APA Example Paper: Effects of Age on Detection of Emotional Information

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Author Note

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Abstract

Age differences were examined in affective processing, in the context of a visual search task. Young and older adults were faster to detect high arousal images compared with low arousal and neutral items. Younger adults were faster to detect positive high arousal targets compared with other categories. In contrast, older adults exhibited an overall detection advantage for emotional images compared with neutral images. Together, these findings suggest that older adults do not display valence-based effects on affective processing at relatively automatic stages.

Keywords: aging, attention, information processing, emotion, visual search
Effects of Age on Detection of Emotional Information

Frequently, people encounter situations in their environment in which it is impossible to attend to all available stimuli. It is therefore of great importance for one’s attentional processes to select only the most salient information in the environment to which one should attend. Previous research has suggested that emotional information is privy to attentional selection in young adults (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Calvo & Lang, 2004; Carretie, Hinojosa, Marin-Loeches, Mecado, & Tapia, 2004; Nummenmaa, Hyona, & Calvo, 2006).

From this research, it seems clear that younger adults show detection benefits for arousing information in the environment. It is less clear whether these effects are preserved across the adult life span. The focus of the current research is on determining the extent to which aging influences early, relatively automatic detection of emotional information.

Regions of the brain thought to be important for emotional detection remain relatively intact with aging (reviewed by Chow & Cummings, 2000). Thus, it is plausible that the detection of emotional information remains relatively stable as adults age. However, despite the preservation of emotion-processing regions with age (or perhaps because of the contrast between the preservation of these regions and age-related declines in cognitive-processing regions; Good et al., 2001; Hedden & Gabrieli, 2004; Ohnishi, Matsuda, Tabira, Asada, & Uno, 2001; Raz, 2000; West, 1996), recent behavioral research has revealed changes that occur with aging in the regulation and processing of emotion. According to the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1982), with aging, time is perceived as increasingly limited, and as a result,
References


