

Memory For Body States

Incidental retrieval of prior emotion mimicry

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Abstract

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2 When observing emotional expressions, similar sensorimotor states are
3 activated in the observer, often resulting in physical mimicry. For example, when
4 observing a smile, the zygomaticus muscles associated with smiling are activated in the
5 observer; and when observing a frown, the corrugator brow muscles. We show that the
6 consistency of an individual's facial emotion, whether they always frown or smile, can
7 be encoded into memory. When the individuals are viewed at a later time expressing no
8 emotion, muscle mimicry of the prior state can be detected, even when the emotion
9 itself is task irrelevant. The results support simulation accounts of memory where prior
10 embodiments of other's states during encoding are reactivated when re-encountering a
11 person.

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As social animals humans must understand the current states of other's, predict future actions and retrieve from memory information about a person that might facilitate later interactions. Evidence supports the notion that such abilities may be underpinned by processes of sensorimotor simulation. That is, representing the observed actions (Avenanti, Candidi, & Urgesi, 2013) and internal states (Keyers, Kaas & Gazzola, 2010) of others, involves the activation of similar visuomotor and somatosensory states in the observer.

Research into sensorimotor simulation has focused on perception of motor actions, after the discovery of cells in area F5 of the monkey, referred to as 'mirror neurons' (Rizzolatti, Fogassi, and Gallese 2001). These cells are active when the animal performs an action, but also when the animal observes the same or similar actions performed by another actor (Di Pellegrino, Fadiga and Rizzolatti 1992).

Research studies in humans, utilising behavioural (e.g. Bach and Tipper 2007; Griffiths and Tipper 2009), neuromodulatory (e.g. Fadiga, Fogassi, Pavesi and Rizzolatti 1995), and functional neuroimaging methods (e.g. Oosterhof, Wiggett, Diedrichsen, Tipper and Downing 2010) provide evidence that observing actions indeed activates similar motor states in the brain of the observer. Similar results have been shown for observation of sensory experiences, such as viewing others receive noxious (Morrison, Lloyd, di Pellegrino and Roberts 2004), and non-noxious touch (Keyers, Wicker, Gazzola, Anton, Fogassi and Gallese 2004; Morrison, Bjornsdotter and Olausson 2011).

Recently, interest in the role of simulation in understanding people's emotions has increased. Facial expressions are a key observable aspect of emotion (Panksepp 2005), and motor simulation may be a route by which an observer understands the

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1 meaning of these actions (Niedenthal, Mermillod, Maringer & Hess, 2010; Wood,
2 Rychlowska, Korb, & Niedenthal, 2016). Viewing facial expressions causes automatic
3 imitative responses in the facial muscles of the observer. For example, viewing another
4 person smile causes an almost immediate increase in activation in the zygomaticus
5 muscle of the cheek, whilst viewing a frown activates the corrugator muscle that draws
6 down the brow (e.g. Dimberg, Thunberg and Elmehed 2000; Dimberg, Thunberg and
7 Grunedal 2002). These changes in activity from the prior state of the musculature are
8 typically very small, non-visible, and only detectable through measurement of the
9 electrical activity at the muscle site, recorded via facial electromyography (EMG) (for
10 discussion of micro-expressions see Cacioppo, Bush and Tassinari 1992; Tassinari and
11 Cacioppo 1992). This ‘facial mimicry’ occurs rapidly, within a few hundred milliseconds
12 (Dimberg, 1997). It also appears automatic, occurring even when participants are
13 instructed not to move their faces (Dimberg et al. 2002), or when the emotion viewed is
14 irrelevant to the task in hand (Cannon, Hayes and Tipper 2009).

15 Recent models purport that facial mimicry represents a ‘spill over’ of
16 sensorimotor simulation (Wood et al. 2016). Vicarious activity in sensorimotor regions
17 elicited when viewing a facial expression (Sato, Kochiyama and Uono 2015; Schilbach,
18 Eickhoff, Mojzisch and Vogely 2008) is thought to trigger activation of other brain and
19 body states associated with the emotion being perceived, and this simulation aids the
20 recognition of the emotion. Whilst simulation may not always involve mimicry (Wood
21 et al. 2016), there is evidence that mimicry can augment or empower simulation of
22 other’s emotions (Lee et al. 2013). Blocking mimicry reduces accuracy in decoding the
23 meaning of facial expressions (Ipser and Cook 2015; Maringer, Krumhuber, Fischer and
24 Niedenthal 2011; Ponari, Conson, D’Amico, Grossi and Trojano 2012; Stel and
25 Knippenberg 2008), whilst amplifying mimicry can improve recognition. Participants

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1 whose brow muscles had been paralysed via Botox injections performed worse than
2 controls in an emotion recognition task, whilst participants whose facial feedback was
3 amplified with proprioceptive taping performed better (Neal and Chartrand 2011). It's
4 believed that during facial mimicry afferent feedback from the facial muscles (Price and
5 Harmon-Jones 2015) adds to the overall simulation of the other's emotion already
6 occurring in sensorimotor regions of the brain (Niedenthal et al. 2010; Wood et al.
7 2016).

8 One issue yet to be addressed is whether such simulations might be reinstated as
9 part of long term memory for other's emotions. Reactivation accounts of episodic
10 memory suggest that retrieving a memory involves partial reactivation of the brain
11 states active during encoding, including those involved in sensory and motor processing
12 (Barsalou 1999; Buckner and Wheeler 2001; Glenberg 1979, for reviews see Buchanan
13 2007; Danker & Anderson 2010). Evidence for this comes from neuroimaging research
14 showing that retrieval of stimuli previously associated with differential sensory inputs
15 reactivated sensory specific cortical regions. For example, recalling an object encoded
16 in the form of a picture, as opposed to in word form, re-activated visual cortex (Vaidya,
17 Zhao, Desmond and Gabrieli 2002); remembering the sound associated with a
18 particular label reactivates areas of auditory cortex (Wheeler, Peterson and Buckner
19 2000); and remembering whether an object was previously presented in the presence
20 of an odor reactivates olfactory cortex (Gottfried, Smith, Rugg and Dolan 2004; for
21 limitations see Danker and Anderson 2010, pp6). Similarly, the retrieval from memory
22 of action words activated motor cortices when the words were encoded alongside
23 performance of the action, but not if the words were encoded without action
24 performance (Nyberg et al. 2001). Interestingly, simply *imagining* the enactment of the
25 action during encoding activated motor areas, which again became active during

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1 retrieval. This latter finding is suggestive of the reactivation of prior simulative
2 processes.

3 In the same manner, might motor simulations of an individual's emotional state
4 be reactivated upon retrieval of that individual's identity? According to models such as
5 that of Wood et al. (2016), viewing another person's smile should activate the face
6 regions within the viewer's sensorimotor cortices, and might result in facial mimicry in
7 the zygomaticus muscle, with resultant afferent feedback, creating a simulation. Upon
8 meeting the same individual again, would this simulation then be reinstated as part of
9 implicit recall of the person's identity? And if so would a facial mimetic-like response
10 indicate such reinstatement – i.e could rapid and sub-perceptual reactivation of the
11 zygomaticus be detected? If this were to occur even if the individual being perceived
12 was now not smiling themselves, this would support the notion of a reactivation of prior
13 simulation.

14 The present study addresses this question. Participants were exposed to faces
15 that consistently smiled or frowned, whilst the activity of their own facial muscles was
16 recorded using facial EMG. Later the participants were re-exposed to the same faces
17 whilst completing a simple oddball task, and again facial EMG was recorded.
18 Importantly however, at re-exposure all the faces now had a neutral facial expression.
19 Covert facial mimicry responses, recorded during initial exposure to the emotional
20 versions of the faces would indicate the presence of sensorimotor simulation. However,
21 could reinstatement of these motor states be detected when the participants viewed the
22 neutral versions of the face? If so this would suggest the reactivation of the prior
23 simulation upon recalling the facial identity. A second issue was also addressed. Facial
24 mimicry appears to occur even when the facial expression being viewed is not relevant
25 to the task in hand. Similarly, reactivation of sensory or motor regions active during

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1 encoding of episodic memories, occurs even when the sensory aspect of the memory is
2 not being actively recalled (e.g. Vaidya et al. 2002). In the present study the question of
3 whether task relevance would affect the reactivation of facial mimicry was addressed by
4 having half the participants attend to the emotional aspect of the faces they viewed,
5 whilst the other half ignored the emotion and attended to the identity of the faces.

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Method

8 Participants

9 Participants were 36 female undergraduates from Bangor University, recruited
10 in two cohorts of 18 participants. The first cohort completed the attend to identity
11 condition (mean age = 21.9 years, SD = 2.1 years), and the second cohort the attend to
12 emotion condition (mean age = 19.9 years, SD = 2.7 years). All gave informed consent.
13 Women appear more responsive than men in their physiological reactions to emotional
14 facial expressions (Dimberg and Lundquist 1990). Therefore a female cohort was
15 selected as being more likely to demonstrate initial embodiment.

16

17 Design

18 Participants completed three tasks. First an initial learning task, during which
19 face identities consistently expressed either smiling or frowning emotions and
20 participants had to either identify oddball trials where the identity of the face changed
21 mid-trial, or identified the emotion expressed by the face. Here it was predicted that
22 participants would demonstrate facial mimicry even though this was never an explicit
23 task goal.

24

25 Second, a few minutes after the first task, participants completed an implicit
recall task where in the majority of trials they passively viewed static, neutral versions

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1 of the faces seen during the learning phase. Their task was to monitor for occasional
2 oddball targets, where either an identity change or an emotion change occurred,
3 depending on the condition they had been assigned to for the initial encoding task. It
4 was predicted that during the passive viewing trials, implicit retrieval of the prior
5 mimicry state associated with a face identity would occur, if learning had taken place.
6 Therefore, participants would show greater zygomaticus activity to those faces that had
7 *previously* smiled than to those who *previously* frowned, and greater corrugator activity
8 to those faces that *previously* frowned than to those who *previously* smiled.

9 Finally the participants completed an explicit recall task, viewing neutral
10 versions of the previously seen faces, and making forced choice decisions about as to
11 whether the face had previously smiled or frowned.

12 In a mixed design, participants were divided into two groups. One attended to
13 the emotion expressed on the faces during both the encoding, and implicit retrieval
14 tasks. The other ignored the emotion and attended to the identity of the face.

15

16 **Stimuli**

17 Morphing software was used to create dynamic facial expressions. Neutral,
18 smiling and frowning versions of four female and four male faces were selected from
19 the Nim Stim (<http://www.macbrain.org/mission.htm>) and KDEF (Lundqvist, Flykt and
20 Ohman 1998) face sets. The eight identities used were selected to create four sex and
21 attractiveness matched pairs, based on previously collected ratings of a larger set of
22 faces, rated for attractiveness from 1-5. The male pairs were rated as 1.9 and 2.1, and
23 2.3 and 2.6. The female pairs as 2.7 and 2.9, and 3.7 and 3.9.

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1 Dynamic morphs of each neutral face identity morphing into both expressions of every
2 other face identity were also created, within sex. In total this created 24 identity change
3 morphs, which were used as oddball trials in the initial learning task for participants
4 tasked with attending to identity. For each participant eight morphs were randomly
5 selected, with each face appearing once as the end face of an oddball morph. A further
6 set of two neutral male and two neutral female faces were also selected as oddball trials
7 for use in the subsequent implicit retrieval task for the participants who were tasked
8 with attending to identity.

9

10 **Procedure**

11 After electrode placement, the participant completed the three tasks in order
12 described above. The participants were told that the study was about sustained
13 attention and a story of frontal lobe recording was used to disguise the EMG measures.
14 The participants were not told that the same faces would be seen throughout the
15 experiment, or that any recall would be required.

16

17 **Initial learning/encoding task (mimicry).** The procedure for the mimicry task
18 can be seen in Figure 1. Participants pressed the spacebar to begin each trial. A fixation
19 cross appeared for 2000ms. A face appeared, with a neutral expression lasting for
20 1500ms, before morphing to an emotional expression (the transition took 240ms),
21 displaying a smile or a frown for 1500ms. After a blank screen of 2000ms the
22 participant relaxed for 5000ms. All participants saw four identities (two male, two
23 female) who *always* smiled, and four identities (two male, two female) who *always*
24 frowned. Participants in the 'attend to emotion' condition (Figure 1a top panel)
25 categorized the emotion they saw in each face display during the trial, pressing either

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1 the Z or M key (counterbalanced). Participants in the 'attend to identity' condition
2 (Figure 1b bottom panel) looked out for oddball trials, where a face would appear, then
3 morph into the emotional face of another identity. Participants pressed the spacebar
4 for oddballs, but did not respond to standard trials. Oddball trials always involved faces
5 morphing into another face of the same emotion category. Face allocation to emotion
6 was quasi-random for each participant, so that there were always two smiling females
7 and two smiling males, and similarly two frowning males and females, and that the
8 attractiveness balance was maintained. The task consisted of 64 standard trials, divided
9 into four blocks of 16. In the attend to identity condition each block also contained two
10 oddball trials, meaning a total of 72 trials.

11 Figure 1 here.

12

13 **Implicit recall task (neutral faces).** The procedure for the implicit recall task
14 can be seen in Figure 2. Participants pressed the spacebar to initiate trials, after which
15 they were viewed a fixation cross for 2000ms. A face appeared, with a neutral
16 expression for 2000ms. After this the screen went blank for 2000ms and the
17 participant was asked to relax for 5000ms. The task consisted of two blocks of 16 trials
18 and each face identity appeared twice in each block. Each block contained two oddball
19 trials. Oddballs in the attend to emotion condition (Figure 2a top) consisted of a face
20 appearing for 1500ms, then morphing to a smile or frown; there were always two
21 smiling and two frowning faces, selected from those used during encoding and balanced
22 for sex. In the attend to identity condition (Figure 2b bottom) oddballs were brand new
23 identities with neutral expressions. In both conditions participants responded to
24 oddballs with a spacebar press and pressed nothing to standard trials. The selection of
25 trial n's in both tasks was guided by the number of trials used in previous studies of

1 facial mimicry (Dimberg and Thunberg 1998; Hess and Philipott 1998; Vrana and Gross
2 2004). We used a larger number of trials during the initial encoding task than during
3 implicit recall to try and ensure the participants learned the emotions associated with
4 each face.

5 Figure 2 here

6
7 **Explicit recall task.** Finally, participants were shown the eight faces seen in the
8 previous tasks and made a forced choice decision ('A' and 'L' keys assigned to condition,
9 counterbalanced) as to whether the face had smiled or frowned during the encoding
10 task. Faces were presented once, with neutral expressions, for 2000ms, and separated
11 by a 2000ms fixation cross prior to presentation and blank screen afterwards.

12

13 **EMG Recording**

14 EMG data were collected from the zygomaticus (smile muscle) and corrugator
15 (frown muscle), using a BioPac MP100 system (BioPac: Goleta, CA). Data were sampled
16 at 2000Hz. Online filters were set to a bandpass of 1-5000Hz, and notch of 50Hz.
17 Electrode placement and preparation were conducted as guided by Fridlund and
18 Cacioppo, 1986. Recordings were made from the left side of the face (see Dimberg and
19 Petterson 2000; Zhou and Hu 2004).

20 Offline the data were pass filtered with a 20-400Hz bandpass (as recommended
21 in van Boxtel 2001), rectified, log₁₀ transformed to reduce extreme values, and z-
22 transformed within participant and muscle site. Change-scores were calculated trial-
23 by-trial. For every trial the mean of the final 500ms of the fixation was used as a
24 baseline and subtracted from each data point during the trial, transforming each point
25 into a change from baseline score. The data were averaged over 200ms bins, using the

1 arithmetic mean. These bins were used as the level at which data were visualized. For
2 data analysis data were averaged using the arithmetic mean, over whole trial periods
3 (e.g. the period during which an emotional face was on screen, or the blank period after
4 this). Artifact trials were removed by eye before the data were matched to condition.
5 Error and post error trials were removed from the EMG analysis to account for error
6 related activity (Ekins-Brown, Saunders and Inzlicht 2016; Lindstrom, Mattsson-Marn,
7 Golkar and Olsson 2013) or post-error increases in effort (Van Boxtel and Jessuru
8 1993). The first trial of each task was removed upon observation of noisier data in
9 these trials. EMG data from oddball trials were not analysed. For the encoding task the
10 mean number of (non-oddball) trials removed per participant was: Attend to identity,
11 happy faces 4.0 trials (SD = 1.5), angry faces 4.7 trials (SD = 1.7); Attend to emotion,
12 happy faces 7.1 trials (SD = 2.2), angry faces 5.6 trials (SD = 1.4). For the implicit recall
13 task the mean number of (non-oddball) trials removed per participant were: Attend to
14 identity, previously happy faces 1.3 trials (SD = 1.0), previously angry faces 1.0 trials
15 (SD = 1.1); Attend to emotion, previously happy faces 2.1 trials (SD = 1.4), previously
16 angry faces 1.9 trials (SD = 1.1).

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18

Results & Discussion

Behavioral Results for Learning/encoding and Implicit Recall Tasks

20 Accuracy rates were assessed for the encoding and implicit recall tasks. During
21 encoding, accuracy in the attend to identity condition referred to the percentage of
22 trials correctly categorized as oddballs, if they were such, or not responded to if they
23 were standard trials. In the attend to emotion condition accuracy referred to the
24 percentage of trials correctly identified as containing a happy or angry facial expression.
25 In the implicit recall tasks accuracy referred to the percentage of trials correctly

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1 identified as oddballs if they were such (new faces in attend to identity / emotional
2 faces in attend to emotion), or not responded to if they were standard trials. Accuracy
3 rates were high across both the initial encoding and subsequent implicit recall tasks,
4 suggesting the participants were attentive to the stimuli. During the learning tasks
5 mean accuracies were above 98%, for both the attend to emotion and attend to identity
6 conditions. During the implicit recall tasks accuracies were above 94% for both the
7 attend to emotion and attend to identity conditions.

8

9 **Mimicry during Learning/encoding Task**

10 Facial mimicry was calculated using the EMG responses elicited by the emotion
11 section of the morph videos, after the initial 1500ms neutral expression, when the face
12 became expressive, smiling or frowning for 1500ms. This period also included the
13 2000ms blank screen after the offset of the face.

14 **Corrugator (frown muscle).** The activation states of the corrugator during and
15 after the emotion expression face is seen are shown in Figure 3a. A three-way mixed
16 analysis of variance was undertaken to analyse face emotion (happy / angry face), time
17 (emotional face present / blank screen after face offset), and the between participants
18 factor of task (attend to identity / attend to emotion).

19 Of primary interest are the significant results involving the face emotion factor,
20 which are indications of emotional mimicry. Of most importance, there was a significant
21 main effect of face emotion, where as predicted, the corrugator was more active when
22 viewing angry than when viewing happy faces, $F(1,34) = 7.5, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .180$.
23 Importantly, the mimicry of face emotion did not interact with whether participants
24 were attending to the task relevant property of face emotion or irrelevant property of
25 face identity, $F(1,34) = .015, p = .902, \eta^2_p < .001$. Interestingly there was also an

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1 interaction between face emotion and time, $F(1,34) = 14.03, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .292$.
2 Further analysis with uncorrected t-tests revealed that the effect of face emotion was
3 detected while the emotional face was viewed, $t(35) = 4.6, p < .001$, but this effect was
4 transient as there was no effect when the subsequent blank screen was viewed, $t(35)$
5 $= .73, p > .1$.

6 The remaining significant effects did not involve the emotion factor, and thus
7 indicate effects on the overall corrugator activation regardless of emotion. There was a
8 significant effect of time, where corrugator activity increased from viewing faces to
9 viewing the subsequent blank screen $F(1,34)=23.5, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .408$. The only
10 significant between participants interaction effect was the interaction of task and time,
11 $F(1,34) = 7.8, p = .009, \eta^2_p = .186$. Follow up uncorrected t-tests revealed that whilst
12 overall activity in the corrugator during the face and blank periods differed significantly
13 for those participants who attended to emotion, $t(17) = 5.1, p < .001$, the difference was
14 not significant for those who attended to identity, $t(17) = 1.6, p > .1$.

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Figure 3 here

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Zygomatcus (smile muscle). The data are presented in Panel b of Figure 3.

18

The data were entered into the same structure of analyses as the corrugator data.

19

Again, significant results involving the face emotion factor are of primary interest. Of

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most importance, there was a significant main effect of face emotion $F(1,34) = 7.05, p$

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$= .012, \eta^2_p = .172$, where the zygomatcus was more active when viewing smiling faces

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as compared to viewing angry faces, and this did not interact with whether attention

23

was focused on face emotion or identity $F(1,34) = 1.62, p = .289, \eta^2_p = .033$.

24

Interestingly, there was no interaction in the zygomatcus between face emotion and

25

time $F(1,34) = .88, p > .1, \eta^2_p = .055$, meaning that, in contrast to the corrugator

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1 muscle, the mimicry effect remained stable into the blank screen period after the offset
2 of the emotional face. Significant results not involving the face emotion factor were a
3 main effect of time $F(1,34) = 7.09, p = .012, \eta^2_p = .173$, where activity increased across
4 time from the period where the face was on screen into the blank screen after the offset
5 of the face; and a main effect of task $F(1,34) = 12.4, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .267$, where the
6 zygomaticus muscle was more active when attending to emotion than attending to
7 identity.

8
9 Two key findings here are of note. First, even though participants were not
10 asked to explicitly mimic the face emotion while attending to their particular task, the
11 mimicry effect was still detected in both muscles. Secondly, this seems to be
12 independent of the participant's task, as there is no interaction between face emotion
13 and task of attending to emotion or attending to face identity. That is, whether directly
14 attending to and making decisions about face emotion, or ignoring the emotion while
15 reporting occasional identity changes, the mimicry effect is observed. This supports the
16 notion that mimicry is evoked without intent (e.g., Cannon et al. 2009; Dimberg et al.
17 2000; Dimberg et al. 2002).

18 It is also worth noting that across both muscle sites the pattern of activity seen in
19 the attend to emotion condition differed to that in the attend to identity condition. In
20 the former it appeared that mimicry constituted a greater increase in activity from
21 baseline levels, whereas in the latter it appeared as a decrease in activity from baseline
22 to the incongruent expression. Finally it worth noting that mimicry seems to be longer
23 lasting in the zygomaticus muscle, continuing in to the blank field after face offset;
24 whereas in contrast, mimicry is only detected in the corrugator muscle while
25 participants are actually viewing an emotion expressing face.

1 also observed less robust effects in corrugator than in zygomaticus muscles (e.g.,
2 Cannon, Hayes and Tipper 2010) and have reported less robust mimicry of the socially
3 costly expression of anger, than on less costly expressions such as happiness and
4 sadness (Bourgeois and Hess 2008; Hess and Bourgeois 2006; but see Kirkham,
5 Pawling, Hayes, and Tipper 2015, for contrasting effects).

6

7 **Zygomaticus:** The data are presented in Figure 4, Panel b. Most importantly
8 there was a main effect of prior face emotion, $F(1,34) = 7.7, p = .009, \eta^2_p = .184$, with
9 increased zygomaticus activation when viewing a neutral face that had previously
10 expressed a positive/smiling emotion as compared to a neutral face that had previously
11 expressed anger and this did not interact with the face property attended (emotion or
12 identity) $F(1,34) < .1, p = .9, \eta^2_p < .1$. The remaining significant effects did not involve
13 the face emotion factor. There was a main effect of time, $F(1,34) = 23.7, p < .001, \eta^2_p$
14 $= .410$, with activation increasing from the face to blank periods. Although the
15 interaction of task and time was significant, $F(1,34) = 5.6, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .142$, follow up
16 uncorrected t-tests revealed a significant increase in zygomaticus activity from the face
17 to blank periods in both participants attending to identity, $t(17) = 2.9, p = .01$, and
18 emotion, $t(17) = 4.0, p = .001$.

19

20 **Explicit Recall Task**

21 At the end of the study participants were presented with the faces and asked to
22 recall whether the person had previously smiled or was angry. Data from two
23 participants in the attend to identity condition were missing from this analysis due to
24 experimenter error in saving the data, and a participant misunderstanding the key-
25 presses. Mean percentage accuracy (correct identification of whether a face previously

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1 smiled or frowned) was high amongst both those participants attending to emotion
2 (mean = 95.1%, SD = 7.6%) and those attending to identity (mean = 82.03 %, SD =
3 20.4%). Both the attend to emotion ($p < .001$ for t-test against 50%) and attend to
4 identity ($p < .001$) groups performed above chance on this task, but, perhaps
5 predictably a comparison of the two groups' performance showed that the group who
6 attended to emotion recalled significantly more faces' prior emotions correctly, $F(1,32)$
7 = 6.4, $p = .016$. It is also worth noting that the attend to identity group also saw oddball
8 trials at encoding, which might have interfered with learning.

9

10 **Individual Differences in Mimicry**

11 Finally, we make a tentative analysis concerning individual differences in
12 mimicry processes. Although mimicry of another person's emotion is a robust effect
13 observed in a number of previous studies, not all people produce detectable mimicry
14 (see Manssuer, Pawling, Hayes and Tipper 2016, for other evidence for individual
15 differences in evoked emotion and learning). This could have implications for later
16 retrieval of prior body states, in that people who did not initially mimic while observing
17 faces expressing emotion, cannot subsequently retrieve and reestablish a mimicry state.

18 Therefore we divided participants in to those who mimicked observed emotion
19 in the first stage of the study and those who did not mimic. This was done by separating
20 those participants who showed muscle activity trending in the expected direction in
21 each muscle from those who did not. So for analysis of the zygomaticus we compared
22 those participants who showed greater activity to smiles than frowns (mimickers) to
23 those who showed the opposite (non-mimickers). And in the corrugator the opposite,
24 with those who showed greater activity in response to frowns (mimickers) being
25 compared to those who showed greater activity in response to smiles (non-mimickers).

1 This does not mean the participants in the mimicry group mimicked every face, only
2 that on average they showed an effect that suggested mimicry. We predicted that
3 retrieval of mimicry in the later retrieval stage can only be detected in the individuals
4 who originally mimicked, and while no significant effects were found in the corrugator
5 analysis, this was indeed the case for the zygomaticus muscle ($N = 25$; $F(1,24) = 9.7$, p
6 $= .005$, $\eta^2_p = .287$). In sharp contrast, those who did not mimic the observed emotion in
7 the initial stage of the study also did not produce any evidence of mimicry in the later
8 retrieval stage ($N = 11$, $F(1,10) = .011$, $p = .92$, $\eta^2_p = .001$). On the other hand, when
9 examining explicit recall of prior emotion the mimickers (mean accuracy = 90.2%, test
10 against chance $p < .001$) and non-mimickers (mean accuracy 86.4%, test against chance
11 $p < .001$) performed similarly. Hence explicit recall is not reliant on implicit retrieval of
12 prior body states (e.g., Toplinski 2011). Clearly the small sample size in the latter non-
13 mimicry group requires that we are cautious and tentative with our conclusions, but
14 retrieval of prior embodied states predicts just such a result, and hence it is worthy of
15 future investigation.

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General Discussion

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The current study provided a number of new observations that add to the
discussion surrounding the role of sensorimotor simulation in social cognition (Wood et
al., 2016). First, automatic mimicry of another person's emotion was again observed in
this study. Thus, even though participants were not asked to overtly mimic another
person's emotion, mimicry was nevertheless detected through the use of facial EMG.
This replicates previous research (Cannon et al. 2009; Dimberg et al. 2000; 2002), and
fits theory purporting that facial motor regions are vicariously activated when viewing
facial expressions (Wood et al. 2016).

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1 Furthermore, the mimicry effect was observed both when emotion was relevant
2 and irrelevant to the participant's goal, supporting the notion that facial mimicry is
3 automatic, and can to be evoked even when another person's emotion is task irrelevant
4 and not explicitly attended to (e.g., Cannon et al. 2009; Dimberg et al. 2000). It is
5 worth noting that the patterns of muscle activity differed between the attention
6 conditions. When attending to emotion, facial mimicry in both muscles appeared as a
7 larger increase from baseline activity. However, in the attend to identity condition it
8 took the form of a lesser reduction from baseline activity, for example, the zygomaticus
9 activity decreased from baseline to a lesser degree for happy than angry faces. Similar
10 results have been reported in other experiments (see Cannon et al. 2009; Dimberg et al.
11 2000). It might be that the pattern of activity in the attend to identity condition is
12 indicative of a greater preparatory response in both muscles, prior to the presentation
13 of the face – perhaps because the task required more effort. Or, as suggested in Cannon
14 et al. (2009), it could be due a suppression of the task irrelevant emotion.

15 However, the core issue engaged here was the reactivation of simulation during
16 later encounters. Embodied accounts of emotional memory processes (e.g., Niedenthal
17 2007) propose that perceptual-motor states are encoded during initial experience of a
18 stimulus. In the current case this would be the activation of facial muscles while
19 viewing another person express an emotion, which in accordance with simulation
20 models, results from vicarious neural activity in facial motor regions. We predicted that
21 such body states might be reactivated when encountering a person again, even if they
22 were not expressing any emotion. We found that indeed, there is evidence for such
23 reinstatement of prior processing, which we saw in the zygomaticus muscle. Here
24 muscle activity reflecting mimicry during previous encoding of emotional faces can be
25 detected when the faces are later viewed with neutral expressions. Interpreted in the

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1 light of current theory this supports the notion that sensorimotor simulations occurring
2 during encoding are reinstated during recall. This finding aligns with models of
3 emotional memory and with evidence that during episodic memory retrieval, states of
4 sensory and motor neural activity that were active at encoding are re-activated. Our
5 data fit particularly well with evidence that neural simulations of actions encoded
6 alongside verbal stimuli are reactivated upon later retrieval of the verbal information
7 alone (Nyberg et al. 2001).

8 However there appear to be boundary conditions. First, the retrieval effects
9 were only detected in the zygomaticus muscle and not the corrugator, despite initial
10 mimicry in both muscles. It may be the case that the more subtle embodied responses
11 are simply detected more easily in the zygomaticus (see Cannon et al. 2010). It is also
12 perhaps noteworthy that the mimicry activity in the corrugator in the present study
13 appeared fleeting, only differentiating between angry and happy faces when the faces
14 were onscreen. Prior research has indicated that facial mimicry is affected by social
15 context (for review see Hess and Fischer 2014), particularly the more socially costly
16 mimicry of anger. It might be the case that reactivation of the corrugator inhibited
17 either by potential social cost or because of reduced affiliation with faces who
18 previously demonstrated consistently negative expressions (Bourgeois and Hess 2008).

19 In an exploratory analysis we compared reactivation effects in the zygomaticus
20 between participants who did and did not demonstrate mimicry in this muscle.
21 Interestingly, whilst mimickers and non-mimickers showed an equal ability to explicitly
22 recall the face-emotion pairings, it was only amongst the mimickers that reactivation of
23 mimicry was seen. The scope for conclusions on this result are limited by the small
24 sample size and simplistic division of mimickers and non-mimickers. However, the
25 results are none-the-less interesting and suggest that further exploration of individual

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1 differences in the utilization, or outward expression of reactivated simulations is
2 needed. It is also worth noting the contrasting results of a similar study (Kirkham,
3 Pawling, Hayes and Tipper 2015). Here during encoding participants viewed emotional
4 faces who smiled and frowned in a manner that was either consistent, or inconsistent
5 with an emotional context, created by the simultaneous presentation of an emotional
6 image alongside the face. Mimicry was reduced for faces whose expressions were
7 inconsistent with the emotional context. However, in a later retrieval phase, where the
8 faces still smiled and frowned but no emotional context was presented, the prior
9 consistency or inconsistency of a face's expressions did not affect participant's mimicry
10 -i.e no retrieval of prior emotion consistency was found. However, unlike the current
11 study, which used neutral faces at retrieval, the facial mimicry evoked at retrieval may
12 have blocked any detection of prior mimicry states being reactivated.

13 Finally some limitations of the current study, and possible future directions
14 require discussion. Numerous experiments have explored the role of sensorimotor
15 simulations and facial mimicry in accurately decoding facial expressions (Ipser and
16 Cook 2015). The current study did not utilize a design that allowed for such an analysis
17 of the role that *reactivation* of simulations might play. For example, simulations might
18 be retrieved as part of predicting the other person's oncoming emotion (Heerey and
19 Crossley 2013), or might play a part in impression formation (Halberstadt, Winkielman,
20 Niedenthal and Dalle 2009). We did not record EMG activity during explicit recall,
21 where reactivation of facial mimicry might have predicted accurate retrieval of prior
22 emotion condition. We also used a relatively small number of faces, and an extension
23 using a larger face set might be better suited for exploring links between reactivated
24 facial mimicry and impression formation or accurate emotion recall.

1 It would also be interesting to investigate similar effects with non-facial stimuli
2 that elicit mimicry-like responses, such as emotional bodies (Tamietto et al. 2009), or
3 images (Dimberg 1986). It is difficult in the present study, but also in the literature as a
4 whole, to decipher whether facial mimicry responses constitute simulation, emotion
5 contagion or just emotional response (Hess and Fischer 2014). Perception deficits
6 specific to perceiving facial emotion when blocking facial mimicry, for example, support
7 the notion of mimicry as simulation (Ipser and Cook 2015; Neal and Chartrand 2011).
8 However, it would be enlightening to explore similar boundaries on the retrieval of
9 mimicry. For example, would blocking later reactivation of mimicry cause a decreased
10 accuracy in remembering prior emotions?

11 We sampled only female participants, and therefore our results can only be
12 generalized to the female population. Examining male participants might help cast light
13 on the individual differences that might underlie the apparent link seen in our
14 exploratory analysis between initial mimicry and later mimicry reactivation. We also
15 used faces that always smiled or frowned. Of course in the real world people hardly
16 ever express a single emotion consistently, hence a more ecologically valid follow up
17 could include identities that emote less predictably.

18 To conclude, we have confirmed that mimicry of another person's emotion takes
19 place without intention and even when attending to irrelevant properties of a face such
20 as identity. Of most importance, in support of simulation accounts of memory, we show
21 encoding of the relationship between a person's identity and their typical emotion, via
22 reactivation of prior motor simulation. That is, mimicry evoked while viewing a person
23 expressing emotion can be reactivated at a later time, even when they are no longer
24 expressing any emotion. And although tentative at this time, it appears that such

1 reactivations only occur in individuals who demonstrate mimicry responses in the first
2 instance.

3
4

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