The wide window of face detection.

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Abstract:

Faces are detected more rapidly than other objects in visual scenes and search arrays, but the cause for this face advantage has been contested. In the present study, we found that under conditions of spatial uncertainty, faces were easier to detect than control targets (dog faces, clocks and cars) even in the absence of surrounding stimuli, making an explanation based only on low-level differences unlikely. This advantage improved with eccentricity in the visual field, enabling face detection in wider visual windows, and pointing to selective sparing of face detection at greater eccentricities. This face advantage might be due to perceptual factors favoring face detection. In addition, the relative face advantage is greater under flanked than non-flanked conditions, suggesting an additional, possibly attention-related benefit enabling face detection in groups of distracters.

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