

Nonverbal Cues of Rejection in the Television Show *The Voice of Holland (Kids)*

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Abstract

This study examined whether children and adults show different cues of nonverbal behavior in a situation of rejection. In this particular case, a situation of rejection caused by participation on the television show *The Voice of Holland* or *The Voice of Holland Kids*. It was expected, that children would express feelings of rejection more clearly than adults. Furthermore, it was expected that children show cues of submissive and flight behavior, based on the ECSI-scale of Troisi and Moles (1999), more frequently than adults.

The results of this study did not indicate significant differences. There was no effect on contestant disappointment in relation to being rejected in *The Voice Kids* or *The Voice*. Moreover, there were no significant differences found between adults and children in relation to submissive or flight behavior.

Keywords: nonverbal communication; rejection; submissive and flight behavior.

Introduction

Correctly recognizing emotions is a skill that is highly important for human beings, and most important for successful interpersonal function (Carstensen, Gross & Fung, 1998). One has to know what others are feeling to respond appropriately to different situations since this will avoid negative outcomes and confrontations. However, reading emotions can be difficult when the person showing emotions grows older. Children tend to express their emotions more openly than adults and are therefore easier to understand (Fabes & Martin, 1991). In addition, a research conducted by Hubbard (2001) showed that children who are rejected show stronger facial and verbal expressions than children who have not experienced rejection very often.

According to Howarth, Guyer and Pérez-Edgar (2013), children expressed happiness when accepted, while disappointment occurred when a child was rejected.

Earlier research by Saarni (1982) and Shennum and Burgental (1982) showed that men express less emotion when they become older. In addition, research by Fabes and Martin (1991) was conducted in an experimental setting. The participants were asked to rate how often they would expect to see emotion in different age categories. They found that although men would become less expressive than women, in general children are more expressive than adults. Participants in their research stated that, overall, emotions were more often expressed by children than by adults. However, it remains unclear what results would be found when participants were actually showing emotions in a real life setting.

There is consistent evidence that certain emotions are recognized more easily; this is especially the case for positive emotions. Facial expressions of happiness are much more easily recognized than facial expressions of sadness or

anger (Leppänen & Hietanen, 2004). Some scholars argue that this is because people encounter positive emotions more often than negative emotions.

It is most likely that the expression of submission and flight behavior can be associated with rejection, an emotion which most people do not experience on a daily basis. Moreover, people do not witness other people being rejected in everyday situations very often. Therefore, it might be difficult to recognize emotions caused by rejection.

Research by Kraemer, Schaafsma, Swerts, Balsters and Vingerhoets (2010) support this idea moderately. Results of their research showed that participants who were excluded, an emotion similar to rejection, showed more flight behavior than participants who were included in a conversation. According to Troisi and Moles (1999) signs of flight behavior are: looking away or down, shutting the eyes, drawing the chin towards the chest, crouching and freezing of the body. Although the results of Kraemer et al., (2010) are not significant, it is expected that in our research, participants also express more signs of flight behavior. Since the research of Kraemer et al., (2010) was conducted in an experimental setting, display rules were very important and thus participants tried to mask their emotions.

This research might provide different results, because the study is conducted in a more natural setting whereby many people could see the rejection instead of two people as in the research of Kraemer et al., (2010). Since more people can see the rejection in this study, we expect adults to show more signs of social awareness and therefore masking their true emotions, while children are less experienced in masking their emotions, and they might show stronger flight responses.

According to Öhman (1986), it is likely that signs of submission will occur after an adult/child is rejected. Submissive displays form the basis of deference, it is a social expression that is expressed towards conspecifics (Sloman & Gilbert, 2009). Submissive displays consist of nonverbal cues, including nodding, lips drawn inside, mouth corners backwards, eye gaze avoidance, turning the head away, angling the head to the side, dropping the shoulders, shifting weight and positioning the feet, fear grinning, crouching, lowering the hind quarters, and screaming (Gilbert & McGuire, 1998; Troisi & Moles, 1999). Submissive behavior can be a sign of deference or respect as well as a reaction to threats from dominants. It can also be a sign of ambivalent and conflict with other potential response. We expect that adults as well as children show signals of submissive behavior, since they are all rejected by judges, who are the dominant factor during the program. However, we expect that children will show more submissive behavior, since adults are more aware of how they present themselves and therefore will more behave

according to the display rules and mask their true emotions.

As a result of the above, the following research questions are investigated during this study:

RQ1: Do children show more nonverbal cues when being rejected than adults? We expect that: children utter their feelings of rejection more than adults (H1).

RQ2: Do children show more cues of submissive or flight behavior when being rejected than adults? It is expected that adults utter less submissive and flight behavior when rejected than children (H2).

Stimuli collection

Selection Criteria and Procedure

Before the perception test started, the video clips had to be collected. In total, three years of *The Voice* were watched on RTL XL and 22 video clips were collected. Furthermore, two years of *The Voice Kids* were watched on RTL XL and 21 video clips were collected. All the collected video clips contained a rejection fragment. Since this research investigated the difference between adults and children when being rejected, gender was no criteria when collecting the videos. In total 43 video fragments (22 of *The Voice* and 21 of *The Voice Kids*) in which a contestant was rejected were collected.

Video Editing

After the video fragments had been collected, the videos were edited in order to be useful for the experiment. Approximately, the last 20 seconds of each fragment was cut because this part showed the first reaction of the contestant after the rejection. This first reaction is the moment when none of the chairs turned around and the contestant knows that he/she has not reached the next round. All the fragments were randomized and edited into one film.

Perception test & extreme sample analysis

Design

This experiment could be defined as a within subject design. Thus, every participant saw both the video clips of *The Voice* as well as the video clips of *The Voice Kids*. A within subject design was used because this is the most reliable way of measuring differences between groups and their behavior in this case after being rejected. The independent variables of this experiment were the collected videos of *The Voice* and *The Voice Kids* in which participants were rejected. The dependent variable is the rating of disappointment of the contestant by the participants in a perception test. Besides the perception tests, the extreme samples were analyzed on the cues of 'flight' and 'submission' behavior with the help of the ECSI-scale by Troisi and Moles (1999).

Participants

In total 30 Dutch participants participated in this study, with

an average age of 31.40 ($SD=14.67$). In total, 43.3% of the participants were men and 56.7% were women.

Materials

In total, 43 fragments (*The Voice* $N=22$ and *The Voice Kids* $N=21$) were collected and approximately the last 20 seconds of each fragment were cut. Thereafter, the fragments were randomized and pasted into one video.

A questionnaire was created in order to measure how disappointed, the participants thought, the contestants felt about the rejection. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions about demographical aspects like gender and age. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of the statement "*Indicate how disappointed you think the contestant feels after being rejected*". Below this statement a Likert Scale was presented, ranging from 1 (totally not disappointed) to 7 (totally disappointed) for each fragment (43 evaluations in total).

For analyzing and coding the fragments that showed extreme samples, the ECSI-scale of Troisi and Moles (1999) was used. The fragments were coded on 'flight' and 'submission' behavior. In order to measure those aspects, an Excel sheet was made. The aspect 'flight' consisted of look away, look down, shut, chin, crouch and still. The aspect 'submission' consisted of nod, lips in and mouth corners back.

Procedure

Perception test

Before the experiment started the experimenter invited the participants to sit down behind a computer in a silent area. Thereafter, the experimenter explained the participants what to do and they were asked to fill in the demographic questions of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the participants were told that in the following 30 minutes they had to watch 43 fragments of *The Voice* (Kids), without audio. In this way, the judgments of the participants were made on the basis of the nonverbal behavior of the contestants. In addition, it was mentioned that after each fragment the participant had to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale how disappointed they think the contestant felt after being rejected. After the experiment the experimenter thanked the participant for participating.

Extreme sample analysis

After the experimental part, the results of the questionnaire were analyzed and the fragments which scored the highest on disappointment were analyzed and coded with help of Troisi and Moles' (1999) ECSI-scale on the aspects 'flight' and 'submission'. In total six fragments were identified as extremes. On the one hand, three of them were rated very low which means that the contestant did not show disappointment. On the other hand, another three fragments were rated high which means that the contestant was very disappointed about the rejection.

Analysis

Perception test

Before the answers of the questionnaire were inserted in a SPSS-file, a mean score per fragment was first calculated on the basis of 30 judgments. Next, an SPSS-file was made which contained the columns; fragment number, the type of fragment (The Voice or The Voice Kids) and the mean score per fragment (based on 43 evaluations). In order to measure in what extent the fragments of The Voice were differently judged than the fragments of The Voice Kids, a T-test of independent measures was conducted.

Extreme sample analysis

Every sub aspect of flight and submission was coded for presence. A 0 meant 'not present', a 1 meant 'present'. To keep this judgment as objective as possible, the videos were independently judged by two group members. The results of the two judges were combined into one to measure the inter-rater reliability (kappa).

Results

Perception test

Although, the participants evaluated that the children felt more disappointed about the rejection ($M=4.78$, $SD=0.53$) than adults ($M=4.43$, $SD=1.14$), the results did not show a significant difference ($T(41)=1.31$, $p=.198$).

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations of the perception tests

	Mean	SD
The Voice	4.43	1,14
The Voice Kids	4.78	0,53

Extreme sample analysis

To determine the degree of intra-or inter-rater reliability a Kappa analysis is conducted. The Kappa showed ($\kappa =.54$, $p<.001$) which means that the similarity of the judgment in this research is 'average', but acceptable.

A two-way analysis of variance showed that there were no significant group effects for the behavioural categories flight behavior $p=.561$ and submission $p=.802$. Furthermore, there were no significant results on the individual cues within these two categories. Statistical outcomes for each cue; look down $p=.643$, shut $p=.519$, nod $p=.158$, lips in $p=.158$, mouth corners back $p=.519$. The other cues were not coded because they were not present in the fragment. However, a frequency analyses shows that submission is more present than flight behavior (not significant). Both adults as children show more submission (not significant).

Conclusion and Discussion

The main focus of this study was to investigate whether children and adults show different cues of nonverbal behavior in a situation of rejection. The researchers Fabes and Martin (1991) found that children express their emotions more openly than adults and are therefore easier to recognize. Therefore, we hypothesized that children utter their feelings of rejection more than adults (H1). Moreover, we hypothesized that that adults utter less submissive and flight behavior when rejected than children (H2). However, both hypotheses are rejected.

The results of the perception test showed no significant difference between adults and children in relation to their nonverbal behavior in rejection. This means that the participants did not evaluate the children as being more disappointed about the rejection than adults. However, from the results of the questionnaire, it was clear that participants found it easier to detect rejection among children than among adults, but that they also saw rejection in adult participants clearly. This indicates that there are in fact nonverbal signs that make clear what people feel when they are rejected.

The second hypothesis is also rejected; no significant results were found when it concerned flight behavior or submission. This is in contradiction with results found by Öhman (1986), Sloman and Gilbert (2009) and Gilbert and McGuire (1998) who found evidence towards showing more submissive behavior when someone is rejected.

There are several possible reasons that no significant results were found. The first reason, in the perception test, could be the relative small sample of participants in this study. One of the reasons this research was not capable to find any significant signs of flight or submissive behavior among the videos may be that the chosen number of clips was too limited.

Another reason might be that the participants considered that children already behaved according to the display rules too and therefore masked their feelings of submission and flight behavior. The children of The Voice are eight till fourteen years old, whereby a considerable amount of participants consist of the latter part of the age group. Therefore, these children can almost be seen as adolescents who are aware of their behavior and therefore hide their submission or flight behavior.

In addition, it could also be possible that the children received more positive feedback from the judges than adults, because the judges were afraid they would 'hurt' the feelings of the child and therefore expressed their professional feedback more nicely. As a result, children might be proud of themselves, because they were for example stimulated to try again next year. Therefore, it can be possible that no clear signs of submission or flight behavior were shown.

Furthermore, one should consider whether the audition clips of The Voice of Holland could be recalled by the participants. If one recalls that a contestant was very disappointed according to what he/she said, than it might be

possible that the participants did not look closely at the nonverbal behavior of the clip anymore. As a result, they filled in the questionnaire according to what they recall.

Although literature suggests that flight behavior and submission are indicators of rejection, this was not found in this current study. For the other part of the research, only six extreme clips, three of children and three of adults were analyzed. These extreme samples were judged by two researchers. Possibly, with a larger sample it would be easier to detect differences and find clear indicators of rejection.

A constraint on the method could be the use of the ECSI-scale of Troisi and Moles (1999). Is this scale sufficient enough for smaller details? No significant results were found, but the participants did see signs of rejection in the contestants of *The Voice*. Could it be that the signs of rejection are more detailed and cannot be measured with the ECSI-scale? This is an implication for further research; a more detailed description of rejection and its cues. By investigating the nonverbal behavioral categories, other indicators might arise. What do people see or focus on.

Another implication for further research is the enlargement of the target group. More video clips and more participants could make a difference.

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