How Do Biologically Important Stimuli Capture Your Attention?
IRB # 12-06

This experiment is studying why biologically important stimuli are so good at capturing your attention. Being able to detect biologically important stimuli when you are engaged in some other task is obviously important for survival. However, focusing too much attention on these stimuli can, in some cases, lead to psychological problems, particularly those related to anxiety such as panic disorder and hypochondriasis. Hence, investigating how biologically important stimuli capture attention helps further our understanding of a fundamental cognitive process, and it may ultimately help us understand and treat anxiety disorders.

In this experiment you will perform a cued spatial discrimination task. Each trial will begin with a cuing stimulus presented on a computer monitor consisting of either the letter 'L' or 'R'. The 'L' cue will signal that the picture target stimulus will be presented to the left side of the monitor, and the 'R' cue will signal that the picture target will be presented to the right side of the monitor. The picture target stimuli will be correctly cued on most but not all trials. The picture target will be presented about 1 second after the cue. You are to press the 'q' key on the keyboard if the picture was presented to the left side of the monitor, and the 'p' key if it was presented to the right.

In all experiments the pictures will include images of household objects, plants, and /or people in normal, everyday situations. However, in some, but not all experiments the picture set will include graphic images of physical injury, such as mutilated bodies, accident scenes, etc. Because of the nature of these pictures we cannot accept participants under the age of 18. Also, you must have normal or corrected to normal vision (i.e., glasses, contacts) to participate in this experiment. The experiment should take about 1 hour. Participants will receive 1 PY151 research credit for participating.

If you would like more information about this experiment and/or want to sign up email:

attenlab@clarkson.edu