

Children are just as capable as adults at recognising faces from different angles

June 27 2014, by Min Song



They determined there was no significant difference between the two groups in how much their performance dwindled in response to the change in viewpoint, contrary to the argument that children are more affected by viewing angle than adults. Credit: Haylee Sherwood

A recent study has found that children are just as capable as adults at recognising faces from different angles, adding to the evidence that face recognition ability is already mature in young children.

Recognising someone a split second after seeing his or her face is an almost effortless activity for most people.

This complex ability to process [faces](#) is evident even in newborns, though in previous laboratory tests [face recognition](#) performance improved considerably across childhood.

Scientists have long disagreed on the reason for this gradual improvement.

One common argument is that as [children](#) age, they gradually start to process faces holistically, as adults do, instead of breaking faces into parts and processing each part individually.

Because this type of holistic processing would be necessary to extract the features of a face that don't change when viewed from a side angle, this theory suggested [young children](#) would be worse at recognising side-facing faces.

To test this theory, UWA School of Psychology's Dr Kate Crookes and University of Western Sydney expert Dr Rachel Robbins asked 32 adults and 26 eight-year-olds to study a set of computer-generated, front-facing faces.

The participants then picked out the same faces from pairs of front-facing faces and from pairs of side-facing faces.

The researchers found both groups were worse at picking out the previously learnt faces from pairs of side-facing faces than from pairs of front-facing faces.

They determined there was no significant difference between the two groups in how much their performance dwindled in response to the

change in viewpoint, contrary to the argument that children are more affected by viewing angle than adults.

Dr Crookes explains that factors such as poor concentration and memory might not have been controlled for in other studies.

"Children generally have poorer memory than adults, and we wanted to make sure this didn't reduce their ability to show their level of face recognition," she says.

"So we controlled for memory by making the task easier for the children, reducing the number of faces they had to learn at a time.

"The results support our previous findings that face recognition is mature in very young kids.

If we can continue improving our understanding of how face recognition develops, it could help develop a method of intervention for people with disorders that hinder their ability to recognise faces."

The research team hopes to expand upon this research by testing different age groups, including younger children and older [adults](#).

Provided by Science Network WA

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