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TARGET ARTICLE

The Still Face: A History of a Shared Experimental Paradigm

Department of Psychology Georgia State University Lauren B. Adamson

Department of Psychology University of Georgia Janet E. Frick

When faced by a suddenly unresponsive social partner, young infants typically react by sobering and gazing away. This still-face reaction has intrigued researchers for several decades. In this article, we present a history of the still-face paradigm in which we locate early observations of the still-face effect, describe the formalization of a procedure that reliably produces it, and discuss how this procedure has been used to investigate a broad range of questions about early social and emotional development. In addition, we reflect on the heuristic value of shared experimental paradigms.

During the 1975 biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD), developmental psychologist Edward Tronick and his colleagues (Tronick, Adamson, Als, & Brazelton, 1975) presented a paper entitled "Infant Emotions in Normal and Pertubated Interactions." The highlight was the illustration of a phenomenon, the still-face effect, using then-novel videotape technology. First, a split screen image of a 70-day-old infant and his mother appeared on the conference ballroom's big screen as they engaged in the pleasant cyclic ebb and flow of a face-to-face interaction. Then, the dyad reappeared in a "still-face" con-

Requests for reprints should be sent to Lauren B. Adamson, I State University, Atlanta, GA 30303. E-mail: ladamson@gsu.edu Department of Psychology, Georgia

rapidly sobers and grows wary. He makes repeated attempts to get the interaction into its usual reciprocal pattern. When these attempts fail, the infant withdraws [and] orients his face and body away from his mother with a withdrawn, hopeless

fect. There are likely several reasons for this presentation's influence. Undoubtedly, the addition of a video clip to words and data heightened attention to the infant's immediate and intense reaction. More significantly, the presentation placed the infant's reaction in a new interpretative frame. For the first time, an experimental manipulation of an adult's behavior embedded a period of unresponsiveness into an ongoing social interaction. Observing an infant's actions before, during, and after a pertubated interaction raised issues not only about infants' early percepture. late affect and attention. tual experience but also about their social understanding and their ability to reguunresponsive adult, but it succeeded in initiating broad interest in the still-face ef-This presentation was not the first sighting of the young infants' reaction to

cognitive capacities. fect still challenges our understandings of young infants' social, emotional, and probe topics as varied as person perception, the emergence of gendered and cultural differences in communication, the roots of individual differences in attachment, and the effect of maternal depression on infants. Moreover, the still-face efstill-face effect rapidly piqued interest that has yet to abate a quarter-century later. This experimental manipulation has become a common procedure with which to Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 1979), with a title ("The Infant's Response to Entrapment Between Contradictory Messages in Face-to-Face Intermainstream of the burgeoning field of infancy research (the Journal of the Ameri-The study reported at the SRCD meeting was soon published as a peer-reviewed article (Tronick, Als, Adamson, Wise, & Brazelton, 1978) in a journal outside the actions") that did not explicitly evoke the still-face effect. Nevertheless can Academy of Child Psychatry, which was renamed the Journal of the American

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understood the still face. Our primary aim is to trace the emergence of the still face as a popular method in infancy research. To accomplish this, we systematically re-This exercise lets us focus specifically on the emergence of the still face as an experimental paradigm. To date, portions of the still-face literature have been sumlation to construct a historical narrative about how it has been used and interpreted In this article, we document how developmental scientists have employed and ed the burgeoning experimental literature that has used the still-face manipu-

> marized in articles and chapters that discuss the manipulation, but the still face has not been isolated from other related phenomena and manipulations to produce a comprehensive summary focused primarily on the still face itself. It is important to note that placing the still face in a historical frame is a complement to, not a substitute for, theoretical interpretations of robust findings or meta-analyses of the empirical literature, both of which we hope will be stimulated by this article.

the focus and the findings of our investigations. The still-face manipulation is a particularly good candidate for such an exploration. Like the Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), it is easy to locate in the literature through the citation of a small number of source articles. However, unlike the Strange Situation, the still-face manipulation has varied considerably across studcoded and analyzed, and the findings interpreted, we hope to gain a fuller appreciation of the promises and the pitfalls of shared experimental practices. ogy (Danziger, 1990). Although infancy researchers readily acknowledge their use the emergence and use of a standardized research protocol. The formulation of shared procedures, we rarely reflect on how these shared procedures influence shared procedures is one of the hallmarks of investigative practice within psychol-Our second aim is to treat our review of the still-face literature as a case By examining variations in how the procedure was performed, the data were

METHOD

ing a list of all unduplicated references in articles and chapters that employed a still-face condition. Each reference was checked to see if it contained the still-face perimental still-face manipulation with young infants. The period covered is from the late 1970s through 2001. Two procedures were used to locate relevant articles (age of infant, adult characteristics), procedural details (e.g., phases used, length of tionale for using the procedure and primary interpretation of its effect). Data coding also captured information about the methods used, including types of samples data sets were contained in the published literature) and theoretical perspective (raerences). Characteristics of each report of an empirical study using the still-face manipulation were systematically coded to abstract information about the investigators' practices (what the still-face manipulation was called, how many unique the still-face manipulation (for a list of these works, see the first section of the Refmanipulation and, if so, it was added to our list and its bibliography was checked for additional references. Second, we compiled all citations to Tronick et al. (1978) and chapters. First, we traced a citation network through the literature by compil-The source materials for this analysis are published studies that employed an exin the Social Science Citation Index through the first half of 2001. These two progenerated a total of 45 unduplicated references to empirical studies using

phases, codes for infant and for adult behavior), and statistical analyses (including factors used).

Because our primary aim in this article was to construct a narrative that describes the emergence of a shared experimental paradigm, the timing and setting of each study was of particular importance. This historical motivation led us away from performing a meta-analysis, which, although it might have clarified some concerns about the strength of the still-face effect within the literature taken as a whole, would have obscured important contextualizing information. To gather such information, we made several forays into the large literature that refers to the results of the empirical studies of the still face and documents the effects of other experimental manipulations of adult—infant interactions. We selectively draw on this related literature in our narrative account of the development and use of the still-face procedure (for a list of these works, see the second section of the References).

RESULTS

An Overview of the Corpus of Still-Face Studies

Since the publication of Tronick et al.'s seminal work in 1978, there has been a steady stream of published empirical studies of the still-face effect that has recently escalated (see Figure 1). The corpus of published empirical studies contains 45 studies that were produced by a total of 20 different research groups.

The vast majority of these studies has examined responses in samples of

The vast majority of these studies has examined responses in samples of healthy, full-term infants, who also tend to be primarily White. Other samples include Chinese infants (Kisilevsky et al., 1998), deaf infants (Koester, 1995; Koester & Meadow-Orlans, 1999; Smith-Gray & Koester, 1995), African American infants (Segal et al., 1995), cocaine-exposed infants (Bendersky & Lewis, 1998), infants with Down syndrome (Carvajal & Iglesias, 1997; Legerstee & Bowman, 1989), children with autism (Nadel et al., 2000), and infants of depressed mothers (Pelaez-Nogueras, Field, Hossain, & Pickens, 1996).

Although all of these studies retain the basic structure of Tronick et al.'s (1978) still-face procedure (i.e., interactive adult, followed by nonresponsive, still-faced adult, typically followed by a return to normal social interaction), other important methodological elements have varied considerably across studies. These elements

Although all of these studies retain the basic structure of Tronick et al.'s (1978) still-face procedure (i.e., interactive adult, followed by nonresponsive, still-faced adult, typically followed by a return to normal social interaction), other important methodological elements have varied considerably across studies. These elements include the age of the infant (M = 5.2 months, range = 1-12 months, plus one study done with autistic children aged 5-12 years; see Figure 2), the length of the still-face portion of the session (M = 106.3 sec, range = 45 to 180 sec; see Figure 3), and the behavior of the adult between segments (e.g., turning away, exiting and reentering the room, talking to the experimenter, or no break in interaction). Although Tronick et al. used a 180-sec still-face condition, 2 min is the modal length, and 90 sec is a close second.

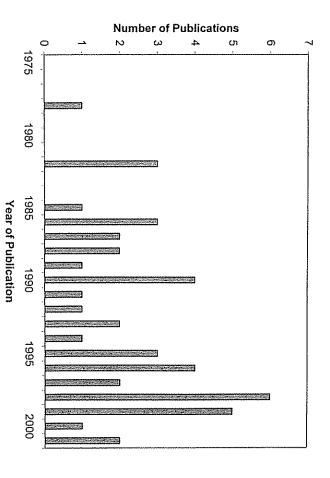


FIGURE 1 Empirical studies of the still-face effect as a function of year of publication (N=45).

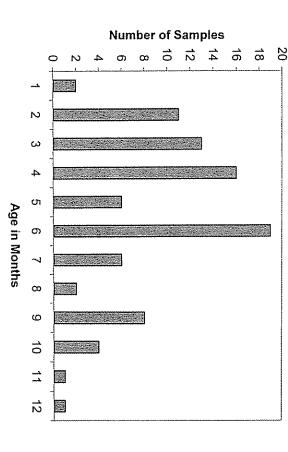


FIGURE 2 Age of infants observed in the still-face condition, N = 89 distinct samples used in 45 published studies; where a range of ages was used, mean age is displayed.

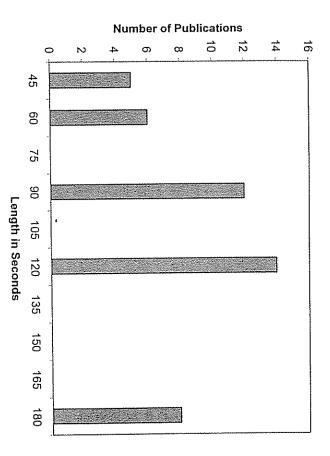


FIGURE 3 Length of the still-face condition in published studies (N = 45).

Coding procedures also varied across studies, although almost all captured the signature of the still-face effect, gaze aversion and a decrease in positive affect. In addition to coding for infant direction of gaze and basic facial expression of affect, some coding schemes have incorporated "rich" interpretations of clusters of behavior (e.g., Braungart-Ricker, Garwood, Powers, & Notaro, 1998; Weinberg & Tronick, 1994, 1996), or fine-grained microcoding of facial expressions (e.g., Carvajal & Iglesias, 1997; Shapiro, Fagen, Prigot, Carroll, & Shalan, 1998).

A Historical Narrative

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Precursors of the still-face effect. At its inception, the still-face manipulation had several close cousins in the experimental literature related to the perceptual and social abilities of very young infants. Researchers had manipulated adult communicative behavior to observe reactions to perceptual paradoxes (e.g., Aronson & Rosenbloom's, 1971, study of young infants' reaction when the mother's voice is displaced in space) and to variations in facial expression and movement (e.g., Wilcox & Clayton's, 1968, observations of 5-month-old infants' visual fixation and kicking as they watched silent motion pictures of a woman's face). Moreover, experimental manipulations had been used to discern what sorts

of stimulation best elicit infants' attention and affect (e.g., Brossard & Decarie's, 1968, study of the reinforcing value of faces alone and in combination with additional stimulation such as touch and holding). Other studies systematically exposed young infants to different experimental treatments, including the presentation of unresponsive social partners (e.g., Roedell & Slaby, 1977), to investigate the formation of social preferences.

the formation of social preferences.

In addition to these relatives, there were a few advance sightings of still-face-like phenomena. The earliest account was probably Kaila's (1932; cited in Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1980) brief description in German of how a 3-month-old infant responded to his social partner's suddenly immobile, neutral face with reduced smiling, uneasiness, and distress. The most tantalizing previews were produced by Stechler, Carpenter, and their colleagues during their studies of very early social perception. Stechler and Latz (1966) first spotted an intriguing anomaly when they repeatedly showed three nursery-reared newborns an assortment of real and schematic faces. At the end of the first month, two of the infants unexpectedly started to avert their gaze from an immobile full face, but not from a face in profile or a simple drawing of a face. They (Carpenter, 1974a, 1974b; Carpenter, Tecce, Stechler, & Friedman, 1970; Stechler & Carpenter, 1967) observed this phenomenon again in other studies that compared infants' reactions to different stimuli, including the mother's face, a mannequin head, and an abstract facelike colander that appeared through a rectangular hole in uniform dark green felt field. Stechler and his colleagues provided rich descriptions of the infants' behavior, including the "frequent almost surreputious glancing back at the target while holding the head averted" (Stechler & Carpenter, 1967, p. 182), and of the sequential aspects of the reactions, noting that "there is smiling or cooing followed by a sober-faced pause, followed by repeated smilling or cooing followed by distressed crying which required intervention" (Carpenter et al., 1970, p. 105). Moreover, they were convinced that the behavior was "clearly based on the informational rather than the energic qualities of the simulus incongruty and the violation of expectation. Finally, they contended that the reaction was deliberate:

The infant is trying to alter the behavior of the stimulus. It is as if the infant has expectations of the target which are not being met and it appears that the baby is attempting to change its discrepant environment. (Carpenter et al., 1970, p. 105)

Thus, by the beginning of the 1970s, the infant's striking reaction to the immobile face had entered the literature. It initially appeared against the backdrop of the traditional experimental literature related to young infants' discrimination of the human face, and so much of the primary contrast was drawn to reactions to other stimuli defined more or less as faces.

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The next, and for our purpose, defining move was to develop an experimental procedure that situated the phenomenon within the context of social interaction. The ground for this step was readied during lively interdisciplinary collaborations that focused on infants' early communicative abilities. Bruner's Center for to observe young infants as they interacted with people and objects. Included in this extraordinary collaboration were Brazelton (who offered Bruner a course in what "infants were *really* like", Bruner, 1983, p. 147), Papousek, Trevarthen, Cognitive Studies at Harvard was an especially noteworthy forum. In the late 1960s, Bruner drew to his Center postdoctoral fellows from several disciplines and with objects Together they filmed very young infants as they interacted with In the late

was informed by the central insights that young infants had different ways of interacting with people and with objects ("communicating" vs. "doing"; Bruner, 1968) and, more specifically, that they delighted in reciprocal exchanges with responsive caregivers (see Brazelton, Koslowski, & Main, 1974; Trevarthen, 1974). Second, this research began to take an expanded view of the young infant as ethological methods tempered reigning experimental approaches. As Trevarthen (1977) later collaborate with researchers to demonstrate infants' capacities (e.g., see Bruner's, 1968, description about how he and Papousek asked mothers to disappear unpredictably so that they might demonstrate how a "failure to obtain reciprocation produces an active avoidance," p. 57; see also Papousek & Papousek, 1977). noted, researchers were beginning to observe infants in ways that let them "express themselves more naturally," and their reactions were recorded "more directly than Two features of this work set the stage for the still-face manipulation. First, it 227). In addition, there were fledgling attempts made to have mothers

working with Adamson, Als, and Wise, made the decisive move of asking mothers to deliberately alter the way they interacted with their 2- to 6-month-old infants within the frame of an experimental paradigm. Tronick recognized that the still-face manipulation could be used to test the hypothesis that infants were active participants in social interactions that were mutually regulated. This was a bold hypothesis at the time, because several leading researchers (e.g., Kaye, 1979) were The experimental production of the still-face effect. 1972 Tronick

championing the opposing view that mothers were experts at acting as if the young infant was an active participant in early dialogues.

The still-face manipulation was one of three perturbations (the others asked the mother to count slowly or to sit still in profile) that were included in the pilot study that inaugurated the observation laboratory in Brazelton and Tronick's new Child Development Unit at the Children's Hospital Medical Center in Boston. The perturbations all involved three periods: a normal interaction without toys ("play with your baby as you typically do"), an experimental condition (e.g., "look at your baby with a neutral face" or "count very slowly as you play with your baby"), and a

reunion period during which the mother resumed the normal interaction. Between periods, the mother briefly left the infant alone in a curtained alcove.

The first published study of the still-face effect (Tronick et al., 1978) was done to establish that mothers both could and would alter their actions in ways that were expression, and amount and type of movement. The still-face effect was displayed by all of the infants, beginning with the first participant in the procedure. As captured on the videotape that was later shown at SRCD in 1975 and the still photographs reproduced in Figure 4 (Tronick et al., 1978; also reproduced in Tronick, 1980; Tronick, Als, & Adamson, 1979), this mother maintained a staring pose for 3 min, and her infant reacted with a complex blend of greeting, retreating, and attically coded to describe vocalizations, direction of gaze, head orientation, facial consistent with an experimenter's instructions and, more interestingly, that infants would react to these perturbations in intriguing ways. Data from seven infants ranging in age from 1 to 4 months were derived from videotapes that were systemmonitoring behaviors.



FIGURE 4 A times series of photographs taken from the videotape of the first infant observed in the still-face condition. From "The Infant's Response to Entrapment Between Contradictory Messages in Face-to-Face Interaction" by E. Tronick, H. Als, L. Adamson, S. Wise, & T. B. Brazelton, 1978, *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 17, p. 9. Reprinted with permission.

In addition to demonstrating the existence of the still-face effect, Tronick et al. (1978) discussed several aspects of the phenomenon. They described the occurrence of a carry-over from the still-face period into the beginning of the subsequent reengagement as infants often engaged in "wary monitoring" (p. 8) as their mothers issued an apology. They sketched the developmental course of the still-face effect. Drawing on the work of Stechler and Carpenter, they suggested that infants as young as 2 to 3 weeks appear to recognize when mothers violate the reciprocity of a social interaction and that over the first months of life, they may become increasingly skilled at reestablishing a reciprocal interaction. They illustrated the growing richness of the infants' repertoire of social acts with the memorable behavior of the boy depicted in Figure 4 who at 5 months of age remained wary for only half of the still-face condition, after which he

looked at the mother and laughed briefly. After this brief tense laugh, he paused, looked at her soberly, and then laughed again, loud and long, throwing his head back as he did so. At this point, the mother became unable to maintain an unresponsive still face, (p. 12)

Finally, Tronick et al. (1978) noted that the still-face effect is reminiscent of the patterns of staring and appearement displayed by other primates (Altmann, 1962; Chance, 1962) and of the reactions of infants to isolation (Bowlby, 1969; Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959).

Clarifying the still-face effect. The significance of the experimental production of the still-face effect was quickly recognized (e.g., see the discussion, which included Carpenter and Papousek, that followed Brazelton's brief description of the still-face effect at a Ciba Foundation symposium; Brazelton, Tronick. Adamson, Als, & Wise, 1975). Citation of Tronick et al. (1978) rapidly spread, even when the still-face manipulation was not performed (e.g., Arco & McCluskey, 1981). Moreover, the still-face effect was quickly replicated, not only by Tronick and his colleagues (Tronick, Ricks, & Cohn, 1982), but also by independent research teams (Fogel, Diamond, Langhorst, & Demos, 1982; Gusella, Muir, & Tronick, 1988; Murray & Trevarthen, 1985; Stoller & Field, 1982).

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There were several reasons for the immediate interest in the still-face effect. First of all, it is dramatic. Infants appear to find it more disturbing than several other perturbations of social interactions, including brief physical separations (Field, Stoller, Vega-Lahr, Scafidi, & Goldstein, 1986; Field, Vega-Lahr, Scafidi, & Goldstein, 1986; see also Field, 1994) and short interruptions of an interaction that occur when the mother turns away to talk briefly with an experimenter (Murray & Trevarthen, 1985). In addition, the effect is richly textured, with infants often displaying behavior patterns that include subtly timed dampened smiles, side glances at a partner, and yawns. Above all, the still-face effect is revealing. Al-

though researchers had already come to appreciate how well young infants could engage in reciprocal social exchanges with their obliging caregivers (e.g., Brazelton et al., 1974; Stern, 1974; Trevarthen, 1974), the still-face condition let them demonstrate infants' unaided ability to initiate exchanges and subtly modulate their attention. Only Lamb, Morrison, and Malkin (1987) raised any reservation about its value as a probe of early social expectancies. In addition to the still-face effect's appeal, the still-face procedure was greeted

as an efficient method for generating variables. It was simple, if not emotionally easy, for a parent to execute and an experimenter to validate. Moreover, researchers from several different laboratories quickly agreed on a recognizable signature for the still-face effect of increased gaze aversion and decreased smiling that contrasted markedly with infants' attentive, gleeful engagement during face-to-face interactions. To detect this signature, all that was needed was an observational coding scheme that characterized gaze, facial expression, and vocalizations so that a pithy set of variables related to gaze aversion, positive affect, and, less often, negative affect could be derived.

It is important to note that the simple signature of increased gaze aversion and decreased positive affect does not provide a rich description of the infants' emotional experience during the still-face manipulation. For one, it does not retain information from the entire procedure. With rare exceptions (Fogel et al., 1982; Stoller & Field, 1982), researchers have focused on behavior during the still-face condition, although recently some investigators (Bendersky & Lewis, 1998; Kogan & Carter, 1996; Weinberg & Tronick, 1996) have argued persuasively that the reengagement period provides an excellent opportunity to observe the infant's ability to reorganize following an emotionally distressing situation. Moreover, the signature glosses over some distinctive nuances of the infants' self-organizing behavior such as rapid gaze alterations, yawning, and self-comforting actions. It also does not provide a functional interpretation for the infants' actions, as do more rarely used synthetic schemes (e.g., Infant Coping Behavior System, Gianino & Tronick, 1988; Infant Regulatory Scoring System, Weinberg & Tronick, Gohn, & Olson, 1999; the COPE procedure for coding comforting, object orientation, parent orientation, and escape by Braungart-Rieker et al., 1998) that are more difficult to apply. Finally, it does not probe beneath the behavioral surface to monitor the infants' physiological reaction to the perturbation (but see Frick & Abelkop, 2000; Stoller & Field, 1982; Weinberg & Tronick, 1996).

A richer description of infants' responses during the still-face procedure may help clarify to what extent the still-face condition is stressful. Although the procedure has the reputation of being distressing (e.g., Legerstee & Bowman, 1989), several studies that have coded negative affect (e.g., Ellsworth, Muir, & Hains, 1993; Fogel et al., 1982; Mayes & Carter, 1990; but see Moore, Cohn, & Campbell, 2001) have replicated Tronick et al.'s (1978) finding that infants do not typi-

cally cry during the still-face phase of the manipulation, although they may be significantly more likely to do so in the reunion phase (Weinberg et al., 1999; but see Gusella et al., 1988; Kisilevsky et al., 1998). Moreover, a richer description of the still-face effect may also provide a fuller treatment of individual variations in its though there are intriguing reports that individual differences in affective reactions (Stoller & Field, 1982) and coping strategies (Gianino & Tronick, 1988) may be during the preceding social interaction than during the still-face phase). Moreover, rarely has the basic issue of short-term stability been systematically addressed, alexpression. Although the effect is remarkably robust, not all infants readily display relatively stable see Fogel et al., 1982, who described two infants who were more avoidant

The full developmental course of the still-face effect has also not yet been fully clarified. Except for Stechler and Carpenter's early sightings of the effect, there has been little attention to how infants under 2 months of age respond. Moreover, by 9 months of age, and perhaps earlier, the implementation of the still-face condimounting evidence that the expression of emotions during the still-face condition does not change systematically from 2 to 6 and perhaps even 9 months of age (Cohn, Campbell, & Ross, 1991; Gusella et al., 1988; Lamb et al., 1987; Moore et al., 2001; Shapiro et al., 1998; Stack & Muir, 1990; Toda & Fogel, 1993). One inescape the impact of the manipulation by redirecting their attention toward objects or by successfully reengaging the adult (Cohn & Tronick, 1982; Tronick et al., 1978; Tronick et al., 1982; but see Striano & Rochat, 1999). Nevertheless, there are triguing possibility is that the increase in gaze aversion reflects a more general developmental increase in the behavioral complexity and organization of coping mechanisms over time (for a discussion of this possibility, see Gianino & Tronick. age (Gusella et al., 1988; Moore et al., 2001; Toda & Fogel, 1993), although at all these ages infants avert their gaze significantly more often during the still-face condition than during periods of normal social interaction. Moreover, there is tion may need to be changed because some infants appear able to actively alter or 1988; Toda & Fogel, 1993). indications that gaze aversion increases from 3 to 6 and perhaps 9 months of

Explaining the still-face effect. From the very first reports of the still face, researchers have moved beyond describing the still-face effect to trying to explain why the manipulation produces such a profound reaction. In turn, this search for an explanation has fueled some superb programmatic efforts to understand infants behavior. The result has been a literature characterized by an unusual blend of careful experimentation and complex conceptualization.

govern the mutual regulation of social interactions. The adult is simultaneously suggest that the still-face of goals and emotions is critical to a full explanation of the still-face According to Tronick and his colleagues (Tronick et al., 1978), a consideration effect arises because the procedure violates the rules that effect.

> as they respond to a still-faced social partner (Tronick et al., 1982). the finding that infants sequentially weave positive and negative affective displays scores how important the transfer of emotion between the infant and caregiver is to the infant's growing sense of effectance (Tronick, Cohn, & Shea, 1985; Tronick & Gianino, 1986). One strength of this regulatory model is that it was able to predict the expected goals of a reciprocal interaction. This demonstration, in turn, undercontradiction" (p. 11). The infant's responses demonstrate an impressive capacito detect the partner's intentions and to regulate affective displays to try to achieve communicating "Hello" and "Goodbye" and the infant becomes "trapped in the contradiction" (p. 11). The infant's responses demonstrate an impressive converted

the dynamic flow of the infant's arousal. However, soon most researchers echoed Tronick's suggestion that an adequate explanation of the still-face effect had to Early on, parsimonious interpretations were proposed that focused almost exclusively on the infants' immediate experience of the still-face stimulus. For example, Field's earliest explanation of the still-face effect (Stoller & Field, 1982; but consider not only immediate experience but also the infants' appreciation that the affective tolerance model of early social interactions that focused interpretation on (1982a, 1982b) assimilated the still-face effect into his broad consideration of an the level rather than the quality of maternal stimulation. In a related attempt, Fogel see Field, 1994) was based on her optimal activation band model that emphasized

velopmental change in sensitivity to purely visual and auditory aspects of mothers' interactive behavior. Muir and Stack continued to probe the role of touching by systematically allowing different forms of touch to the still-face manipulation. Stack and Muir (1990) confirmed that touching often occurred when mothers were expected patterns of social interaction had been violated.

Muir and his colleagues at Queen's University have been especially persistent in their attempt to come to grips with what causes the still-face effect (for a review, see Muir & Hains, 1993). Beginning with a much-needed control study that demonstrated that the still-face effect was not merely due to the passage of time they began to explore the effects of more nuanced variations of the adults' hand movements by, for example (Experiment 2), having an experimenter actively or passively touch 5-month-old infants during the still face with or without the infant's vision of the hands being blocked by an opaque bib. Once again, it appeared allowed to do so during both normal interactions (Experiment 1) and during still-face periods when touching was permitted (Experiment 2) and that the still-face effect was partially mitigated when the mother was allowed to actively onstrated that the still-face effect was not merely due to the passage of time (Gusella et al., 1988, Study 1), they then systematically decomposed the still-face stimulus in hopes of determining what it means to young infants. The most provocperiods (Gusella et al., 1988, Experiment 2), the contrast between periods was fect. When mothers did not touch their infants during both the normal and still-face touch the infant. After replicating this finding (Stack & Muir, 1992, Experiment 1), elimmated for 3-month-olds but not for 6-month-olds, suggesting that there is a destream of findings delineated the role of touch in mitigating the still-face t 1) and during
2) and that the

playful interaction, or maintain eye contact that even when an adult's facial and vocal expressions were unresponsive, active touch could elicit a substantial amount of infant smiling. Stack (Stack & Arnold, 1998; Stack & LePage, 1996) subsequently took this research in an interesting direction by asking if by touch alone still-faced and silent mothers could communicate different interactive arms such as getting the infant to imitate, engage in a

work, see Rochat, Neisser, & Marian. 1998). However, "the story is not so simple" (Muir & Hains, 1993, p. 182). The more one varies the still-face procedure by, for example, altering the order of conditions or substituting a stranger for the mother, (Stack & Muir, 1992. p. 1522). On the one hand, touch by a still-faced adult may elicit a substantial amount of positive affect. On the other hand, the dynamic face seemed to have privileged status in early social interactions. When touch is absent, the sight of a still face provokes the still-face effect while a loss of general stimulathe more it appears that young infants' expectations are informed by the interactive context adult vocalizations, or contingency does not (Muir & Hains, 1993; for related research program has produced findings that "create a bit of a mystery"

theoretical approaches that might stimulate satisfying explanations. For example, Muir and his colleagues have been inspired by views as varied as Gibson's (1979) notion of amodal stimulation (see Stack & Muir, 1992) and dynamic systems theory (Fogel & Thelen, 1987; see Muir & Hains, 1993), whereas others, Indeed, the significance of the still face as an experimental effect may rest in large measure on its success as a focal point for discussions of the essence of the young infants' experience of social interactions. These discussions are characterized by unusually broad scope. Researchers have cast wide nets to find possible over, the still-face effect has brought into consideration processes as fundamental as early perception, emotion, and cognition and as multifaceted as self and mutual regulatory affective processes in mother-infant relationships (e.g., Weinsuch as Trevarthen (1998), have emphasized intersubjective perspectives. berg et al., 1999). In short, the still-face effect clearly does not admit to a simple explanation

ing to note how rapidly the procedure was adopted and how it was adapted to address a range of concerns. procedure into their ar: Adopting and adapting the still-face procedure. spied as a phenomenon, several researchers incorporated the still-face to their arsenal of methodological tools. For our purpose, it is interest-Once the still-face ef-

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retical probe. Fogel and colleagues (Fogel et al., 1982) provided the earliest example of this use when they modified the still-face procedure to test their dynamic model of emotion. They argued that their model would be supported if the arousing effect of the still face was modulated by when the still face occurred relative to the One productive but relatively uncommon use of the still face has been as a theo-

> was decreasing, as it might be when the infant first smiles at the mother. Fogel et al.'s (1982) comparison of how infants reacted to the still face begininfant's rapid cycles of tension during social interactions. More specifically, if the level of tension was on the rise, as they suggested it is when the infant first looks at the mother, a sudden still face might be more upsetting than if the level of tension

seem to draw the line based on animacity. When infants were faced with various still-faced people and "dynamic, interactive, multimodal" objects (Ellsworth et al., 1993; see also Legerstee, Corter, & Kienapple, 1990; Legerstee, Pomerleau, Malcuit, & Feider, 1987), they appeared to make a categorical judgment. The affective aspect of the still-face effect was reserved only for people; infants reacted to all manners of more-or-less humanlike objects with only flat affect regardless of subtle variations in postcondition behavior were not replicated by Stoller and Field (1982). However, the general strategy of comparing the still-face effect across conditions to map out the young infant's experience of the social world proved informative. At least in its basic signature, the still-face effect was readily elicited not only by the mother but also by strangers (e.g., Ellsworth et al., 1993; Stack & Muir, 1992, Experiment 2), by fathers (Braungart-Rieker et al., 1998), and even by a televised image of an adult (Gusella et al., 1988, Experiment 3). However, infants ning after a first look versus after a first smile produced empirical findings that were equivocal at most: The still-face effect was robust in both conditions.

differences has been the focus of studies that have included groups such as preterm and full-term middle-class and lower class African American infants (Segal et al., 1995; see also Kogan & Carter, 1996), Chinese and Canadian infants observed how similar the object was to a person.

A second application of the still-face procedure has been as an indicator of group differences. Often replication of the effect rather than the documentation of 2000) as well as to address enduring questions about gender differences in communication (Weinberg et al., 1999). Down syndrome (Carvajal & Iglesias, 1997; Legerstee & Bowman, 1989), deafness (Koester, 1995; Koester & Meadow-Orlans, 1999), and autism (Nadel et al., 2000) as well as to address enduring questions about gender differences in early with fathers and with mothers (Kisilevsky et al., 1998), and infants who participated in day care (Field, Stoller, et al., 1986). However, the still-face manipulation has been used to study the effects of various developmental disorders including

plagued by the difficulty of selecting an appropriate comparison group or adapting the still-face procedure for participants who are not young infants. Nevertheless, results related to gender effects have run the full gamut from none (e.g., Toda & Fogel, 1993), to girls displaying more distress than boys (Mayes & Carter, 1990; Stoller & Field, 1982), to girls appearing more positive than boys (Braungart-Rieker, Courtney, & Garwood, 1999; Cohn & Tronick, 1983). These The Using the still-face procedure to probe group differences is no simple matter, in study of gender differences in the still-face effect provides an instructive ample. Unlike studies of developmental disorders, this work has not been

different findings may reflect seemingly minor variations in the still-face procedure, including how affect is coded. The problem also may run deeper. To locate reliable group differences, it is likely necessary to consider how infants are acting just before (e.g., see Weinberg et al.'s, 1999, study of gender differences) and after (e.g., Bendersky & Lewis's, 1998, investigation of the effect of prenatal exposure to cocaine on infants' arousal) the still-face phase to get a fuller picture of in self-regulatory processes.

in terms of sensitivity (Kogan & Carter, 1996), responsivity (Bendersky & Lewis, 1998), positivity (Carter, Mayes, & Pajer, 1990), interactive style (Stoller & Field, 1982; Tronick et al., 1982), and depression (Moore et al., 2001; Pelaez-Nogueras et al., 1996; Tronick et al., 1985). Infants' response to the still face at 6 months of age has been related to later attachment classification at 1 year (Braungart-Rieker et al., 1999; Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, Powers, & Wang, 2001; Cohn et al., 1991; Kiser, Bates, Maslin, & Bayles, 1986; Tronick et al., 1982), externalizing and internalizing behaviors at 18 months (Moore et al., 2001), and behavior prob-A third broad group of applications of the still-face procedure involves using it as a gauge of developing relationships to answer a myriad of questions about how differences in interactive experiences with a partner might stem from earlier experiences and might predict later social-emotional status. Variations in the still-face effect have been related to variations in mothers' baseline behavior chara lems at 3 years (Bates, Maslin, & Frankel, 1985).

DISCUSSION

ture to draw together studies that have used the still-face procedure (Tronick et al., 1978). This strategy generated a rich corpus of studies that support the claim that the still-face paradigm has become an essential part of discussions about early social interactions. Over the past 25 years, interest in the still face has remained unabated. Indeed, the procedure's use is on the rise (see Figure 1) and the pipeline remains filled (e.g., see the program of the 2002 biennial meeting of the International Society for Infant Studies, including Frick, 2002). In this article, we have taken a method-defined slice of the infancy research litera-

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developmental psychology when the study of early social interactions, and more generally, of the "competent infant" (Stone, Smith, & Murphy, 1973), was burgeoning. At this time, young infants were often surprising observers with unexpected perceptual, cognitive, and social capacities. Researchers were energized as In this closing section, we move away from the particulars of the literature to reflect on the developmental course of the still face itself. As a first step, it is imporof young infants. Although Tronick et al.'s (1978) formulation of the still-face protant to place the still face within the broader context of then contemporary studies was innovative, it fits well within a vibrant period of transformation within

well by new observational methods that allowed the review of rapidly occurring actions. Yet the still face is relatively unique in that it, rather than many of its close procedural cousins, became a part of a field's repertoire.

ing case of Twitmyer and conditioned reflexes; Coon, 1982), it may be argued that a key deciding factor had less to do with science and more to do with reputation. that readily occur during early infancy, and it adds to it an unnatural pausing in the adult's activity that immediately provokes a complex response from the infant that, successfully merged naturalistic and experimental procedures in a way that let infants demonstrate their appreciation of caregivers' activities. As Muir and Hains (1999) wryly wrote, the still-face context is "the infant's version of experimental instruction" (p. 157). It begins by homing in on the face-to-face social interactions dure, or concept captures and sustains interest. In some instances (e.g., the interest-Our analysis of the emergence of the still face suggests that in this instance, other factors deserve consideration. The still-face procedure was noteworthy because it using cutting-edge video techniques, convincingly demonstrated the infant's sen-It is a recurring puzzle in the history of psychology why a specific event, proce-

fied still face (e.g., Bendersky & Lewis, 1998) but more often, significant variations in adult behavior just prior to the manipulation (e.g., whether the person is absent, sitting in profile, engaged in face-to-face interaction) and in the length of the still face (ranging from 30–180 sec) go unevaluated. tion with a series of dramatic actions that both regulate arousal and beckon the unresponsive partner. The basic signature of increased gaze aversion and decreased positive affect has been so robust that it has been often overlooked that both data collection and coding procedures have varied considerably across studies. Sometimes methodological variations have been signaled by the use of the term *modi*sitivity to a social partner's actions.

By now, hundreds of infants have reacted to the still-face experimental instruc-

which in turn makes it difficult to resolve some questions about the still-face effect, including lingering concerns about the presence and significance of crying and of gender differences. However, it may also be viewed in more positive ways. First, the robustness of the still face allows researchers to make meaningful modifications in affective social referencing about objects (Markov, Adamson, & Bakeman, 2000; see Striano & Rochat, 1999, for a related idea). but distinct manipulations designed to probe the specific interactive processes (e.g., the 5-sec contingent still face designed by Cohn & Elmore, 1988) or to investigate older infants' triadic interactions with people (Nadel & Tremblay-Leveau, 1999) or Rochat, 1999; Rochat & Striano, 1999). It also inspires researchers to design related method so that they can use the still-face effect to investigate new concerns such as This lack of standardization may hamper close comparisons across studies, appreciation of maternal facial expression (D'Entremont & Muir,

The experimental creation of a phenomenon is not without possible perils. As incider, Bouyer, and Mietkiewicz (2000) warned, researchers must remain

the troubling suspicion that we might overextend the still-face paradigm, using it even when another observational context might provide a better view of the process under study (e.g., see Lamb et al., 1987, who argued that social expectancies might best be studied not in face-to-face but in distress-relief contexts). mindful of ethical issues that may be involved in using classical research paradigms, including the still-face procedure. For example, we have rarely paid sufficient attention to the partners' experience of the still-face manipulation (with the fine exception of Mayes, Carter, Egger, & Pajer, 1991). Moreover, there is always

face has been explained from several different perspectives, setting the stage for a debate about the underlying phenomenon. It is noteworthy that this debate has occurred at most at the margins, leaving some central issues, such as the centrality of contingency, still open for further exploration. Moreover, as the still face becomes one of about how young infants are able to act. Thus, the still-face paradigm continues to at-In addition to prompting creativity, the robustness of the still-face effect in light of procedural variability highlights young infants' nascent social abilities. When researchers employ the still-face procedure, they are adopting not only a (loose) script several measures of individual variability, its unique usefulness as a probe of processes such as attachment will need to be assessed. non that illustrates central qualities of the young infant's capacity for interpersonal engagement. Moreover, it is likely that the still-face procedure, or variants that depractice, but also, and most significantly, because it creates a fascinating phenometract interest not only because as an expedient method it helps regulate experimental for conducting a study but, more important, essential elements of a compelling plot why infants react as they do to the perturbation of a social partner's actions. The still velop from it, will continue to be used broadly in part because it is still not fully clear

think it is safe to predict that there are still sections to be written in a history of the still face. The still-face method still inspires experimental creativity; the still-face effect continues to elude full explanation. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the still-face paradigm continues to spotlight young infants' amazing social, emotion in a way that can be readily captured across laboratories. Moreover, there is also ample evidence that it will continue to be a useful method in a wide range of face has fulfilled its promise as a shared experimental paradigm. It has helped to structure our view of the very young infant's ability to modulate affect and attentional, and cognitive capacities. investigations, Of course, In closing, the historical record to date provides ample evidence that the still one cannot read the future in the past. Nevertheless

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