



Implicit measurement of the own-race bias using the visual search paradigm

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Abstract

The phenomenon of the own-race bias implies the tendency to recognize faces of the race someone is most familiar with, i.e., of their own race, faster and with higher accuracy (e.g., Meissner & Brigham, 2001; Malpass & Kravitz, 1960). To measure this tendency more implicitly, the visual search paradigm can be used, where participants have to detect the presence or absence of a target face under a certain amount of distractors (e.g., Lipp et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2013). However, studies so far cannot consistently show a bias for own race faces, probably due to non-standardized /not adequately-matched stimulus material. The present study also examines the own-race bias employing a visual search paradigm, namely a feature search task: Caucasian participants had to decide as quickly and as accurately as possible whether a target face is present (e.g., a white target face among black distractor faces) or absent under several distractor faces. Results showed that participants performed in general significantly better, i.e., made more correct answers, if faces were white compared to when faces were black. Analysis of reaction times showed that for white faces participants were significantly faster when a target face was present compared to when it was absent. For black faces, there was no difference in reaction times between target present or absent trials, i.e., participants needed the same amount of time to decide if a black target face was present or a white target face was absent. Only in absent trials, participants needed more time for white compared to black faces. Therefore, it seems

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to be harder to detect the absence of a black target face than to detect the absence of a white target face, i.e., a face of participants' own race. Overall, results seem to confirm the bias for own race faces.

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