

## **AMBIVALENCE AND AMBIGUITY IN FACIAL EXPRESION OF EMOTIONS**

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Perception of mixed emotions in pure and mixed facial expressions was studied. In Experiment 1, participants gave independent evaluations of positive and negative valence and of familiarity of a set of pure (anger, disgust, fear, happiness and sadness) and artificially constructed mixed expressions. Mixed expressions were composed of an upper or lower happy half face and an upper or lower half face corresponding to each of the four negative emotions. Mixed expressions were evaluated as being more ambivalent (positive and negative simultaneously) than pure expressions and this was specially so for expressive mixes containing a happy mouth. In Experiment 2, the extent to which each expression was recognised as showing different emotions at the same time (emotional ambiguity) was studied. Participants had to identify the expression of each face, choosing from various terms that made reference to basic emotions and cognitive states (surprise, strangeness). Participants were significantly more accurate in identifying pure than mixed expressions. Moreover, they identified two different emotions more frequently in mixed than in pure expressions, though, especially in the case of fear faces, two emotions were also identified in some pure expressions. In most cases of double identification, “surprise” appeared as one of the expressions identified. In the case of mixed expressions this happened with faces showing happiness in the lower face. In Experiment 3, sensitivity of expression identification to the immediately precedent linguistic context was studied. Each expression was preceded in different trials by the name of different emotions that acted as a prime, being the task of each participant to indicate to what extent the face showed that specific emotion. Even though the resulting emotion profiles showed in general that mixed expressions were more ambiguous than pure expressions, the participants also perceived different emotions in the pure expressions, especially in the case of fear expressions, that were recognised as showing fear and surprise at the same rate. Our results show a considerable degree of ambivalence and ambiguity in perception of emotional expression and suggest that the immediate context where an expression takes place can have a profound influence on the affective meaning assigned to that expression.

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