

THE ANGER YOU SEE AND THE ANGER YOU DON'T: AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION STYLES IN FACIAL EMOTION PROCESSING

Fátima Saraiva¹, Joana Coutinho¹, Susana Capela¹, Francisco Rosa¹, Catarina Fagundes¹, Marlene Nogueira¹, Natividade Couto Pereira¹, Marieke Martens², Catherine J Harmer², Adriana Sampaio¹ & Liliana P Capitão¹

¹Psychology Research Centre (CIPsi), School of Psychology, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal; ²Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Grant 277/22

Background: Anger is a key signal of interpersonal threat, yet little is known about how it is processed at different levels of awareness or how such processing relates to individual differences in anger expression.

Aims: The present study examined associations between subjective anger — encompassing state, trait, and expression dimensions — and the conscious and nonconscious detection of angry facial expressions relative to fearful and happy faces.

Methods: Sixty participants completed the Facial Expression Recognition Task (FERT) and a Continuous Flash Suppression (CFS) paradigm to assess emotion processing at conscious and nonconscious levels, respectively, and completed the State–Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI).

Preliminary Results: Results revealed a dissociation across awareness levels: angry faces were recognised more accurately than fearful faces during conscious recognition yet emerged more slowly than fearful faces under nonconscious suppression. At the individual-differences level, higher levels of externalised anger were associated with greater accuracy in recognising angry expressions, whereas higher levels of internalised anger were associated with relatively delayed nonconscious detection of anger compared with fear. Together, these findings indicate that externalising and internalising anger-expression tendencies are linked to distinct patterns of emotion processing across levels of awareness, underscoring the importance of theoretical models that integrate awareness-dependent mechanisms with stable individual differences in anger regulation.

Keywords: Anger, Continuous Flash Suppression (CFS), Facial Expression Recognition Task (FERT), Awareness, Individual differences

Publication:

Pelliet, A., Nogueira, M., Fagundes, C., Capela, S., Saraiva, F., Pulcu, E., ... & Capitão, L. P. (2025). "Invisible Dangers": Unconscious processing of angry vs fearful faces and its relationship to subjective anger. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 130, 103848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2025.103848>

E-mail contact: liliana.capitao@psi.uminho.pt