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PROSOPAGNOSIA

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Prosopagnosia, also known as face blindness, is an impairment of faces recognition. It is often accompanied by other types of recognition impairments, such as place recognition, car recognition, facial expression of emotion, though sometimes it appears to be restricted to facial identity. No wonder that prosopagnosia can cause serious social problems. Prosopagnosics often difficulties in recognizing family members, close friends, and even themselves. Most of the cases of prosopagnosia that have been recorded have been due to brain damage resulted from head trauma, stroke, and degenerative diseases. Sometimes individuals had normal face recognition abilities which were then impaired. In congenital prosopagnosia, the individual never adequately develops the ability to recognize faces. Though there have been several attempts to treat this disease, no therapies have demonstrated lasting improvements among a group of prosopagnosics. Prosopagnosics often learn to use 'piecemeal' or 'feature by feature' recognition strategies. These strategies may include secondary clues such as clothing, gait, hair color, body shape, and voice. Prosopagnosia in children may be missed; they may just appear to be very shy or slightly odd due to their inability to recognize faces. They may also have a hard time making friends, as they may not recognize their classmates. They often make friends with children who have very clear distinguishing features. Children with prosopagnosia may also have difficulties following the plots of television shows and movies, as they have problems in recognizing different characters. They tend to gravitate towards cartoons, where the characters always wear the same clothes and have other easily recognizable distinguishing features. Prosopagnosiac children may also have a hard time telling family members apart, or recognizing people out of context. Additionally, children with prosopagnosia can face difficulties with the public school system, as many school professionals are not well aware of prosopagnosia, if aware at all. There are few neuropsychological methods of assessment that can definitively diagnose prosopagnosia. One commonly used test is the famous faces tests, where individuals are asked to recognize the faces of famous people. However, this test is difficult to standardize.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) conducts research related to prosopagnosia in its laboratories and also supports additional research through grants to major medical institutions across the country. Much of this research focuses on finding better ways to prevent, treat, and ultimately cure disorders, such as prosopagnosia.