



## “Please catch my eyes”: Perceptions and reactions to facial visible difference

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## Backgrounds

People living with a visible difference may experience stigma [1].



Affective reactions of other people can be especially difficult to deal with [2].

Little is known about the impact of visual attention on these reactions [3].

### Aim

To investigate the relationship between visual attention and affective reactions.

## Methods

### Participants

N = 89, Age: M = 19.20, SD = 1.82

### Stimuli

Portraits with and without a burn-like scar on a cheek.



**Task** 1) To look at the portraits,  
2) To rate the affective states elicited.

### Measures



This device enables researchers to investigate visual attention.

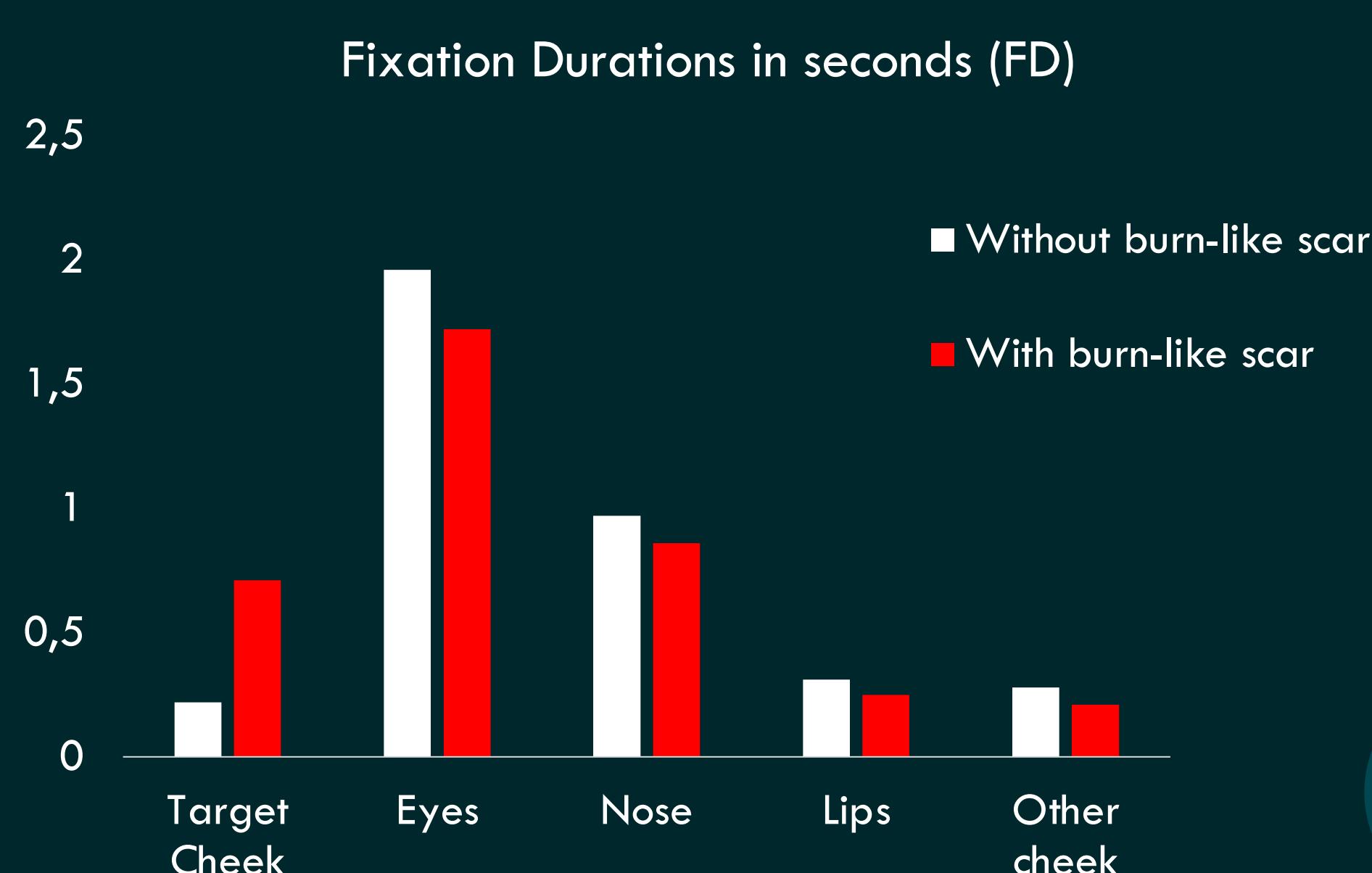
### Questionnaires of affective reactions



**1**

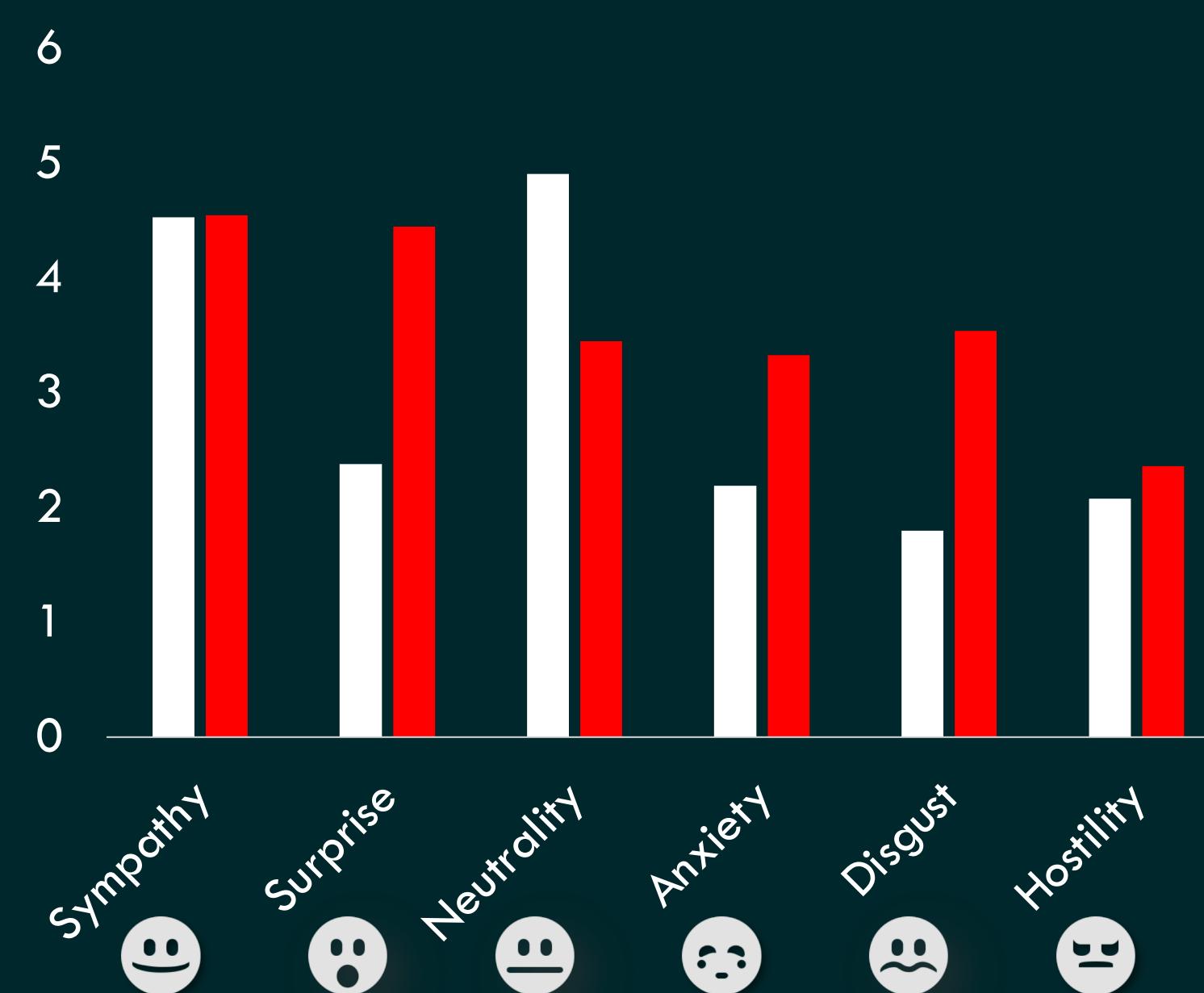
More time is spent looking at the facial difference and less looking at the central features of the face.

**2**



## Findings

### Affective reactions



**2**

Visible differences elicit ambivalent reactions.

**3**

The more the facial difference was explored, ...

FD on the eyes

-1SD

Mean

+1SD

Disgust

Surprise

Neutral

Anxi

Host

FD on the target cheek

Surprise

Neutral

Anxi

Host

FD on the target cheek

... the more disgust was reported, but only when the eye area was looked little at.

Surprise

Neutral

Anxi

Host

FD on the target cheek

Surprise

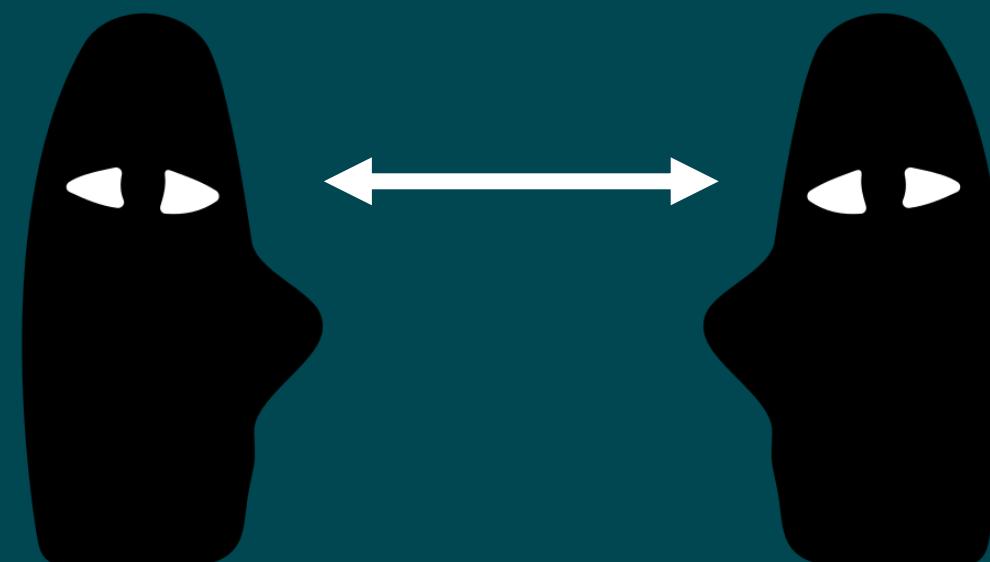
Neutral

Anxi

Host

FD on the target cheek

## Discussion



### Take-home message

Eye focus seems to limit stigmatizing reactions to a visible difference.

### Implications

#### For research

Why do people make eye contact (or not)?  
Does it affect behavior?



#### For practice

Can strategies fostering eye focus reduce stigma?

## References

- [1] Rumsey, N., & Harcourt, D. (2004). Body image and disfigurement: issues and interventions. *Body Image*, 1(1), 83–97. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1740-1445\(03\)00005-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1740-1445(03)00005-6)
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- [3] Stone, A., & Potton, A. (2019). Emotional responses to disfigured faces and Disgust Sensitivity: An eye-tracking study. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 24(9), 1191–1200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105317692856>

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