

Introduction

Psychology and criminal justice are fields that constantly intertwine in the search to find justice. In recent years, hundreds of innocent people have been exonerated by DNA evidence due to the work and dedication of The Innocence Project. Out of these hundreds of exonerates, about 75% of these false convictions were due to faulty eyewitness identification.

This research involves a literature review on seventeen articles on the own-race bias and how this bias affects facial identification. Own-race bias is the tendency to better recognize faces that one is most familiar with, usually one's own race. Current research supports the conclusion that people are often flawed in their identification of races different from their own and further research can be conducted to prevent such errors. Bringing awareness to this bias to the criminal justice system can lead to policies and procedures that decrease the likelihood of these false convictions. Examining this bias can affect the way in which lineups are conducted and the way in which judges allow the admissibility of certain eyewitnesses and evidence.

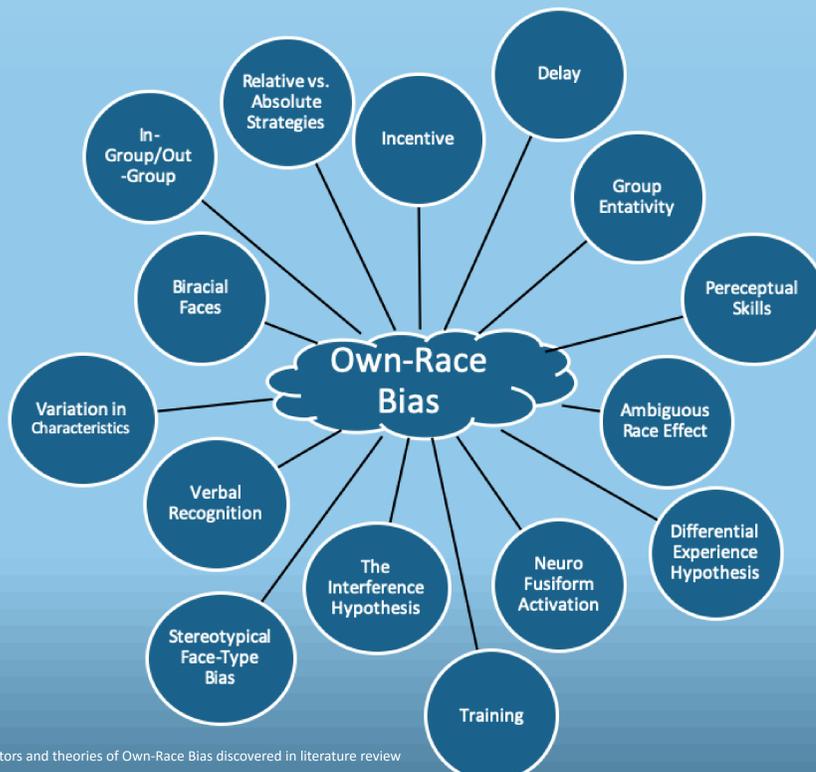


Figure 1. Factors and theories of Own-Race Bias discovered in literature review

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Results

- ❖ Due to more exposure with White faces through social experience in the United States, Malpass and Kravitz (1969) provided evidence that Black participants did not exhibit own-race bias as strongly as White participants, suggesting that experience is more important than race.
- ❖ Findings by Levin (1996), Lindsay, Jack, Christian (1991), Pauker, et al. (2009) and Wilton, Sanchez and Giamo (2014) concluded that when faces are racially ambiguous (e.g. Biracial), they are excluded from the in-group and perceived and encoded differently into memory.
- ❖ Cunningham, et al. (2004) and Phelps (2001) found that the bilateral fusiform, which is the part of the brain correlated with facial recognition, is activated quicker for White participants viewing White faces. This suggests that same-race faces may have an advantage in early visual perception.
- ❖ Lavakras, Buri and Mayzner (1976) concluded that visual training was helpful in raising the immediate performance of subjects but after a week of delay, the effects wore off and all groups were equivalent on the recognition task.
- ❖ In the studies by Kleider, Cavrak, and Knuycky (2012) and Kleider-Offutt, Knuycky, Clevinger, and Capodanno (2017), it was concluded that stereotypical face-types (e.g. Afrocentric features) looked to be more likely the cause of misidentifications than own-race bias when using real-world application.
- ❖ Barkowitz and Brigham (1982) and McGuire and Pezdek (2016) found that certain signals may motivate a perceiver to direct more attention and mental resources to encoding a suspect's face but even with increased motivation, they're less likely to be accurate if the suspect is of another race.
- ❖ Smith, Stinson and Prosser (2004) stated findings concluding that sequential lineups are superior to simultaneous lineups due to fewer false positive errors.

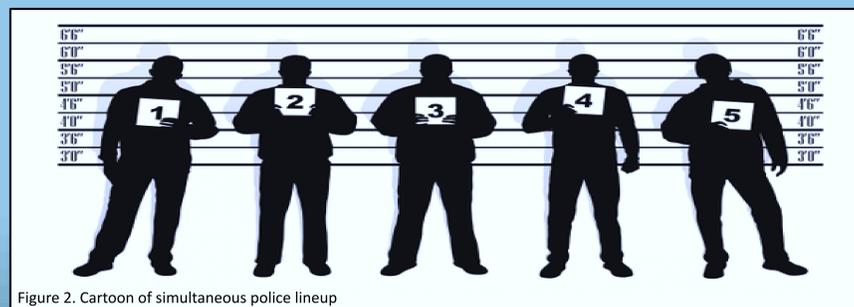


Figure 2. Cartoon of simultaneous police lineup

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Figure 2. Cavanaugh, M., & Burke, M. (2011). [Cartoon of simultaneous police lineup]. Retrieved from: <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2011/sep/26/sdpd-change-lineup-practices/>

Discussion

Eyewitness identification plays a large role in multiple parts of the criminal justice system. Eyewitness evidence begins at the time of the crime and ends at the conviction, playing important roles throughout the whole process. Due to the amount of false eyewitness testimony that leads to faulty convictions, this is a topic that needs to be researched.

All those involved in the courtroom work group, such as judges, juries and attorneys, should be warned about the potential lack of reliability in such testimony. Caution should especially be given to cases in which the eyewitness is of a different race than the suspect. In the case of lineups, sequential lineups that support relative judgement are superior to simultaneous lineups that support absolute judgement. Relative judgement is used when witnesses compare faces directly to memory rather than to the other faces.

Through this literature review, it can be concluded that own-race bias is a consistent finding with many factors affecting the way in which it can be altered. Future research should be done to clarify if the own-race bias is due simply to race or due to experience and exposure as some studies showed the strongest own-race bias in White participants. Some of these factors include ambiguity of the faces, characteristics of the suspect and the witness, incentives, confidence, delay and much more. More research is needed in this topic, especially relating to real-world application with lineup practices.

Future Research

Now that the literature review has been conducted, I plan to create a study that addresses the question of own-race bias or experience and exposure effect. The first step to doing this is to plan out the measures that will be used in the study and begin working on an IRB proposal.

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