

1
2 **LEARNING IN EMOTION JUDGMENTS: TRAINING**
3 **AND THE CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**
4 **OF FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**

5 Hillary Anger Elfenbein

6 *ABSTRACT:* This preliminary study presents data on training to improve the accu-
7 racy of judging facial expressions of emotion, a core component of emotional
8 intelligence. Feedback following judgments of angry, fearful, sad, and surprised
9 states indicated the correct answers as well as difficulty level of stimuli. Improve-
10 ment was greater for emotional expressions originating from a cultural group more
11 distant from participants' own family background, for which feedback likely pro-
12 vides greater novel information. These results suggest that training via feedback can
13 improve emotion perception skill. Thus, the current study also provides suggestive
14 evidence for cultural learning in emotion, for which previous research has been
15 cross-sectional and subject to selection biases.

16 *KEY WORDS:* culture; emotional intelligence; emotion recognition; facial expres-
17 sions; feedback; learning; training.
18

19
20 **Introduction**

21 The ability to recognize emotional states accurately through nonverbal
22 expression has been studied widely in clinical, cognitive, developmental,
23 and social psychology. In general, the accurate understanding of emo-
24 tional expressions predicts better social adjustment, mental health, and

Hillary Anger Elfenbein is affiliated with Organizational Behaviour and Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

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Address correspondence to Hillary Anger Elfenbein, Organizational Behavior and Industrial Relations, Haas School of Business University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-1900, USA; e-mail: hillary@post.harvard.edu.

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25 even workplace performance (e.g., Carton, Kessler, & Pape, 1999; Now-
26 icki & Duke, 1994; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979).
27 Nonverbal expressions can serve as spontaneous readouts of an individ-
28 ual's inner state (e.g., Ekman, 1972) and also purposeful social displays
29 indicating behavioral intentions (e.g., Fridlund, 1991, 1994; Hess, Banse,
30 & Kappas, 1995). Highly skilled individuals are presumably more accu-
31 rate at obtaining information about other people's internal states, and can
32 often use this information to navigate their social worlds.

33 Given the importance of these judgments, it is worth considering
34 how to improve their accuracy. Research that has attempted to validate
35 training in nonverbal sensitivity has been relatively sparse (Ambady, Ber-
36 nieri, & Richeson, 2000), but holds promise as well. Practice alone can
37 be a valuable teacher (Costanzo, 1992; deTurck, Harszrak, Bodhorn, &
38 Texter, 1990; Grinspan, Hemphill, & Nowicki, 2003; Zuckerman, Koest-
39 ner, & Alton, 1984). Even in the absence of any feedback, participants
40 achieve higher accuracy in the second half of standardized test instru-
41 ments (e.g., Rosenthal *et al.*, 1979).

42 There is also supportive evidence for training programs that are de-
43 signed—beyond practice—to provide diagnostic feedback to participants
44 about how to make judgments of nonverbal behavior. In Beck and Feld-
45 man (1989), adolescents randomly assigned to receive feedback about the
46 accuracy of their judgments subsequently outperformed those who re-
47 ceived only the same amount of practice in judging the same stimuli.
48 Feldman, Philippot, and Custrini (1992) documented that feedback about
49 whether responses were correct or incorrect improved children's accu-
50 racy in repeating judgments of a set of facial expressions. Grinspan *et al.*
51 (2003) demonstrated improvement in children's accuracy judging facial
52 expressions following group exercises illustrating examples and compo-
53 nents of facial expressions. Gillis, Bernieri, and Wooten (1995) examined
54 the impact of two types of feedback on judgments of interpersonal rap-
55 port. They found that cognitive feedback—that is, receiving general infor-
56 mation about the nonverbal cues that are typically diagnostic in
57 predicting rapport—benefited only relatively mechanical and purified
58 judgments in which participants viewed bar charts that illustrated the lev-
59 els of those cues. However, participants who judged actual nonverbal
60 behavior, appearing in videotaped dyadic interactions, benefited from
61 outcome feedback—that is, receiving the criterion variable which was the
62 targets' own ratings of their interpersonal rapport in this study. This study
63 corroborates other evidence that training programs instructing participants
64 about diagnostic cues do not appear measurably to improve nonverbal
65 decoding accuracy (Costanzo, 1992).

66 Taken together, prior research suggests that participants who make ge-
67 stalt judgments of nonverbal behavior benefit less from instructional mate-
68 rials regarding the diagnostic cues, and more from feedback about the
69 correct responses that allows them to make personal sense of the cues con-
70 tained within stimuli. Thus, in light of the promise of this approach to
71 training in emotion judgments, it is worthwhile to expand the body of
72 empirical support. A further innovation of the current study is to provide
73 participants with additional outcome feedback that contains potentially
74 valuable information about the stimuli beyond whether or not participants'
75 initial responses were correct. In addition to providing correct responses,
76 the present design also provides an indication of how clear or obvious the
77 item is to other perceivers, by indicating the accuracy norms for each stim-
78 ulus item. Such information may benefit participants by focusing greater
79 attention on those items that contain cues clearly intelligible to peers, and
80 suggesting relatively less focus on the potentially ambiguous or unclear
81 cues contained in those items that are less readily understood by peers.
82 The presence of this additional information may allow participants to learn
83 more efficiently, and to develop consistent interpretations of clear cues
84 with less risk of reading signal into the noise of idiosyncratic expressions.

85 *Hypothesis 1:* Emotion recognition accuracy improves with outcome
86 feedback.

87 Given ample evidence for improvement due to practice, even in the
88 absence of feedback, a simple pre-post design does not provide unambig-
89 uous support for the value of outcome feedback to improve emotion rec-
90 ognition accuracy. Thus, to provide potentially stronger evidence, the
91 current study uses a training context in which outcome feedback for mul-
92 tiple types of emotion judgments can be compared, to suggest that
93 improvement results from more than practice and task exposure alone.
94 Cross-cultural judgments provide one such opportunity.

95 *Cultural Learning*

96 Given the increasingly diverse nature of society, it is increasingly impor-
97 tant for individuals to recognize emotional expressions in members of
98 other cultures. In spite of its basic universality (e.g., Ekman, 1972, 1992;
99 Haidt & Keltner, 1999; Izard, 1971; Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997;
100 but see also Russell, 1994), the expression of emotion may nonetheless
101 vary across cultural groups. Recent research documents an in-group

102 advantage in the communication of emotion, whereby judgments of emo-
103 tions expressed by members of one's own cultural in-group are generally
104 more accurate than judgments of emotions expressed by members of a
105 cultural out-group (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002b, 2003). To explain this
106 phenomenon, a recently proposed dialect theory of emotion (Elfenbein &
107 Ambady, 2003) suggests that the communication of emotion is a uni-
108 versal language with dialects that differ across cultures (Rosenthal *et al.*,
109 1979; Tomkins & McCarter, 1964). Cultural groups may vary subtly in
110 their pattern of emotionally expressive cues, and individuals are likely to
111 be more accurate when judging emotions expressed using a familiar style.

112 Consistent with the work reviewed above that demonstrates the value
113 of practice, past research shows that accuracy in judging foreign emotional
114 expressions tends to improve with greater cross-cultural exposure (Ducci,
115 Arcuri, W/Georgis, & Sineshaw, 1982; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002b, 2003;
116 Sorensen, 1975). However, such work has been cross-sectional and obser-
117 vational, and could reflect self-selection. That is, participants in these stud-
118 ies generally chose their degree of cross-cultural exposure to other groups.
119 More direct evidence would come from an intervention study in which
120 accuracy can be measured before and after increases in familiarity.

121 For these reasons, the current study examines outcome feedback in
122 the context of cross-cultural emotion judgments. Beyond cultural training,
123 such research is designed to help evaluate the value of outcome feedback
124 in nonverbal judgments more generally. Instruction about correct res-
125 sponses is presumably most helpful when individuals judge emotions that
126 are ambiguous and unfamiliar. Because dialect theory argues that stimu-
127 lus materials from different cultures use subtly different expressive cues,
128 instruction is presumably more helpful and usable for expressions that are
129 culturally less familiar because such instruction likely contains more no-
130 vel and potentially unknown information about emotional expression
131 style. Although feedback about expressions from one's own cultural
132 group certainly provides judges with the potential for learning, this poten-
133 tial is likely greater for feedback about expressions from a different cul-
134 tural group. Because practice alone is unlikely to be a complete
135 explanation if there are differential results for outcome feedback across
136 the cultural origin of stimulus materials—in a repeated-measures design
137 in which practice is constant across types of stimulus materials—such dif-
138 ferential results would further support the value of outcome feedback.

139 *Hypothesis 2:* There is greater improvement in emotion recognition fol-
140 lowing outcome feedback for expressions that originate

141 from a cultural group that is relatively less familiar given
142 the participant's own family cultural background.

143 **Method**

144 *Stimulus Materials*

145 Stimuli were two sets of black-and-white photographs of facial expres-
146 sions from the USA (Ekman & Friesen, 1976) and Mainland China (Wang
147 & Markham, 1999). Each set was previously developed and validated in
148 its country of origin by researchers from that country, for high recognition
149 levels and for intensity ratings higher for the intended emotion category
150 than any alternative. The two sets did differ in the methods the research-
151 ers used to elicit the facial expressions. Whereas Ekman and Friesen's
152 posers moved specific facial muscles to portray prototypical expressions
153 of emotion, Wang and Markham's posers attempted to pose an appropri-
154 ate expression for each emotional state. However, both are arguably consis-
155 tent with local emotional expression norms, because Ekman and
156 Friesen developed their model of prototypical expressions (e.g., Ekman &
157 Friesen, 1978) within the United States. In all other respects, the Chinese
158 photos were designed to match the US, and both collections have previ-
159 ously been used together in cross-cultural emotion research (Elfenbein &
160 Ambady, 2003; Markham & Wang, 1996).

161 Two matched sets of photographs served as stimulus materials for the
162 training and testing blocks. To avoid specific item confounds, half of the
163 participants viewed Set A during the training session and Set B during the
164 testing session, and the other half vice versa. Each set contained 40 pho-
165 tos, two males and two females from each of the two cultures displaying
166 each of five basic emotions identified as having unique, highly recogniz-
167 able signal characteristics: anger, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise
168 (Ekman, 1972). Expressions of the sixth basic emotion, disgust, were ex-
169 cluded due to the small number of disgust poses contained in the Chinese
170 stimulus set that had high normative recognition levels. Photos of given
171 emotions for the two cultural groups were carefully selected so that the
172 matched sets were comparable in terms of similar in-group normative
173 recognition levels (USA $M = 88.6\%$, $SD = 8.8\%$, China $M = 87.3\%$,
174 $SD = 9.8\%$), which suggests the two sets have similar strength of signal
175 value to perceivers in their country of origin. Across the two sets, there
176 was a consistent number of photographs per individual poser (13 posers

177 from each cultural group for an average of three photographs each poser).
178 Due to limitations in available items from the photograph collections, in
179 order to maintain the balanced design (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002a; Mat-
180 sumoto, 2002) one item was repeated in Sets A and B for each cultural
181 group.

182 *Participants*

183 Seventy-five students at a large university in the United States participated
184 in exchange for course credit. To classify participants' backgrounds, a
185 questionnaire following the judgment task asked for participants' gender,
186 their family's country of origin, their own country of birth, and the coun-
187 try of birth of their mother, father, maternal grandparents, and paternal
188 grandparents. *Participants of Chinese ancestry* ($n = 38$, 17 males and 21
189 females) listed their family origin and their birthplace or that of parents
190 and/or grandparents as China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. *Participants of*
191 *non-Chinese ancestry* ($n = 37$, 19 males and 18 females) identified their
192 cultural background, own birthplace and birthplace of parents and grand-
193 parents as anywhere other than China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. Data were
194 excluded from analysis for participants reporting their family origin, birth-
195 place or that of parents and/or grandparents as non-Chinese regions in
196 East Asia, i.e., Cambodia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, or Vietnam. Coding the
197 number of generations in which participants and their families lived in
198 the United States—with a zero for those who had themselves immigrated,
199 one for those whose parents had generated, and two for those whose
200 grandparents had immigrated—the average generation for participants of
201 Chinese origin was 0.58 ($SD = 0.57$, range 0–2).

202 *Judgment Task*

203 Participants viewed stimuli via a computerized task programmed using
204 SuperLab (1997). The session began with two *familiarization trials* con-
205 taining facial expressions from India (Mandal, 1987), after which partici-
206 pants could ask questions or indicate readiness to continue. The
207 subsequent *training session* contained two screens for each photograph.
208 First, participants viewed the photograph, which remained on the screen
209 until the participant entered a multiple-choice judgment of the intended
210 emotion. Following this judgment, a feedback screen appeared with the
211 photograph and additional information: the intended emotional category
212 and in-group accuracy norms: "[Intended category]. In [the USA/China],
213 this photograph is considered [easy/medium/difficult, (normative %

214 score)],” with the word “easy” for photographs with normative scores
215 90% and higher, “medium” 80–89%, and “difficult” below 80%. Partici-
216 pants pressed any key to continue from this screen to the next photo-
217 graph. Training sessions used all photographs in one stimulus set either A
218 or B, in a randomized order differing for each participant. Subsequently,
219 participants took part in the *testing session* using all photographs in the
220 other stimulus set B or A, following the same protocol except without
221 feedback screens. In light of evidence that the language of administration
222 can impact the cross-cultural judgment of emotional expressions (Mat-
223 sumoto & Assar, 1992), all instructions were in English.

224 Percentage accuracy scores analyzed below indicate the proportion
225 of stimuli labeled with the intended category, as defined by the research-
226 ers who created the stimulus materials. Key results are also reported in
227 terms of unbiased hit rates, which correct for possible participant biases
228 in the base rate of selecting each emotional category (Wagner, 1993).
229 Analyses exclude expressions of happiness due to a ceiling effect (98.8%
230 accuracy).

231

Results

232 Table 1 summarizes emotion recognition accuracy values across groups
233 and sessions. Analyses used a 2 (Judge Cultural Group: Chinese ancestry,
234 non-Chinese ancestry)×2(Judge Sex)×2(Session: training versus testing
235 session)×2(Expressor Cultural Group: China, USA)×4(Emotion: anger,
236 fear, sadness, surprise) ANOVA with repeated measures on the Session,
237 Expressor Group, and Emotion factors.

238 Participants of Chinese and non-Chinese ancestry did not differ in
239 overall emotion recognition accuracy, $F(1, 71) = 1.99, p = .16$. Partici-
240 pants—all residing in the USA—recognized American expressions more
241 accurately than Chinese expressions, $F(1, 71) = 5.93, p < .02, r = .28$, al-
242 though stimulus materials had comparable normative values in their re-
243 gion of origin. Overall accuracy varied across emotions, $F(3,$
244 $213) = 27.01, p < .01$, with surprise the state most accurately understood
245 and fear the least. Some emotions were more clearly understood when
246 expressed by one cultural group than another (Emotion×Expressor Cul-
247 ture, $F(3, 213) = 26.81, p < .01$), with fear more accurately understood
248 from Chinese expressions and anger, sadness, and surprise more accu-
249 rately understood from US expressors.

250 Supporting Hypothesis 1, participants were more accurate during
251 testing session than the initial training session, $F(1, 71) = 14.97, p < .01$,

TABLE 1

**Recognition Accuracy for Judgments of Emotional Expressions from
China and the United States by Participants of Chinese and non-Chinese
Ancestry during Training and Testing Sessions**

Emotion	Training Block		Testing Block		Grand Total (%)	Improvement across Sessions	
	Expressions (%)		Expressions (%)			Expressions (%)	
	China	USA	China	USA		China	USA
<i>Non-Chinese Ancestry</i>							
Angry	69.0	86.3	72.8	92.2	80.1	3.7	5.9
Fearful	78.6	62.5	83.3	64.9	72.3	4.8	2.4
Sad	65.5	78.6	77.4	81.0	75.6	11.9	2.4
Surprised	83.9	87.1	86.9	92.8	87.7	3.0	5.7
M	74.3	78.6	80.1	82.7	78.9	5.8	4.1
<i>Chinese Ancestry</i>							
Angry	64.2	73.0	70.3	77.7	71.3	6.1	4.7
Fearful	73.6	56.8	74.3	65.5	67.6	0.7	8.8
Sad	73.6	73.6	73.6	88.5	77.4	0.0	14.9
Surprised	86.5	88.4	83.1	91.9	87.5	-3.4	3.5
M	74.5	73.0	75.3	80.9	75.9	0.8	8.0
Total	74.4	75.8	77.7	81.8	77.4	3.3	6.0

Note: Values in boldface/italicized print represent the overall improvement between the training and testing sessions for those emotional expressions originating from a cultural group more/less distant, respectively, from the participant's family cultural background.

252 $r = .42$ (unbiased hit rates, $F(1, 71) = 12.61, p < .01, r = .39$). Providing
 253 support for Hypothesis 2 was a significant interaction of Session \times Expressor
 254 Cultural Group \times Judge Cultural Group, $F(1, 71) = 5.44, p < .03,$
 255 $r = .27$, such that the relative advantage for expressions more culturally
 256 similar to one's background was greater in the initial training session
 257 than the subsequent testing session. This result reached only marginal
 258 significance using unbiased hit rates, $F(1, 71) = 2.82, p < .10, r = .20$.
 259 Figure 1 illustrates this interaction, in which there was relatively greater
 260 improvement from participants of Chinese rather than non-Chinese ancestry
 261 for stimulus materials from the USA, and relatively greater improve-
 262 ment from participants of non-Chinese rather than Chinese ancestry for

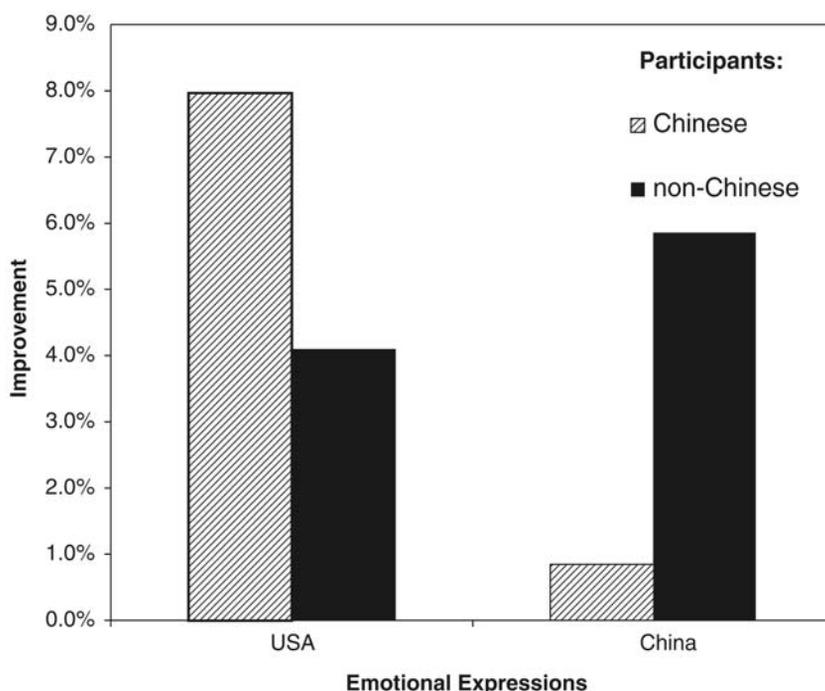


Figure 1. Mean improvement in accuracy of emotion recognition as a function of the origin of emotional expressions and the cultural background of participants.

263 stimulus materials from China. Although a visual inspection of Table 1
 264 suggests some fluctuation in this effect across emotions, in particular with
 265 a stronger effect for judgments of sadness and fear, a statistical test did
 266 not reveal differences across emotions in the magnitude of Hypothesis 2
 267 (Emotion \times Session \times Expressor Cultural Group \times Judge Cultural Group, $F(3,$
 268 $213) = 1.94, p = .12$). No other terms were significant.

269 Additional ANOVA models examining the training and testing ses-
 270 sions separately revealed a trend of relative advantage in judging expres-
 271 sions originating from China for Chinese participants and from the USA
 272 for non-Chinese participants in the initial training session (conventional
 273 hit rates, $F(1, 71) = 4.64, p < .04, r = .25$, unbiased hit rates, $F(1,$
 274 $71) = 5.75, p < .02, r = .27$), but not in the subsequent testing session
 275 (conventional hit rates, $F(1, 71) = 1.16, p = .29, r = .13$, unbiased hit
 276 rates, $F(1, 71) = 0.003, p = .96, r = .01$).

277

Discussion

278 This preliminary study adds to existing evidence that outcome feedback
279 can improve the accuracy of judgments of nonverbal behavior. These
280 findings support the promise of such training in recognizing emotions in
281 facial expressions, a skill studied widely by psychologists. Extending past
282 findings, the study examined the impact of feedback that includes infor-
283 mation about correct answers as well as clarity levels of stimuli.

284 Past research has demonstrated that participants provided with feed-
285 back about the accuracy of their emotion recognition judgments outper-
286 form those given practice alone (Beck & Feldman, 1989). The cross-
287 cultural application of the current study further suggests—although it does
288 not conclusively demonstrate—that improvements in judgment accuracy
289 following outcome feedback likely resulted from more than practice
290 alone. Improvement on each set of stimulus materials was greater for par-
291 ticipants from cultural groups less familiar given their own family back-
292 ground. In such cases, outcome feedback presumably provides greater
293 novel information. Likewise, these findings provide suggestive empirical
294 support for a dialect theory of emotion, by providing evidence for the
295 cross-cultural learning of emotion recognition judgments. The finding that
296 participants achieved greater improvements with expressions from less
297 familiar cultural groups supports the idea that familiarity with culturally
298 specific elements of emotional expression improves recognition accuracy.
299 Although the amount of actual cultural learning in the current design was
300 limited compared with meaningful longitudinal interpersonal exposure,
301 the study addresses self-selection concerns plaguing past research on cul-
302 tural learning, in that participants did not choose their level of cross-cultural
303 exposure.

304 *Limitations and Further Work*

305 This study has important weaknesses that should be addressed in future
306 research. In particular, the stimulus materials were selected because they
307 were readily accessible from previous studies, and participants were re-
308 cruited from university student convenience samples. First, the availability
309 of stimulus materials limited the study to static facial expressions. Dy-
310 namic channels of nonverbal communication such as vocal tones, body
311 and facial movement need to be examined as well in future work. Fur-
312 ther, stimulus materials limited the number of learning trials to 20 photo-
313 graphs per cultural group, and future work should provide more intensive
314 training. Improvement over such a brief period suggests the great poten-

315 tial power of outcome feedback. Indeed, the relative advantage in judging
316 expressions originating from China for Chinese participants and from the
317 USA for non-Chinese participants in the initial training session appeared
318 to disappear by the subsequent testing session. The current test was even
319 conservative in that learning likely took place over the course of the
320 training trials (Beck & Feldman, 1989), and so the baseline comparison
321 was already slightly inflated from a true baseline.

322 The use of pre-existing stimulus materials provided an additional lim-
323 itation in that the expressions originating from the USA appear to be
324 more pure, intense, and easier to decode. Although normative recognition
325 levels were similar as tested in the country in which each set was devel-
326 oped, the multiple-choice format for establishing stimulus norms allows
327 for variance in the quality of portrayals, in that a photograph would be
328 considered to be a good representation of an emotional state as long as it
329 excludes other plausible alternatives.¹ In the current study, participants
330 were more accurate overall in judging the American expressions and
331 demonstrated greater improvement in their judgments of American
332 expressions. It seems likely that the method used in the US to create stim-
333 uli resulted in more clear exemplars of basic emotions, and the more eas-
334 ily recognizable cues facilitated the learning process. The particular
335 pattern that emerged—in which there was greater learning for Chinese
336 stimuli by non-Chinese rather than Chinese participants and greater learn-
337 ing for USA stimuli by Chinese rather than non-Chinese partici-
338 pants—would be unlikely to result if the Chinese stimuli did not also
339 contain sufficiently reliable cues to permit learning. However, future re-
340 search should use stimulus materials that are more closely matched and
341 comparable with respect to reliability and intensity levels, the method of
342 emotion elicitation, and a range of positive and negative states. In the
343 current study, the culture of expressors and the method of creating the
344 stimuli are confounded with each other, which limits the interpretation of
345 the results.

346 Because the stimulus materials were intended to portray clear expres-
347 sions, the resulting judgment task was relatively unchallenging compared
348 with the ambiguity of understanding expressions in daily life. The stimuli
349 used in further research should be intense enough to portray clear and
350 valid expressive cues, yet not so intense to result in ceiling effects that
351 may serve to hide or dampen the effects of learning. At the extreme, the
352 exclusion of expressions of happiness due to near-perfect recognition lim-
353 its the generalization of the current results to three negative emotional
354 states and one neutral state. Because negative emotions are the most like-
355 ly to be inhibited (Ekman, 1972), the current findings may differ when

356 tested with positive emotions. In fact, because the results for anger run in
357 the direction opposite of the predicted interaction, the current find-
358 ings—applying to expressions of fear, sadness, and surprise—may best
359 describe submissive emotional categories.²

360 A further limitation is that expressors' cultural background was
361 apparent due to visible ethnic differences, and this may have impacted
362 the current results. On the one hand, it may seem unlikely that these re-
363 sults stemmed from ethnic bias—greater motivation when judging one's
364 own cultural group (Kilbride & Yarczower, 1983; Markham & Wang,
365 1996)—in that one would not expect outcome feedback to increase par-
366 ticipants' motivation to understand expressions relatively more from a
367 more culturally distant group. On the other hand, it is possible that the
368 outcome feedback provided participants with greater confidence in
369 decoding such expressions. On a related note, participants may have
370 been more curious about the out-group expressions and their greater
371 attention—rather than the presence of unfamiliar cues that are learnable
372 via outcome feedback—could have contributed to the current results.³
373 There may be lesser potential for contrast effects in further research that
374 includes stimuli that do not allow clear identification of group member-
375 ship or using a between-subjects design in which participants view stimu-
376 lus materials from only one cultural group.⁴

377 Further, researchers examining cultural learning should ensure that
378 stimulus materials are representative in portraying culturally acquired
379 components in the style of emotional expression across groups. The cur-
380 rent study inferred the presence of culturally specific elements of style in
381 the stimulus materials from the presence of in-group advantage in previ-
382 ous research using the same stimuli (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003). How-
383 ever, further work should document explicitly the presence of these
384 stylistic differences. It is possible that the clearer evidence for the second
385 hypothesis in the case of expressions of sadness and fear, rather than an-
386 ger and surprise, could indicate stronger cultural differences in the diag-
387 nostic cues contained within the sadness and fear stimuli. The presumed
388 mechanism for greater learning via outcome feedback is that it provides
389 participants with information that helps them to form clear decision rules
390 regarding the emotional states associated with particular configurations of
391 expressive cues. This mechanism can be tested directly, for example by
392 using training stimuli in which culturally variable cues are present vs. ab-
393 sent, and documenting whether or not cultural learning is greater in the
394 case of training materials containing culturally variable cues. For exam-
395 ple, Elfenbein, Beaupré, Leveque, and Hess (2005) recently developed
396 stimuli from Quebec, Canada and Gabon, Africa using a consistent elici-

397 tation method resulting in expressions of similar clarity, intensity, and nat-
398 uralism, in which cultural groups differed in subtle aspects of their
399 expressive style for many of the emotional categories tested. These
400 expressions can be paired with stimuli from the Montreal Set of Facial
401 Expressions (MSFE; Beaupré & Hess, 2005) in which members of the
402 same ethnic groups took part in a directed facial action task so that pos-
403 ers used a standard configuration of facial muscles regardless of their cul-
404 tural background. By randomly assigning participants to judge one of
405 these two types of expressions during the training block—all of whom
406 judge culturally variable expressions in the testing block—the MSFE train-
407 ing condition can serve as a control for practice, motivation, curiosity,
408 and other potentially confounding factors that serve as alternate explana-
409 tions to cultural learning.⁵

410 After confirming the core findings of the present study using im-
411 proved methodology, further research could examine the boundary condi-
412 tions for the effect. For example, it is not clear the duration of any
413 learning that takes place during such a laboratory study.

414 Future research on cross-cultural learning should also sample partici-
415 pants more precisely with respect to the origins of stimulus materials. In
416 the current study, participants all resided in a major city in the United
417 States. Participants of Chinese family background certainly had exposure
418 to the emotional expressions of Caucasian Americans, and participants of
419 non-Chinese background may have had some exposure to Chinese emo-
420 tional expressions as well. Given the likely asymmetry in this exposure, it
421 is curious that Chinese participants displayed greater learning of Cauca-
422 sian American expressions than non-Chinese participants did for Chinese
423 expressions. One can speculate that this pattern—if not created by differ-
424 ences in the clarity of stimuli—may reflect differences in motivation on
425 the part of participants, given that Chinese participants likely have more
426 incentive to understand non-Chinese emotional expressions than the re-
427 verse. A setting with minimal cross-group contact would make for a clear-
428 er test of the current hypotheses. Sampling participants for future research
429 on cross-cultural learning should also include settings with meaningful
430 contact and genuine stakes for those involved, for example in overseas
431 work assignments. Real-world cultural learning is likely to be a long-term
432 and interpersonally involved process⁶, rather than the result of explicit
433 feedback on a series of laboratory stimuli. However, real-world contact
434 can also present its own barriers to learning, for example politeness on the
435 part of social interaction partners who may be reluctant to indicate when
436 it is clear an attribution error has been made (e.g., Swann, Stein-Seroussi,
437 & McNulty, 1992). If a perceiver does not act outwardly on a given attri-

438 bution, then there may not be a chance for social interaction to provide
 439 feedback on the judgment, even if interaction partners are so inclined.
 440 These factors suggest that there may still be a role for explicit feedback to
 441 generate improvement in the ability to understand emotional expressions.

442 Overall, with important qualifications, the current findings suggest
 443 promise for the future of training programs designed to improve the accu-
 444 racy of nonverbal judgments. This is a worthwhile goal given extensive
 445 evidence for the day-to-day value of such accuracy, as well as the recent
 446 surge of interest in the perception of emotion given its inclusion under
 447 the umbrella of emotional intelligence (e.g., Matthews, Zeidner, & Rob-
 448 erts, 2002; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001). Further, in light
 449 of increasing cultural diversity in schools, workplaces, and communities,
 450 society can benefit from researchers identifying and validating methods to
 451 overcome challenges to cross-cultural understanding.

453

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