

## **The role of categories for person perception: Accessing semantic information about familiar and unfamiliar people.**

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Cognitive models of face processing differentiate between ‘visually derived semantic codes’ and ‘identity-specific semantic codes’ (Bruce and Young, 1986). Whereas the former kind of information can be derived from any face, the latter is available only for familiar faces. The talk will deal with the role of categories for both kinds of semantic information, reporting behavioural and electrophysiological data.

Knowledge about familiar people can be accessed by viewing the person’s face, but also via alternative input modalities, e.g. the name or the voice of a familiar person. However, it is controversial whether or not semantic memory for people dissociates from semantic memory for objects. One possibility is that representations for people tend to be stored in associative networks that are based on co-occurrence, whereas objects tend to be stored in terms of categories. Recent data from our group support the assumption that a small but reliable categorical priming effect for people might exist in addition to the well-established associative priming effect. In further support for a categorical organization of person knowledge, data from false recognition experiments with categorically related names and objects will be reported.

Whereas familiar faces tend to be processed as individuals, processes of person *categorization* (e.g. deciding whether a person is old vs. young, male vs. female etc.) play a more important role in the perception of unfamiliar faces. However, it remains controversial whether relevant categories are activated automatically during perception. Alternatively, category activation may be determined by controlling factors, such as attention, processing strategies or goals. Recent data from our group will be discussed, which support the automatic activation of some (but not all) social categories during perception.