

Model gender influences emotion categorization

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Abstract

Perceivers view facial configurations as belonging to emotion categories, though the features of facial cues to emotion vary continuously. Little is understood about what factors beyond facial musculature influence these categorizations. We investigated how an emoter's gender influences how emotional cues are perceived. Eighty-four adults categorized morphed emotional faces of male and female models sampled from a neutral-angry continuum. Participants had a lower threshold for categorizing female faces as upset ($X^2=16.618$, $p<.001$), particularly for configurations that were closer to the angry end of the continuum. Even when provided explicit feedback on their responses, participants continued to be more likely to identify a face as angry for female, as compared to male, models ($X^2=11.561$, $p<.001$). Therefore, judgments of emotion were influenced by both the emotional cues displayed by a model and also the model's identity. These results highlight how the social context influences how individuals read and therefore respond to anger.