



DEBRIEFING FORM

Project Title: Mechanisms of Attention

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Thank you for your participation in our study. Your time and commitment to psychological research at the University of Alberta is greatly appreciated. Although there has been much research investigating the ways in which people pay attention, there is still much that remains unknown. For example, researchers have found that people pay attention to (i) regions of space (Posner, 1980) (ii) specific objects (Lavie & Driver, 1996), and (iii) moments in time (Hayward & Ristic, 2016), however attention does not always prioritize one method over another. Likewise, some investigations have found that people prioritize certain content (social faces, reward information, etc) more than other, nonsocial content (e.g., Anderson et al., 2011; Friesen & Kingstone, 1998; Hayward et al., 2018), yet this isn't always the case (e.g., Vecera & Rizzo, 2006; Tipples, 2008). Further, while some theories have been put forth to predict level of distractibility based on perceptual features in the environment (e.g., Load theory, Lavie & Tsai, 1994), this theory has recently come under criticism (e.g., Benoni & Tsai, 2010). Thus, the proposed line of research is designed to get a better sense of the mechanisms underlying attention and distraction.

The goal of the current study is to determine whether the social value of an object influences how we pay attention to that object. We postulate that some objects may communicate information about an individual's identity, while other objects may convey information about social events. Conversely, we hypothesize that other objects may not hold any social value. As a result, a third of the objects shown in this study were objects that are typically affiliated with certain "groups" of people, another third of the items were objects that are commonly associated with social situations, and the final third were objects that are generally not unique to social situations or specific groups of people. You were first asked to do a search task in order for us to determine if individuals attend to "social" objects more than "non-social" objects. If they do, then we can expect that individuals will find the "social" objects faster than the "non-social" objects. Next, the memory task was included to assess whether or not the social value of an object improves the accuracy of one's memory. If it does, then we can expect that participants will be more accurate in their placement of the "social" objects than the "non-social" objects. Furthermore, you were asked to answer a few slider questions for each object. This was done to assess the social value of each object, the specific type of social information that the object communicates, and the level of consensus among participants' responses. As an additional manipulation, we also primed half of the participants with "socialness" by including a line in the instructions that explained our interest in exploring the social value of objects. This was done to investigate whether or not thinking about "socialness" before the experiment improves attention to social objects. Finally, you were then asked to complete the Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ) in order for the researchers to assess if/how autism traits relate to one's performance in this study. Note that this is basic research and can in no way be used for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. You will not be given feedback about your responses.

If you have any further questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact the PI, Dr. Dana Hayward, at dana.hayward@ualberta.ca. If you would like to withdraw your data from the study after testing is completed you may do any time up until 30 days after your testing session was completed. This can be done by contacting the PI. If you have any questions about research participation, contact our Research Participation Coordinator at (780) 492-5689, or rescrcd@ualberta.ca.



For further reading on similar issues you may want to consult these interesting articles:

Langton, S.R.H., Law, A.S., Burton, A.M., & Schweinberger, S.R. (2008). Attention capture by faces. *Cognition*, 107, 330-342.

Doherty, B.R., Patai, E.Z., Duta, M., Nobre, A.C., & Scerif, G. (2016). The functional consequences of social distraction: Attention and memory for complex scenes. *Cognition*, 158, 215-223.

Thank you very much for participating. Without the help of volunteers like you, we could not answer many important scientific questions in psychology. We have one last request: **Please don't tell other people about what we asked you to do in this study, as it is very important that they approach the study as you originally did, i.e., without expectations and without full awareness of our objectives.** This is important because it is the only way we can obtain objective and valid information.

Yours truly,
Dr. Dana Hayward
Assistant Professor