

Young Children Form First Impressions From Faces

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Just like adults, children as young as 3 tend to judge an individual's character traits, such as trustworthiness and competence, simply by looking at the person's face. And they show remarkable consensus in the judgments they make, suggests a new *Psychological Science* study led by **Emily Cogsdill** of Harvard University.

Cogsdill's study received Open Data and Open Materials badges from *Psychological Science*, a designation the journal gives to articles whose authors share their data with other researchers for possible study replication. All data, face stimuli, and prompts used in the study are publicly available via the Open Science Framework (www.osf.io/c5kme).

In the experiment, the researchers had 99 adults and 141 children (ages 3 to 10) evaluate pairs of computer-generated faces that differed on one of three traits: trustworthiness (i.e., mean/nice), dominance (i.e., strong/not strong), and competence (i.e., smart/not smart). After being shown a pair of faces, participants might be asked, for example, to judge "which one of the people is very nice." As expected, the adults showed consensus on the traits they attributed to specific faces. And so did the children.

Children ages 3–4 were only slightly less consistent in their assessments than were 7-year-olds. But the older children's judgments were in as much agreement as adults', indicating a possible developmental trend. Overall, children seemed to be most consistent in judging trustworthiness, compared to the other two traits. This suggests that children may tend to pay particular attention to the demeanor of a face — that is, whether it is broadly positive or negative.

Importantly, the findings do not address the question of whether the judgments the children are making are *accurate* inferences of character. Rather, they simply demonstrate that adults and children are consistent in the traits they attribute to faces, irrespective of the validity of those judgments.

While it is still unclear exactly *when* the tendency to infer character from faces first emerges, it might be possible to test younger children with the same computer-generated faces to find out. APS Past President **Mahzarin R. Banaji** of Harvard University was the senior researcher on the study. She said she and her colleagues next plan to examine how social experience over time influences social perception.

Mahzarin R. Banaji will deliver the Fred Kavli Keynote Address at the 2014 APS Annual Convention in San Francisco, May 22–25, 2014.

To find out more about open scientific practices at *Psychological Science*, visit osf.io/tvyxz/wiki/view and pss.sagepub.com/content/25/1/3.full.