

WHY EMOTIONALITY CANNOT EQUAL SOCIALITY: REPLY TO BUCK

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We are grateful that Buck (1991) has reviewed the Chovil (1991) study and presented the most frequent counterarguments to the emerging communicative view of facial displays. This exchange grants us the opportunity to articulate not only the differences between emotion and communicative views of facial displays, but also the reasons why a communicative perspective is more in accord with everyday behavior as well as contemporary accounts of the evolution of signalling.

Buck addresses the Chovil (1991) study (and others like it) along three main lines: (a) sociality need not be potentiating; (b) sociality equals emotionality; (c) phylogenesis implies emotional views of faces. We respond to each in turn:

(a) Sociality is not always potentiating. Buck argues that a communicative view implies that facial displays are always enhanced by social factors and reconciles discrepancies among various studies by noting differences in stimuli and the relationship between displayer and observer. We suggest that no communicative view argues that facial displays must increase in number or intensity with increasing sociality. Facial displays are a means by which we communicate with others. Like words and utterances, they are more likely to be emitted when there is a potential recipient, when they are useful in conveying the particular information, and when that information is pertinent or appropriate to the social interaction. The increased sociality in the Chovil (1991) study led to a greater frequency of displays, we believe, because the more social situations were closer approximations of full face-to-face interaction.

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(b) Sociality equals emotionality. This is Buck's strongest criticism of a communicative view of faces. As he states:

Manipulations of sociality will naturally be judged by subjects to be manipulations of emotion . . . In general, I suggest that any situation that is judged to be "social" will also be judged to be "emotional." (p.11)

We can think of numerous counterexamples:

1. People are often happier when others leave the room.
2. Children cry when their caretakers leave and stop when they return.
3. One's unhappiness at bad news is often ameliorated by the presence of another.
4. We are often more frightened at the prospect of confronting others than when we actually confront them.

In each of these cases, emotionality and sociality are not covariant, but independent or reciprocal. This is true regardless of how broadly one defines "emotion."

Experimental evidence is also available from two studies that measured sociality and emotional experience. Both demonstrate their separability. In the first, sociality affected facial displays when emotion was statistically controlled (Fridlund, Sabini, Hedlund, Schaut, Shenker, & Knauer, 1990); in the second, manipulation of sociality did not affect reported emotion (Fridlund, 1991b).

Buck further argues that sociality affects faces via changes in emotion. Thus it must follow that sociality cannot modify facial expressions except insofar as it affects emotion. His claim that emotionality equals sociality creates a contradiction, because he also stipulates:

Under some conditions of personal relationship and type of emotion, the presence of others has a facilitating effect upon display and under other conditions the effect is inhibitory. (p. 6)

Thus, for Buck, sociality affects display via emotion, but for a given type of relationship and emotion, sociality can inhibit or facilitate displays.

Buck also endorses the Ekman and Friesen (1969) notion of "display rules" to explain differences in facial displays found across different studies. But the "display rules" notion requires the separability of emotion and sociality, with the faces instigated by the former and mediated by the latter.

The display rules concept stipulates that individuals can alter spontaneous faces by faking or exaggerating an absent emotion, minimizing an actual one, or masking one's natural expression with a substitute. Consequently, display rules can only be operative if two individuals show different facial displays while having the same emotion. To our knowledge, this criterion has never been demonstrated in any display-rules study (see reanalysis of Ekman-Friesen's "Japanese-American" study by Fridlund, 1991a; 1991c).

There is yet another problem. The "display rules" concept combines deception terminology ("exaggeration", "masking") with neurological constructs like "inhibition" in order to explain virtually any facial display that does not coincide with the icon-like facial stereotypes of the emotion theorist. The result is ad hoc labelling of faces as "authentic" and "inauthentic" or, to use Buck's distinction, "spontaneous" and "symbolic." Is a poker-face really an "inhibited" face? Or is it a face that displays a message of authentic sobriety or neutrality? When the emotion theorist expects a weak smile or even a grimace, is a broad smile an "exaggeration" or a "mask"? Or is it one's spontaneous display of politeness and interpersonal regard?

The position that there is display of "real emotion" with a dissimulative social overlay has been traced to thinkers like Rousseau and Freud (Fridlund, 1991c). What is transpiring, simply, is that one person is providing messages to another. In the emotions view, only in dissimulation or with conscious intent do our faces signify messages about things other than emotion. In contrast, we believe that facial displays almost never signify emotions. Typically, they are messages about attitudes, opinions, affirmations, ruminations, blocked goals, and social conventions—whether present, past, or anticipated. They also act as syntactic markers, greeting signals, or provide listener feedback to speakers (e.g., Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986; Brunner, 1979; Chovil, in press; 1991; Ekman, 1979; Kendon & Ferber, 1973; Ortony & Turner, 1990; Smith, 1989).

One could of course suggest that emotion underlies all of these, but this would create a further problem—a confusion of sign and signal. Here's an example: We are asked what we think about Charles Manson and we wrinkle our nose in response. The emotion theorists might say that the facial display reflected our emotions about Manson. But let's look at the verbal analog. We utter the word "Creep" in response to the question. To be consistent the expletive must reflect our emotions, or at least should be analyzed with respect to our emotions. The fact that we were asked to comment about Manson would be irrelevant. Extending the logic would lead to an absurdity: the contents of our speech refer only to our state when we speak, never to the referents in those contents.

This predicament is redoubled when it comes to recollection or anticipation. Suppose that we decide to tell another about how angry we were two weeks ago. Would the facial display we make while talking reflect the anger we feel when remembering our anger, or would it refer, like our words, to the anger we felt?

The spontaneous vs. symbolic dichotomy for facial displays does not allow that facial displays, no matter what they convey, can be both spontaneous and symbolic. In the Chovil (1991) study, when people heard others' close call stories, they spontaneously winced and grimaced. We submit that the wincing and grimaces are another way of saying, "that's scary" or "that's awful." The "that" is the event in the story, and the listener's faces are as referential as any words.

(c) That phylogenesis implies emotional view of faces. Finally, we propose that Buck's idea of limbic systems in intimate communication precludes the possibility of deception or misinterpretation. Krebs and Dawkins (1984) spoke of the ecology of social interactants who "manipulate" others with their displays and how those who would be manipulated (i.e., who would respond to) others' displays would do well to know the other's intentions for them. Signalling and susceptibility to signalling should thus coevolve, genetically and culturally, within the constraints of deception and skepticism. All serve our needs to communicate our social intent and to know another's, both in the conversation at hand and in interactions to come. Our "feelings" are beside the point. The coevolution of displays and vigilance for them underlies the behavioral-ecology view of human facial displays (Fridlund, 1991a; 1991c), and their communicative analysis. This view supplants emotion theories of faces (Fridlund, in press). It also accords with modern evolutionary thinking on the functions of signalling, and squares with observation of everyday social commerce.

In conclusion, we have tried to indicate the limitations of emotion views of facial displays, and to offer an alternative perspective which accounts for the variety of facial displays observed in social interaction. Obviously, there are many unanswered questions and the picture will likely become complex. By raising some issues and offering an alternative perspective, we hope that others will look more closely at how people use their faces.

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