

Configural and featural face processing are modulated by spatial attention: evidence from event-related brain potentials

Hailing Wang

Tsinghua University

Shimin Fu

Tsinghua University

Abstract: Face recognition is widely believed to rely on two distinct mechanisms, the configural (e.g., the distance between two eyes or between mouth and nose) and featural (e.g., the shape of the eyes or mouth) face processing. However, little is known about whether the two processing types are affected by spatial attention. In our study, spatial attention was manipulated by asking participants to attend to the left or right visual field. We found that configural face processing elicited a larger P1 compared to featural face processing when they were attended. In contrast, the P2 was larger for featural relative to configural face processing when they were attended. Therefore, the results suggested that configural and featural face processing are differentially affected by spatial attention at different time windows.