



Our latest Psychology research is...

testing new ways to measure an individual's ability to recognise emotion from faces

The problem

Our ability to recognise emotions from facial expressions changes as we age, varies with our mood, and is affected by our physical and mental health. If we can reliably measure how easy it is for an *individual* to recognise emotions from faces, we may be able to use this as an indicator of their health and wellbeing.

The current study

Healthy participants were presented with a series of images of faces on a computer screen. Some of the faces showed no emotion and so were neutral in expression and others had expressions of happiness or fear that varied in intensity (for example, from barely happy to extremely happy). We measured the intensity of expression needed for each participant to reliably detect the emotion.

What we found

It is possible to reliably measure an individual's ability to recognise emotions from faces; each participant could recognise happy faces at a lower intensity of emotion compared to fearful faces, and this difference was statistically significant at the individual level. This finding is consistent with research comparing averages across groups.

How does that help us?

The ability to recognise emotions is affected by our mental and physical health. Measuring an individual's sensitivity to emotions could be an indicator of their health and wellbeing and could inform clinical decision making. Future research will explore this in more detail, including understanding this in different disorders.

Reference: Delicato, L. S. (2020) A robust method for measuring an individual's sensitivity to facial expressions. *Attention, Perception & Psychophysics*. doi: 10.3758/s13414-020-02043-w

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