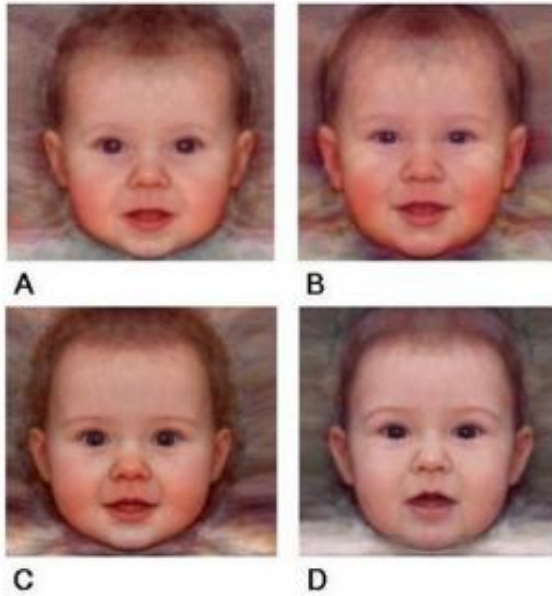


Women know bonnie babies best

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The averaged highly cute male (a) and female (c) baby faces are shown in the left column, the averaged less cute male (b) and female (d) baby faces are shown in the right column.

(PhysOrg.com) -- St Andrews researchers may finally have found the reason why women are more likely to coo over babies than men.

Women are able to determine a "cute" baby instinctively by its chubby cheeks, large forehead, big round eyes and button nose. However, according to the latest research, men struggle to distinguish a cute baby from any other.

Psychologists at the University of St Andrews, together with colleagues from the universities of Bern, Bielefeld and York, have used computer image manipulation to discover how subtle variations in cuteness between infant faces are perceived differently by males and females.

Dr Reiner Sprengelmeyer explained, "We found that young women between 19-26 and 45-51 years were more sensitive to differences in infant cuteness than men aged 19-26 and 53-60 years."

Surprisingly, however, women aged 53-60 years, performed at the same level as men in determining the attractiveness of the newborns.

Dr Sprengelmeyer continued, "Because average age at menopause is 51 years in the UK, these findings suggest the possible involvement of reproductive hormones in cuteness sensitivity."

"We therefore compared cuteness discrimination in pre and post menopausal women of the same age alongside women taking and not taking oral contraceptives (progesterone and oestrogen).

"Pre-menopausal women and young women taking oral contraceptives - which raise hormone levels artificially - were more sensitive to variations of cuteness than their respective comparison groups."

Ten images were chosen from ratings by both men and women from a pool of over one hundred baby photographs and combined into a composite, typically appealing baby face shape. Likewise ten images were selected to create a less appealing baby face shape.

Professor David Perrett is head of the Perception Lab where the images were made. He said, "These two face shapes gave us the cuteness dimension underlying the study for baby girls and baby boys."

The findings have led the psychologists to suggest that cuteness sensitivity is modulated by female reproductive hormones.

Dr Sprengelmeyer concluded, "Given that cuteness is considered an indicator of being young, helpless, and in need of care, we hypothesise that the ability to detect small variations in the degree of cuteness may have evolved to guide the allocation of necessary maternal resources to the infant."

Further research will explore whether cuteness sensitivity is implicated in post-natal depression.

The paper, "The Cutest Little Baby Face: A Hormonal Link to Sensitivity to Cuteness in Infant Faces by R. Sprengelmeyer, D.I. Perrett, E.C. Fagan, R.E. Cornwell, J.S. Lobmaier, A. Sprengelmeyer, H.B.M. Aasheim, I.M. Black, L.M. Cameron, S. Crow, N. Milne, E.C. Rhodes, A.W. Young" is published in "Psychological Science".

Provided by University of St Andrews

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