

Separable (and race-selective) neural mechanisms for judging individuated and non-individuated others

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From the quickest glimpse of someone, 'snap' judgments are readily made using superficial information; these are often stereotypic, and other times, surprisingly accurate. The neural basis of these is unclear. We used fMRI with a factorial design to examine whether dissociable neural systems underlie non-individuated judgments (i.e., made at zero-acquaintance given only superficial information) and individuated judgments (i.e., made when given additional idiosyncratic information), and if these systems are sensitive to a target's race. White and Black targets were either 'introduced' through a gradual presentation of idiosyncratic person-descriptive information (individuated), or they remained superficial, continuously accompanied by bogus non-descriptive information (non-individuated). Between information segments, participants repeatedly made dispositional judgments about targets. These judgments never explicitly corresponded with any person-descriptive information participants may have received. Whole-brain analyses revealed that the amygdala showed selective responses to judgments of non-individuated others. In contrast, individuated judgments engaged a network associated with Theory of Mind (ToM), including left temporoparietal junction, superior temporal sulcus, and middle frontal gyrus. Critically, activity in a localized region of paracingulate cortex (PCC), important for reasoning/representing another's mind, showed a robust interaction: while the PCC elicited greater activity when judging individuated relative to non-individuated Whites, it was not 'online' when judging Blacks. The findings point to distinct neural circuitry involved in judging individuated versus non-individuated others. We speculate that the amygdala may facilitate snap social judgments. The PCC is distinguished from other regions involved in ToM by its selectivity to ingroup (White) members, possibly providing a neural correlate of outgroup dehumanization.