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Face-trait inferences show robust child-adult agreement: Evidence from three types of faces on “mean” versus “nice” judgments

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**Face-trait inferences show robust child-adult agreement: Evidence from  
three types of faces on “mean” versus “nice” judgments**

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**Abstract**

Humans rapidly and automatically use facial appearance to attribute personality traits (“trustworthy,” “competent”). To what extent is this face-to-trait attribution learned gradually across development versus early in childhood? Here, we demonstrate that child-adult concordance occurs even when faces should minimize agreement: natural (not computer-generated) adult faces; less developed children’s faces; and perceptually unfamiliar monkey faces. In Study 1, 3- to 12-year-olds and adults selected “nice/mean” faces among pairs with a priori “nice-mean” ratings. Significant cross-age consensus emerged for all three face types. Study 2 replicated this result using an improved procedure in which 44–48 faces appeared in randomized pairs. This converging evidence supports the idea that complex forms of social cognition – allowing perceivers to believe they can derive personality from faces – emerge early in childhood, a finding that calls for new procedures to detect this central facet of cognition earlier in life.

Keywords: social cognition; social cognitive development; person judgment; first impressions; trait impressions; face processing

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