



Background

- People expressing fear are perceived as naïve, submissive, and affiliative (Hammer & Marsh, 2015).
- Although these are traits that would also make one appear to be an easy target for exploitation, researchers have hypothesized that fear **only** serves to elicit prosocial help responses from others, and should **not** cause harmful, exploitative responses toward fearful people (Marsh et al., 2005).
- If fear **only** serves to elicit prosocial responses from others, people should be motivated to freely express their fear whenever they feel it.
- However, people do suppress their fearful expressions in harsh environments to avoid appearing “weak” (Crewe, 2012).
- Since harsh environments, like low socioeconomic status (SES) environments, are associated with more opportunistic behavior (Williams et al., 2016) this suggests that people are aware that expressing fear may put them at risk for exploitation.

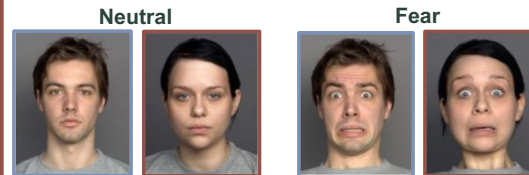
References

- Crewe, B. (2009). *The prisoner society: Power, adaptation, and social life in an English prison* (1st ed.). Oxford, England: The Oxford University Press.
- Hammer, J., & Marsh, A. (2015). Why do fearful facial expressions elicit behavioral approach? Evidence from a combined approach-avoidance implicit association test. *Emotion, 15*(2), 223-231.
- Marsh, A., Ambady, N., & Kleck, R. (2005). The effects of fear and anger facial expressions on approach- and avoidance-related behaviors. *Emotion, 5*(1), 119-124.
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Funding

Study 1 Method

- 292 MTurk participants (52.74% female; $M_{age} = 35.16$; $SD = 9.01$).
- Randomly assigned to view a neutral **OR** fearful target.
- Participants evaluated targets on traits that would make them an **opportunity** for exploitation or a **threat** preventing exploitation.
- Participants then reported their childhood SES and demographic information.



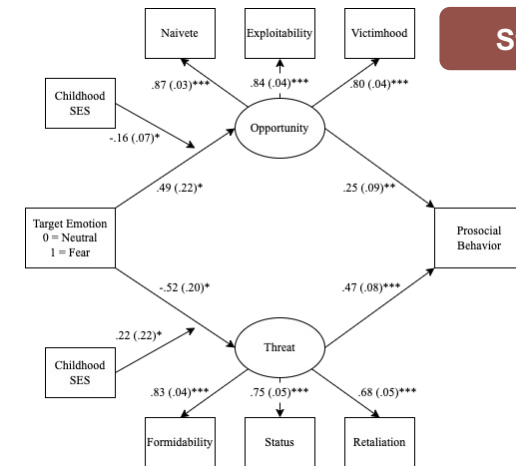
Study 2 Method

- 369 MTurk participants (47.97% female; $M_{age} = 37.01$; $SD = 9.99$).
- Randomly assigned to watch a neutral or scary movie clip and report emotions felt during the clip to a faux observer from a low or high SES environment.
- Participants evaluated observers' personality, based on information about their environment.

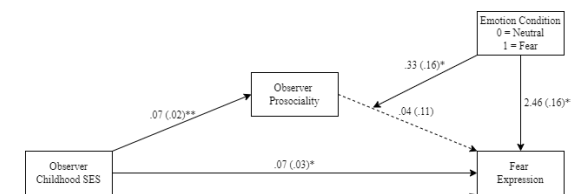
Study 1 & 2 Results

- Fearful people were perceived as more of an opportunity for exploitation, and less of a threat.
- People from low SES environments were particularly sensitive to the emotions displayed by the target when evaluating their opportunity or threat level.
- People expressed less fear in the presence of a person from a harsh (low SES) environment than from a benign (high SES) environment.
- Fear expression was driven by how prosocial people perceived observers to be.

Study 1 Results



Study 2 Results



Conclusions

- Results support the hypothesis that fear serves functions beyond eliciting prosocial responses from others.
- Fear expression indicates to others that one is a potential opportunity for exploitation, particularly in the eyes of people who may behave opportunistically, such as those from harsh, low SES environments.
- When experiencing fear in the presence of others, people are sensitive to the risks and benefits of expressing that emotion.
- People suppress fear more in the presence of people they perceive as less likely to behave prosocially.