



2014 Summer Research Experiences (SRE) for Undergraduates and Teachers

Abstract

MASSARO, M., MORAN, K., ROBERSON, B., LARSEN J. and C. COLLINS. An analysis of the coherence between experiential and behavioral response during ambiguous emotional stimuli. National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis, Knoxville, TN. State University of New York College at Geneseo, NY; Clemson University, Clemson, SC; University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

In 1971, Paul Ekman published that the six basic emotions (anger, happiness, surprise, disgust, sadness, and fear) have distinct, universal facial expressions; we smile when we are happy, frown when we are sad, and wrinkle our noses in disgust. Past studies confirm that high levels of coherence exist between emotional experience and facial expression when subjects are shown poignant film clips. But what happens to the tie between emotional experience and facial response when the eliciting event isn't purely of one sentiment? In this study, data collected from video recordings of individuals watching ambivalent film clips are used to examine the relationship between emotional experience and facial response when mixed emotion is elicited. Cross-correlations between data sources measuring positive and negative emotional response indicate low to moderate amounts of coherence between response systems. Contributors to coherence are being investigated, including the degree to which emotion is "mixed" at a given time, individual personality characteristics, and attitude toward various emotions. Furthering the understanding of response coherence and mixed feelings will shed light on various psychiatric disorders, where emotional dysfunction skews the normal emotional experience and response.