

LIFESTYLE

Children with ears that stick out are more cute - study

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Study reveals that protruding features make infants more adorable. Photo / 123RF

Daily Mail

Children whose ears stick out may be self-conscious.

But a new study shows that while large ears may catch the eye, the trait doesn't carry a social stigma.

In fact, an experiment showed that adults tended to rate children with larger ears as being more intelligent and likeable upon first impressions.

Dr Ralph Litschel, lead author of the study published in the journal *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery*, told LiveScience: "Protruding ears catch the eye, but not necessarily the imagination in a negative way."

The facial plastic surgeon at Cantonal Hospital St Gallen in Switzerland said that protruding ears may make children seem particularly cute.

It's thought that around five per cent of people have large ears.

In an experiment, scientists photographed 20 children between the ages of five and 19 who were considering surgery to stop their ears protruding as much.

They made a copy of each photograph and used Photoshop to show how the children would look after surgery and showed the pairs of images to 20 volunteers.

The experts used an eye-tracking device to measure which facial features caught the attention of the volunteers and asked them to guess each child's personality.

The results revealed that the observers spent an average of seven seconds looking at each child's face.

They spent an average of 10 per cent of that time looking at protruding ears, compared to six per cent for the ears in the Photoshopped images, demonstrating that the over-sized features did catch their attention.

The experts said this is because people tend to focus on what is different and novel in a face, as it helps us to recognise others.

Dr Litschel said they were surprised to find that the volunteers did not see the protruding ears as an undesirable feature.

Previous studies have shown that beauty influences people's perception of personality and the volunteers said that the children in the study all looked cute and smart.

It's unknown why it has been thought that protruding ears may lead to a biased perception of a person's personality, but it could hark back to a 1876 study by an Italian criminologist called Cesare Lombroso, who identified criminals by unusual facial features, such as their ears.

This work suggested that unusual ears went hand-in-hand with crime.

Dr Litschel added: "Up to today, popular comic cartoons with prominent ears represent the less-intelligent, immature, oddball character, like Shrek."

He noted that the results of the study may vary depending on the culture of the volunteers, as,

for example, big ears are seen as a sign of good fortune in Asia.

- Daily Mail