

When a brain doesn't know who you are



It can be socially embarrassing when you meet someone again and you can't remember their name. But, how would you feel when you can't identify people that you have been working with on a daily basis for years? What if you can't identify family members or friends?

And, what if your look in the mirror and don't know who that person is?

This is the strange neurological disorder known as **Prosopagnosia** – the condition more commonly known as “*face blindness*”. The inability of the brain to process the identification attached to a particular facial profile is surprising not related to memory impairment or loss, vision problems or learning disabilities.

Rather, according to The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), prosopagnosia is the result of “abnormalities, damage, or impairment” occurring in the part of the brain processing memory and facial recognition (more specifically the right fusiform gyrus).

While face blindness is most well known, other deficits in processing can include problems with distinguishing:

- facial expression and emotions,
- cars, animals or objects
- navigation or place identification
- age or gender
- people from objects

The condition **most commonly develops as a consequence of stroke, traumatic brain injury or neurodegenerative diseases**, but it also appears as a congenital disorder and a characteristic of the autism and Asperger's spectrum.

Successful strategies developed by those with prosopagnosia is to rely on other distinguishing qualities, such as a vocal tone, hairstyle, hair color,

body shape, dress. This appears to work well for those recovering from strokes or traumatic brain injury. However, those with the congenital disorder may have gone through most of their life not knowing they have a problem and developed their own internal recognition system.

The video below shows the effects prosopagnosia of as a result of a on-the-job brain injury.

Sources:

<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/prosopagnosia/Prosopagnosia.htm>

<http://prosopagnosiaresearch.org/index/information>