The Impact of Gaze Direction on the Other-Race Categorisation Advantage

Thursday, September 11, 2025 2:10 PM (20 minutes)

In the last decades, increasing efforts have been devoted to exploring the influence of ethnic group membership on face processing. Several studies have shown that individuals process own-race faces differently from other-race faces. Specifically, research has documented the phenomenon known as the Other-Race Categorisation Advantage (ORCA), which refers to the tendency for individuals to categorise other-race faces faster than own-race faces. Theoretical models suggest that this effect arises because own-race faces are processed more holistically, whereas the perception of other-race faces relies more heavily on the analysis of individual facial features, such as eye-gaze cues. The present study aimed to explore the contribution of gaze cues to the ORCA effect. Participants (n = 121) performed a speeded binary classification task, categorising faces as either own-race or other-race. Crucially, the faces displayed either direct or averted gaze. Consistent with previous findings, results revealed faster reaction times (RTs) when participants categorised other-race faces compared to own-race faces (i.e., the so-called ORCA). Importantly, a significant interaction between ethnicity and gaze direction also emerged. Specifically, for own-race faces, RTs were faster for faces with direct gaze compared to those with averted gaze, whereas no significant differences related to gaze direction were observed for other-race faces. Together, these findings enrich existing theoretical accounts of ORCA, suggesting that eye-gaze direction would be relevant only when classifying own-race faces. Nonetheless, future research is needed to further clarify the mechanisms underlying this effect.

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