

Decreasing Sensory Noise Lowers Metacognitive Efficiency

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Submitter Dobromir Rahnev
Affiliation Georgia Institute of Technology

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Presentation Abstract Summary Visual metacognition is the ability to employ confidence ratings in order to predict the accuracy of one's perceptual decisions. Researchers have developed a number of paradigms to manipulate observers' overall confidence, independent of overall accuracy, but it is unclear how visual metacognitive efficiency can be affected. Here we show that a hierarchical model of confidence generation makes a counterintuitive prediction: metacognitive efficiency has a positive relationship with the level of sensory noise. In other words, decreasing trial-to-trial sensory noise is predicted to lower metacognitive efficiency. To test this prediction, we used a perceptual learning paradigm to decrease the amount of sensory noise. In Experiment 1, seven days of training led to significant decrease in noise but also a decrease in metacognitive efficiency. Experiment 2 showed the same effect in a brief 100-trial learning in each of two different tasks. Finally, in Experiment 3, we experimentally manipulated stimulus contrast to increase sensory noise and observed a corresponding increase in metacognitive efficiency. Our findings demonstrate the existence of a robust positive relationship between sensory noise and visual metacognition. These results provide strong support for our hierarchical model of confidence generation and demonstrate that one can directly manipulate metacognitive efficiency.

Co-author Information

* Presenting Author

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation	E-mail
Dobromir *	Rahnev *	Georgia Institute of Technology	drahnev@gmail.com
Ji Won	Bang	Georgia Institute of Technology	ji.bang@psych.gatech.edu
Medha	Shekhar	Georgia Institute of Technology	medha@gatech.edu

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