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"Please catch my eyes": Perceptions and reactions to facial visible difference

Project VISHU

<https://www.researchgate.net/project/VISage-et-HUMANITE-comprendre-et-prevenir-les-difficultes-dintegration-sociale-des-personnes-atteintes-de-defiguration-faciale>



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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

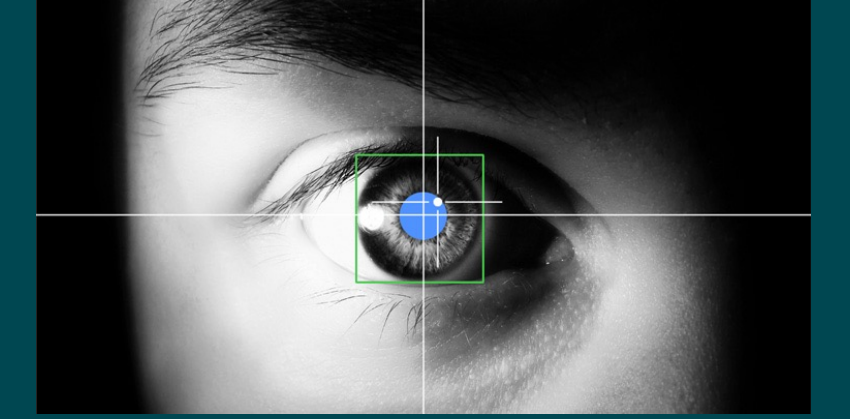
Stimuli

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



Measures

Eye-tracking technology



This device enables researchers to investigate visual attention.

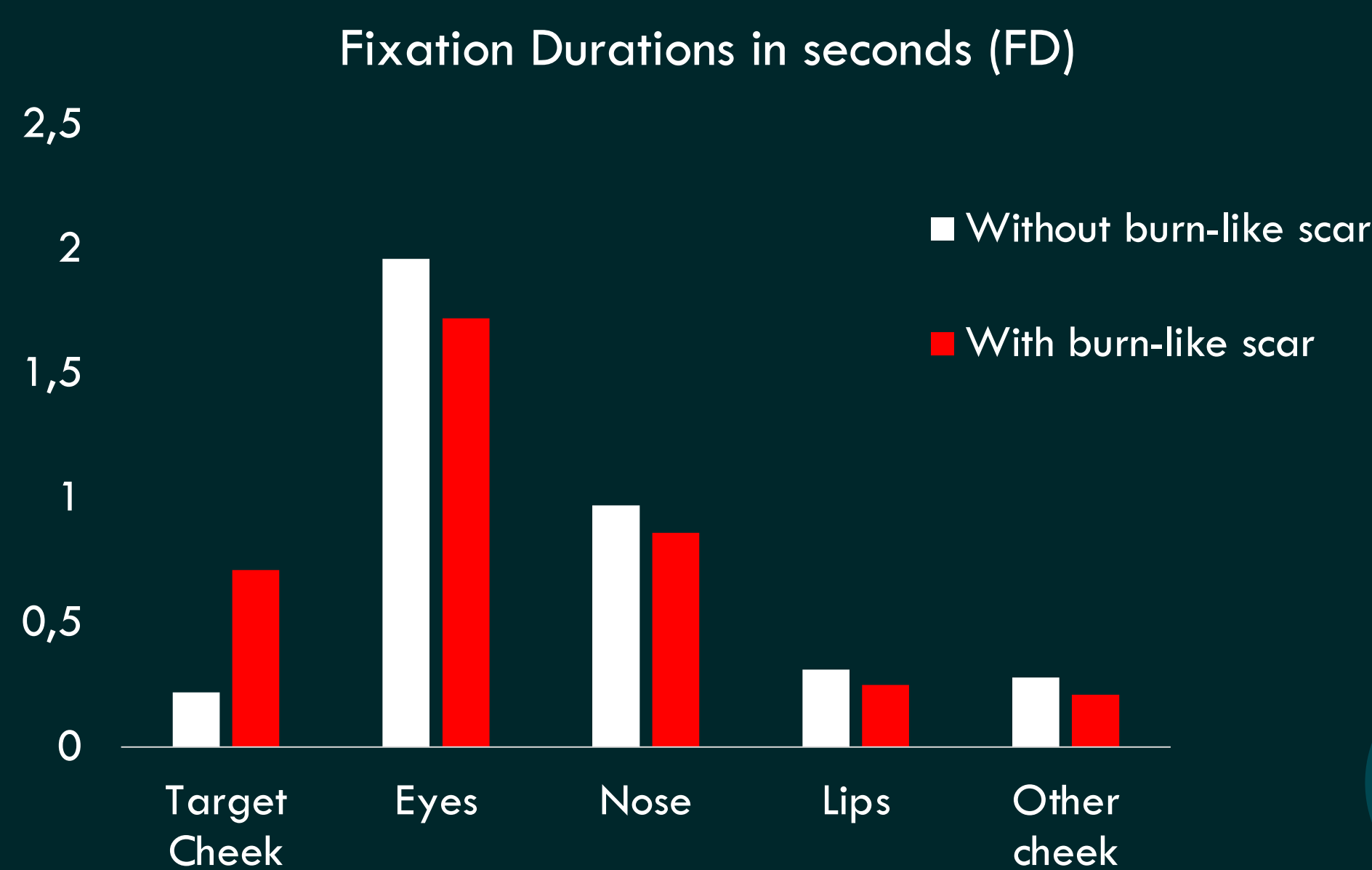
Questionnaires of affective reactions



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

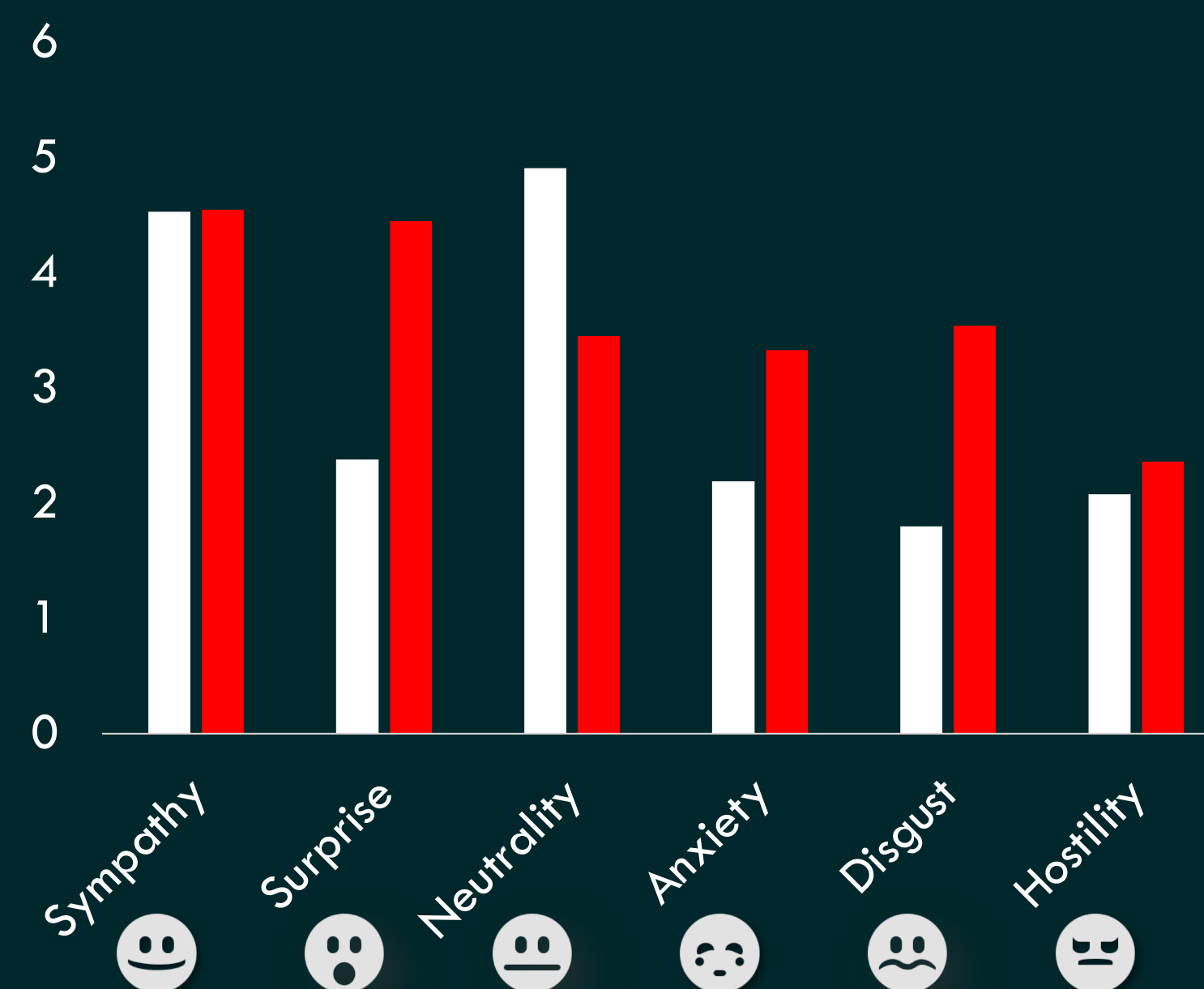
1

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



Findings

Affective reactions



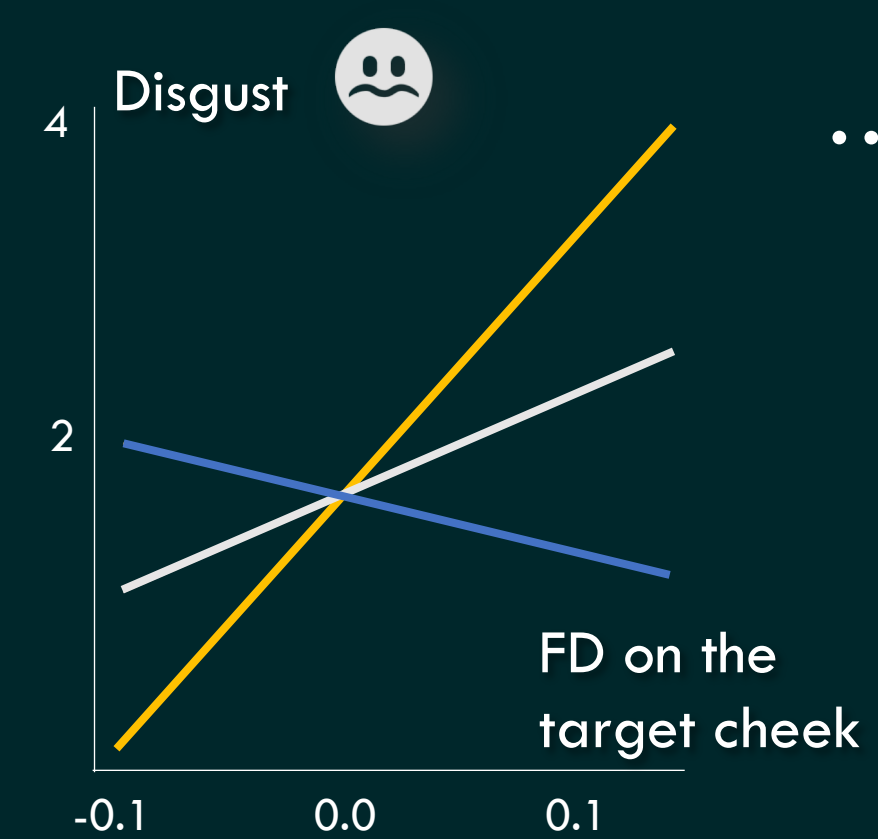
2

Visible differences elicit ambivalent reactions.

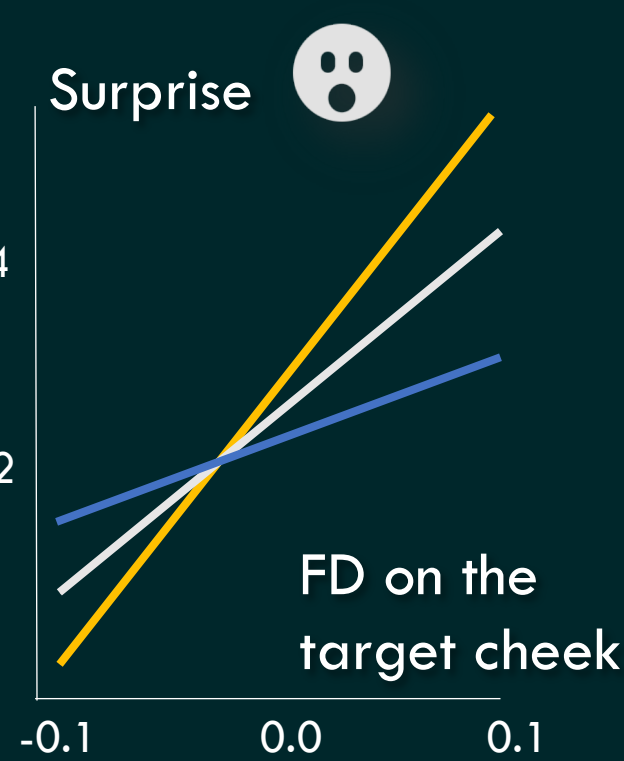
3

The more the facial difference was explored, ...

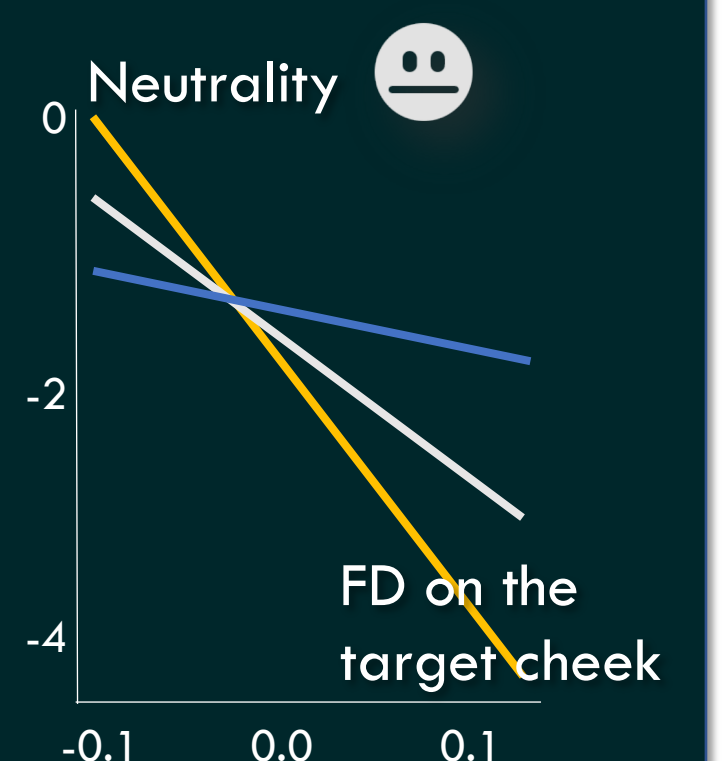
FD on the eyes
-1SD
Mean
+1SD



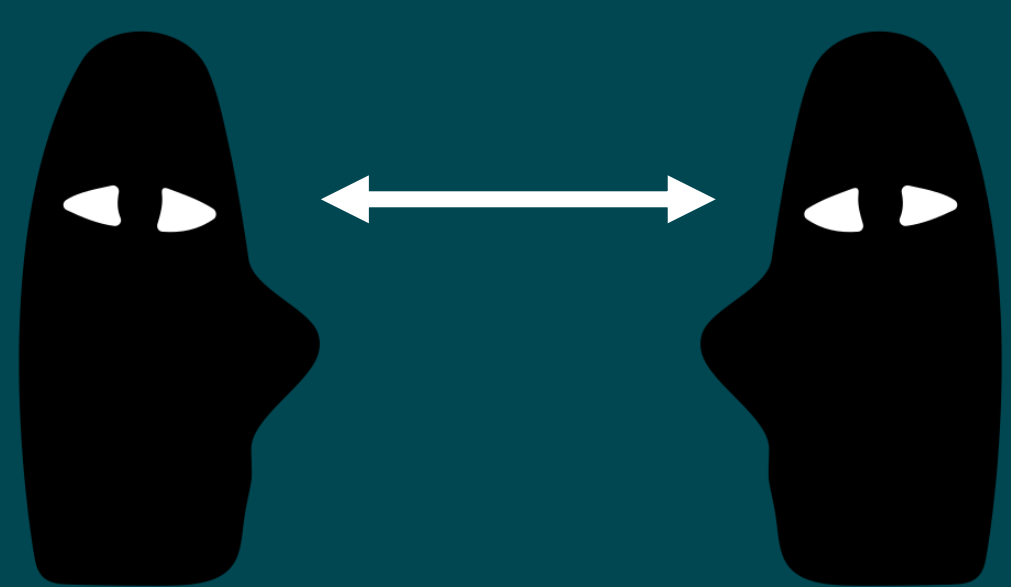
... the more disgust was reported, but only when the eye area was looked little at.



... the more (less) surprise (neutrality) was reported, and particularly when the eye area was looked little at.



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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