

FEEDBACK/DEBRIEFING FORM

Remembering who was where

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Previous research has shown that person identity information is better remembered when faces convey an angry versus happy or neutral expression (Jackson et al., 2009). The angry benefit may be driven by the behavioural relevance of threatening stimuli. Perceived anger is viewed as a social threat and may enhance working memory for faces to help us deal with the potentially dangerous situation by acting as quickly as possible in the most effective manner.

In the experiment you have just completed, asked you to memorise four faces before the presentation of the neutral face that you had to relocate. In each trial, you saw 2 competing emotional expressions (among 4 possible expressions: angry, happy, fearful and sad). We will examine not only visual memory for face identity, but also memory for face position (spatial memory). To measure accuracy of memory for identity, we will analyse the proportion of responses in which you relocated the test face in a position where another face was presented. To measure precision of spatial memory, we will calculate the distance between the original and the reported locations of the faces. We will analyse whether these different performance measures of working memory are influenced by the types of competing emotional expressions. We will also examine the relationship between eye movement behaviour (number and duration of fixations, fixation location and order) and memory performance. Is memory more precise when you looked more at a face/location?

We are also interested in whether the mood state (positive or negative) you were in at the time of study influenced your working memory performance. Negative moods are shown to improve detailed processing while positive moods enhance global processing (the bigger picture). We predict that participants in a negative mood might have more precise memory for faces than those in a positive mood. Social anxiety and autistic-like traits were also measured – these characteristics in the normal population can influence how we process faces and emotional information, so we will assess the potential impact of these factors also.

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Further Reading

Jackson, M. C., Wu, C.-Y., Linden, D. E. J., & Raymond, J. E. (2009). Enhanced visual short-term memory for angry faces. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 35(2), 363-374.