

Introspective access to implicit shifts of attention

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Abstract

Literature in metacognition has systematically rejected the possibility of introspective access to complex cognitive processes. This situation derives from the difficulty of experimentally manipulating cognitive processes while abiding by the two contradictory constraints. First, participants must not be aware of the experimental manipulation, otherwise they run the risk of incorporating their knowledge of the experimental manipulation in some rational elaboration. Second, we need an external, third person perspective evidence that the experimental manipulation did impact some relevant cognitive processes. Here, we study introspection during visual searches, and we try to overcome the above dilemma, by presenting a barely visible, “pre-conscious” cue just before the search array. We aim at influencing the attentional guidance of the search processes, while participants would not notice that fact. Results show that introspection of the complexity of a search process is driven in part by subjective access to its attentional guidance.

Keywords

- Metacognition;
- Cognitive processes;
- Visual search;
- Consciousness