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The Own-Race Bias and ERPs – effects of ethnicity on face processing and recognition

Faces of another ethnicity are generally harder to recognize than faces from the observer's own ethnicity. This so-called own-race bias is most commonly attributed to lifetime experience and long-term perceptual expertise with own-race faces.

In this talk, I will present a series of studies in which we examined the own-race bias and underlying neuro-cognitive mechanisms in own- and other-race face processing. We tested the influence of expertise on the behavioural own-race bias and face processing as measured by ERPs in several experiments by either varying participants' expertise with other-race faces (study 1), by switching the task objective while learning own- and other-race faces (study 2) or by simulating perceptual expertise through intensive individuation training (study 3). In contrast to that, a fourth study was conducted to specifically disentangle the neural correlates of both ethnicity processing and face inversion in own- and other-race faces.

Our results argue for an influence of long-term expertise on the own-race bias and qualitatively different neural processes when perceiving and recognizing faces from one's own and another ethnic group.