

Implicit Race Bias Increases the Differences in the Neural Representations of Black and White Faces

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Racial stereotypes have been shown to have subtle and unintended consequences on how we treat members of different race groups. According to new research published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#), race bias also increases differences in the brain's representations of faces.

Psychological scientists Tobias Brosch of the University of Geneva in Switzerland and Eyal Bar-David and Elizabeth Phelps of New York University examined activity in the brain while participants looked at pictures of White and Black faces. Afterwards, participants performed a task that assessed their unconscious or implicit expression of race attitudes.

By examining patterns of brain activity in the fusiform face area — a brain area involved in face perception — the researchers were able to predict the race of the person that the participant was viewing, but only for those participants with stronger, negative implicit race attitudes.

These results suggest that the ways in which Black and White faces are represented in this brain region differ for people with a stronger, implicit race bias compared to people with less or no bias. This implies that people with stronger, negative implicit race attitudes may actually perceive Black and White faces to look more different.

Tobias Brosch notes that “these results suggest it may be possible to predict differences in implicit race bias at the individual level using brain data.” Elizabeth Phelps adds “although these findings may be of interest given the behavioral and societal implications of race bias, our ability to predict race bias based on brain data is relatively modest at this time.”

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