

Infants taught to maintain ability to distinguish between other-race groups

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Exposing infants to facial pictures of different races can reduce difficulty in recognising and discriminating between other-race groups later in life, according to a University of Queensland study published today.

Postdoctoral Research Fellow in UQ's School of Medicine Dr Michelle Heron-Delaney said this difficulty was commonly known as Other Race Effect.

Other Race Effect is a well-established phenomenon in [adults](#) and is assumed to be a consequence of experience with [faces](#) from races that are typically found in their environment.

“For instance, to many adult Caucasians, all Chinese people look alike, while to many Chinese people, all Caucasian people look alike,” Dr Heron-Delaney said.

“We found that at six months of age [infants](#) can discriminate individual faces from their own and other races but by nine months this ability is typically lost due to minimal exposure with other-race faces.”

The study, which will be published in the Public Library of Science today, investigated whether infants could maintain the ability to process other-race faces via book training in their own homes between six and nine months.

The team exposed 32 six-month-old Caucasian infants to six colour pictures of faces, and eight different sets of faces in total. Half the group was exposed to Chinese faces and the other to Caucasian faces. The team then retested the infants at nine months.

The results concluded that those infants exposed to Chinese faces were able to maintain the ability to discriminate faces from other-race groups while those infants who did not receive the exposure lost this ability.

“This outcome is unique and exciting - it demonstrates that training on other-race faces at this early stage of an infant's life can prevent the Other Race Effect from developing in the first place,” Dr Heron-Delaney said.

“It also confirms that even infants as young as six months of age can learn and remember content from a picture book interaction with their parents.”

Provided by University of Queensland

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