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RECOGNIZING FACES, RECOGNIZING BIAS

RESEARCH BY PROFESSOR AND STUDENTS WINS MAJOR AWARD.

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | July 15, 2020*Above: Leslie Rollins**Read time: about 1 min*

Have you ever confused the identity of someone who belongs to social groups different from your own?

To find out why we make that common mistake, [psychology](#) professor Leslie Rollins and two student assistants conducted research that is making a significant impact on the field of facial recognition. The article describing their findings received the Outstanding Paper Award from the Southeastern Psychological Association.

"It was a very competitive group of finalists; however, Dr. Rollins' paper and presentation were excellent and impressed all members of our committee," wrote Dr. Andrew Kelly, chair of the award selection committee.

"It has been well established in previous research that people show social biases in face recognition by better remembering faces from their own age group, sex and race," Rollins said. "Our study investigated the cognitive and neural processes that underlie these biases."

Rollins, along with Aubrey Olsen '20 and Megan Evans '19, asked Christopher Newport students to make age or sex judgments while viewing photos of child and adult faces. Then, they completed a face recognition task. Event-related potentials, which measure electrical brain activity, were also recorded while participants completed the task.

"As expected, young adults in our study better remembered young adult faces than child faces and own-sex faces

than other-sex faces,” Rollins said. “Further, biasing participants to think about a specific social category (for example, age or sex) during learning impacted their memory for the faces and how their brains processed these faces.”

Rollins said the research will advance understanding of facial recognition, social biases and how our tendency to categorize people into social groups impacts our thoughts and behaviors.

Rollins, Olsen and Evans published an article about their research in the peer-reviewed journal *Neuropsychologia*. Rollins says it is the first paper published with event-related potential data collected at Christopher Newport.
