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Cultural Differences in the Effect of Mask Use on Cross-Race Face Perception: An Eye-Tracking Study

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Abstract

We recruited Asian and White adults to examine cultural differences in the effect of mask use on face scanning behavior and social categorization. Mask use impaired social categorization accuracy for White but not Asian faces, suggesting the diagnostic features for Asian faces were more in the eyes. Consistent with this finding, Asian adults showed a bias to categorize ambiguous faces as Asian regardless of the mask condition, whereas White adults exhibited a similar bias only for masked faces, resulting in a larger mask effect. In face scanning behavior, mask use made Asian adults look more towards the left as opposed to the right eye compared with White adults. A more right-eye-biased pattern due to mask was associated with an increased mask effect in ambiguous face categorization, suggesting a link between cultural differences in face scanning behavior and social categorization. These findings have important implications for social cognition with mask use.

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