

POSTER

REDUCED RELIANCE ON CONFIGURAL PROCESSING FOR INFANT FACES: EVIDENCE FROM THE THATCHER ILLUSION

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ABSTRACT

Face perception is a highly specialized skill in humans. Decades of research have demonstrated that face perception is reliant on configural processing strategies, thought to develop with experience. However, these studies have almost exclusively with adult stimuli. Interestingly, behavioral work suggests adult faces and infant faces elicit different responses. Infant facial cues have been shown to trigger different affective responses, neural activity, and even caretaking motivation. The current study investigated the use of configural processing in infant faces as compared to adult faces using the Thatcher Effect (TE). The TE is a robust configural disruption which occurs when local featural changes are harder to detect in inverted faces. For each infant and adult face identity, a normal unedited version and a Thatcherized version was shown in both an upright and inverted orientation. Participants rated faces using a 1 (not grotesque) to 7 (very grotesque) scale. The data showed a significant interaction between face type and orientation which indicated that the TE was more prominent for adult faces than infant faces in the upright condition. That the TE, a configural disruption, impacted infant facial processing less than adult facial processing would suggest that infant faces may be processed less configurally than adult faces. This finding is in line with work suggesting that the own-race bias in face processing may not extend to infant faces. Given their critical role in parenting and caretaking behavior, more research may be needed to better understand the underlying differences between infant and adult face processing.