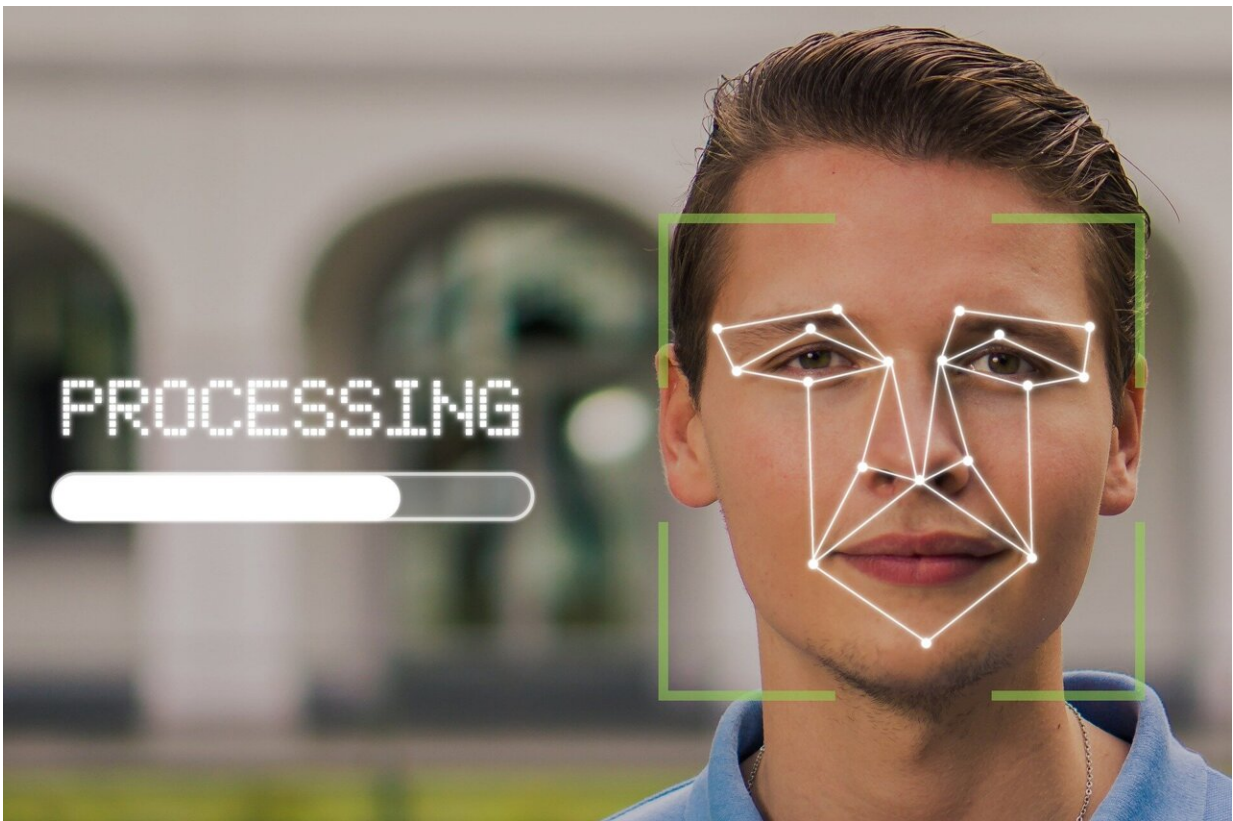


Testing of super-recognizers shows some have truly remarkable abilities

May 12 2023, by Bob Yirka



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Two specialized researchers, one with the Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (the Knowledge Media Research Center), the other with the Applied Face Cognition Lab at the University of Lausanne, have

validated reports that some people have super-recognizing abilities. In their study, reported in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Maren Mayer and Meike Ramon analyzed data from eyewitnesses of ongoing bank robberies in Fribourg, Switzerland, helping to identify two suspects.

Anecdotal evidence and reports from multiple criminal tracking organizations have suggested that some people can recognize another person's face with high accuracy after time has elapsed, even after seeing a face for just a few seconds. Such people have become known by police officials as super-recognizers (SRs). But as the researchers with this new effort noted, little if any research has sought to verify that self-described SRs or those described as such by others, do indeed have such abilities.

Mayer and Ramon were not actively seeking to test the skill of SRs. They were approached by officials from the Cantonal Criminal Police of Fribourg looking for help in solving robberies that had been captured on video.

Cantonal police provided the researchers with copies of the robbery videos and also videos of lineups as suspects were brought in for identification. Soon thereafter, the person responsible for both robberies was identified and jailed. Over the course of the investigation, 118 people had been asked to help identify possible suspects; 66 of the witnesses were known to be SRs. The researchers were then allowed to test both groups as they saw fit and then compared the work of both groups to learn more about the skill level of the SRs.

The researchers found that the skill level of the SRs varied greatly, with some having little greater recognition ability than the [average person](#). But some, they found, had truly exceptional facial recognition abilities. They also found that they could conduct simple tests with the SRs that helped to quickly ascertain their skill level. And they found that

performance by SRs could be enhanced by showing them other [forensic evidence](#) before asking them to identify a face.

More information: Maren Mayer et al, Improving forensic perpetrator identification with Super-Recognizers, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2023). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2220580120](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2220580120)

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