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Behind the Mask:

**Recognising Genuine and Masked Expressions of Emotion:
The Effect of Therapists' Training and Experience**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand**

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2017

ABSTRACT

Accurately recognising facial expressions of emotion can enhance communication and the development of a therapeutic relationship. When emotions are masked or inhibited, duplicity can be betrayed through evidence of leakage of the underlying emotion occurring in the face. Being able to discern when emotions are masked or concealed may also contribute to therapy outcomes by alerting the therapist to areas requiring further exploration. Despite a large body of research on facial expression of emotion, there is a dearth of research into therapists' emotion recognition competencies or ability to detect deception. This study sought to answer the following questions: First, is recognition of facial emotional expressions, including masked expressions, enhanced by training? Second, does clinical experience impact on emotion recognition ability? Finally, does training increase the ability to discern authentic from falsified expressions? In Study 1, 43 clinical psychologists were recruited for the study and undertook an emotion recognition and deception detection task. Twenty-two of the participants completed training in emotion recognition using the Subtle Expression Training Tool (SETT; <http://www.paulekman.com>). In Study 2, a partial replication of Study 1 was conducted with 25 participants, and an updated version of the SETT. Results for recognition of emotion were mixed, with partial support found for the hypothesis that training would enhance recognition ability. Training was effective for improving recognition of single emotion expressions, but had less impact on recognition for masked or leaked expressions, with the exception of sadness. Efficacy of training was also dependent on experience level, with more experienced participants benefiting the most. All participants were able to detect emotional deception at levels above chance prior to training. Following training, those with a high level of experience demonstrated the greatest improvement in deception detection, with half of this group accurately detecting deception at levels significantly above chance ($M = .74$).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been privileged to have had the support of many wise friends, colleagues, family, and affirming mentors throughout my thesis journey. First and foremost, my heartfelt thanks go to my supervisors, Associate Professor John Podd, Dr. Stephen Hill, and Dr. Shane Harvey.

John, I cannot thank you enough. You have been a constant source of encouragement, wisdom, and humour, with an awe-inspiring wealth of knowledge and expertise. Thank you for your positive mentoring style, generous lashings of patience - particularly during the analysis stage, and the ease with which you restored my confidence when it was flagging. Thank you for keeping me on track by continuing to shine the light at the end of the tunnel. You are indeed a gifted supervisor.

To Stephen, thank you for your critical eye and your expert assistance with the analysis and results sections. And to Shane, I appreciate the many informal chats we shared that kept me passionate about the importance of researching emotion, which helped to keep me focused. I also thank Mr Malcolm Loudon and his technical skills which assisted me to analyse my signal detection results and his development of the emotion expression computer programme.

To my family and friends, you have all believed in my ability to complete this thesis, even when I doubted it myself. To my husband Wayne, thank you for your enduring patience and understanding. You had no idea what you were letting yourself in for when you agreed that my decision to complete a doctorate was a good idea. We were both naïve to the challenge that lay ahead of us. Words are not enough to convey the depth of my gratitude to you for your support – emotionally, financially, and your ability to always lift my spirits with your humour. To Michaela and Aimee, I

am deeply thankful for having two caring and thoughtful daughters. I am immensely proud of how you have both been inspired by my journey, and achieved your own academic successes. To my parents, Sandy and Jenny, thank you for instilling in me the work ethic necessary to undertake doctoral study.

I would also like to acknowledge the participants who willingly gave their time and engaged so sincerely in the emotion induction process used to create the stimuli for the main study. To all the psychologists who gave up two hours out of their busy schedules to participate in my study, I am most grateful.

Warm thanks to my work colleagues at the Massey Psychology Clinic. Each one of you, in your own way, through encouraging words in the tearoom or some sage advice, helped me to stay on track. I especially owe thanks to Senior Clinician, Jan Dickson, who supervised me throughout my internship which is an integral element of this doctoral degree. Jan, you are an absolute gem, and admired by all clinical students, past and present. I was most fortunate to have your guidance and unwavering support during the most difficult year of the doctorate.

Thank you to all my friends for your support, and to my clinical psychology student colleagues, who through climbing your own Everests, always offered appropriate encouragement. A very special thanks to Rachel Hooks, my fellow intern, for helping me retain my sanity during our intern year and for so willingly agreeing to the arduous task of reading my draft thesis.

I am also grateful for the financial assistance provided to me by Massey University (Doctoral Completion Scholarship) and the Massey Alumni (Doctoral Completion Scholarship).

To the Ekman Group who allowed me free access to their online training programme, the Subtle Emotion Training Tool (SETT), your generosity is most appreciated.

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