

Cognitive Space for Multiracial Faces

The explosive growth of the multiracial population has led to substantial interest in multiracial face perception. One striking trend from race categorization studies is that the faces of self-identified multiracial individuals are very seldom classified concordantly (i.e., as “multiracial”). These findings raise the question of whether people are perceptually capable of distinguishing multiracial faces from the monoracial and “emergent race” faces with which they are often confused in categorization experiments. We collected pairwise similarity judgments of Asian-White multiracial, Asian, White, and Latinx faces (Experiment 1) and Black-White multiracial, Black, White, and Latinx faces (Experiment 2), using discriminant function analysis and multidimensional scaling to assess whether participants possess perceptually distinct mental representations of multiracial individuals. Although participants’ mental representations of multiracial faces were not perfectly delineated, the results indicated that people are capable of perceiving multiracial faces as a distinct category to a far greater degree than might be expected based on race categorization research.