 for the treatment group. In the treatment group, anger was rated more accurately in anger coded Black faces in the post test (M=3.9, SD=3.7) than in the pre test responses (M=3.6, SD=.57); t(47)=-2.19, p=.005 where fear Black faces specifically were misidentified as anger. Overall, the training was significantly effective in teaching accurate identification of emotions in Black faces.

For White faces, in the treatment group, similar results were found with a few exceptions. Post-test responses more accurately identified fear in fear coded White faces after the training (M=3.3, SD=.62) than what was identified in the pre-test (M=2.9, SD=.65); t(47)=-4.05, p=.000. Misidentification of fear decreased after the training (M=1.5, SD=.47) in comparison to scores before (M=1.9, SD=.5); t(47)=5.94, p=.000. Additionally, similar results were found for misidentification of anger in the post test responses (M=1.8, SD=.72) in comparison to pre test responses (M=2.2, SD=.64); t(47)=3.35, p=.002. Notably, it was found that there was no significant differences in the post test responses (M=2.27, SD=.51) for correctly identifying anger in White faces than in the pre test (M=2.58, SD=.5); t(47)=-1.53, p=.131.

A series of one-way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effect of the emotion training on responses in pre and post-test surveys, accounting for time and group assignment. There was a significant effect of the training on accurate fear identification in Black faces, Wilk’s Lambda=.887, F(1,83)=10.529, p=.002, decrease in misidentification of anger, Wilk’s Lambda=.908, F(1,83)=8.443, p=.005, and of fear, Wilk’s Lambda=.912, F(1,83)=7.963, p=.006. There was not a significant effect on the accurate identification of anger in Black faces, Wilk’s Lambda=.912, F(1,83)=8.021, p=.227. In White faces, it was found that the training had a significant affect on identifying fear, Wilk’s Lambda=.927, F(1,83)=6.543, p=.012, but, like the
The results suggest that participants more accurately identified anger and fear in Black faces as a result of the training. This means that after the training, they saw the coded emotion
more accurately from their pre-test responses before the training. This decrease in the misidentification of key emotions is an important finding, in the fact that this is exactly what the training specifically intended to decrease. The anger-race bias suggests that individuals see anger when it’s not there, specifically when viewing Black males.

The null results in regards to accurately detecting anger in Black faces can be seen as evidence that the anger-race bias was present in the first place, in that we would expect that viewers would be over-sensitive to viewing anger. There were some non-significant results found as well. There was not a significant change in seeing White anger in the post-test survey. Additionally, identifying anger in Black faces was not found to be significant in the ANOVA tests. It is possible that this lack of effect is because of the White majority participant numbers, the participants already knew enough about what White anger looked like for the additional training to not make a significant affect in that area.

In this study, with these results, the anger-race bias decreased substantially after the training was presented. With significantly more accurate responses, the training group showed that not only could a training be effective in communicating accurate identification of emotions, but also decreased the anger-race bias that was present before the training. In a just a simple, brief training, we saw results significant enough that if implemented in law enforcement, may save lives, such that we could predict that inaccurate snap judgments can be systematically decreased in a lab-based setting so it may be that they could be decreased in a real-life setting. Law enforcement officials have a much higher sensitivity to threat detection and must use split second judgments to ensure their safety, as well as other civilian’s safety. If such training was implemented, more accurate snap judgments might be made with more confidence that they made the right decision. Lives could possibly be saved, as implicit racial biases would have a
reduced impacted in the automatic decision-making of whether or not to shoot. Innocent individuals would not be injured if unneeded, and the individuals in question may experience the justice system in a completely fair and unbiased way.

In conclusion, our results supported our main hypothesis. With the significant findings, it is apparent that there was a treatment effect in decreasing the anger-race bias among our participants. Decreasing the anger-race bias has major implications including future research. It would be valuable to see if a training such as this would have an even greater effect when paired with a similar shooting game used by Plant and Peruche (2004).

Limitations

The training and measures used were created for this study and had not yet been validated or tested before this study began. Without the survey being validated, it is possible that it did not test to the purpose of the study accurately. While the 2 undergraduate students who coded they survey achieved a 100% inter-coder reliability, additional external coders would be needed to further validate all instruments used. In addition, the photos used for the survey were independently evaluated by 2 White coders. The coders may have been affected by the anger-race bias when coding the photos, making the race of the undergraduate coders a limitation to the accuracy of the survey. The participant sample used for this study may have hindered the results. The classes came from a rural college town with very low diversity, and the majority of the participants were White and female. It is plausible that this background affected the participants perceptions of Black men more so than a diverse participant sample from an urban area. Additionally, because of the quasi-experimental design, a convenience sample was used without true randomization. These factors greatly effect the generalizability of our results to a more diverse population. The length of the effect of treatment was not tested, presenting an additional
limitation. Because there was no follow up after the final survey, there is no way of knowing how long the treatment effects found lasted. Without knowing this information, it is difficult to say to what extent the training was successful. The study also did not take into account behavioral measures. In a safe lab setting, participants had no fear or consequence to their responses. However, in real life applications, this would not be the case. It is quite possible that responses could have been different had there been an element of fear when taking the survey. Because the officer does not have something at stake in the analog environment, it is unknown how they would respond when a true fearful situation occurs and civilians, and their own safety is at risk.
References


Honors Experience Reflection Portion

From graduating high school and moving into college, I wanted to be in the same types of academic groups I was involved with in high school. I honestly thought that this honors program would be like the National Honors Society, or something similar, going into it. I eagerly filled out the application and was really excited about the priority registration perks the honors program offered. Other than taking an honors general course, and taking advantage of the priority registration, I didn’t feel that being an ‘honors student’ really affected me my first 2 years of college. I told people I was in honors, and I was in an honors class, but I didn’t feel like I was doing anything extra from my peers for those first 2 years.

The Honors class I took was American Institutions. I thought this was a valuable experience as it was a much smaller generals class than my peers were involved in, and I made many friends who I’ve kept in contact with throughout my college education. I used these friends who were also in honors to go to honors socials together, join and start clubs together and even do honors contracts together. It was a great way to connect with other students with my same level of academic drive and interests to go through our education together. The experience of the class was also unique in the fact that because it was a smaller group, we could have more in depth conversations and debates. The election was happening during the course of the class, and the smaller class gave us liberty to really dive into the election process and talk about what was going on. I don’t think I would have learned as much, or would have been so involved in the election process if I had been in a regular sized generals class for this subject.

I never felt I had a strong enough connection or desire with any of my class projects to build a contract off of them, as most of my class assignments were essays and presentations, so I did independent contracts. This ended up being to my benefit as these contracts shaped and
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guided me towards what my final capstone project would be. I thought the requirements for contracts were very reasonable and attainable. I never struggled finishing the contract I said I would and I thought they were very beneficial to my education. I actually feel very lucky that I did them, because I learned more, searched out new opportunities that I wouldn’t have without the contract requirement.

Through completing the capstone/thesis requirement, I realized that research is not for me. Although very important to my field of work, I saw that I did not enjoy conducting research. It did stretch me in ways that normal coursework did not, and I benefited learning from how the process works from start to finish. In addition, because of my chosen research, I had to complete a full board IRB which was a difficult and stressful process for me, but I’m glad I had the full experience. In the end, the capstone requirement was a lot more time consuming and demanding than I initially expected going into the honors program my freshman year. I think the honors program should be more detailed and upfront as to what is involved with the capstone requirement so students become part of the honors program fully knowledgeable with what will be expected of them later in their education.

I am very grateful for my time in the honors program. I believe that it truly set me apart from my other peers when applying for internships and jobs. I also think it enhanced my college education to a degree I can’t even measure. Although some aspects were hard, and sometimes I wondered if it would be worth it, I’m so glad I finished and graduated with Honors. I truly believe this experience was invaluable to my education.

Thank you so much to the whole honors program for helping me get here!