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The Impact of Cognitive Demands on Attention to Facial versus Situational Cues When Judging Emotions

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ABSTRACT

What information guides how perceivers evaluate people's emotional experiences? Some regard expressive facial cues to be the critical source of information whereas others argue that situational cues exert the decisive impact. This research explored an alternative view suggesting that both information sources are of consequence and that cognitive demands placed on perceivers play a pivotal role in determining what information they use. To test this view, perceivers were given discrepant combinations of facial and situational information about people's emotional experiences and identified what emotions they felt. Facial information influenced perceivers' judgments most often when demands were placed on their cognitive resources. In contrast, situational information had the greatest impact when cognitive demands were minimized. These findings shed light on the debate surrounding the issue of facial versus situational dominance and the process by which emotion judgments are made.

KEYWORDS

Emotion Perception, Facial Cues, Cognitive Demand

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