Not everyone in Hollywood does their own stunts like Jackie Chan and Tom Cruise. When a scene in a movie calls for a dangerous or precarious situation, stunt doubles are called in to mimic and protect stars. But what keeps an audience from seeing through the facade of stunt doubles to tell them apart from the real actors? Johnny Depp has a stunt double named Tony Angelotti, but you would never realize that he did without a survival mechanism in our brains that actually morphs him with his stunt double. This "brain trickery" is a crucial key to giving us a sense of stability and continuity in an ever-changing, ever-expanding world, researchers conclude.

"Our visual system loses sensitivity to stunt doubles in movies, but that's a small price to pay for perceiving our spouse's identity as stable," said David Whitney, associate professor of psychology at UC Berkeley and senior author of the study.

Study participants were given a target face on a computer screen that they had to identify from looking at numerous faces. The participants repeatedly identified faces that were not the target face, but a blend of faces they had seen over the past few seconds. Furthermore, they actually judged their matches as being more similar to the target face.

"If we didn't have this bias of seeing a face as the same from one moment to the next, our perception of people would be very confusing. For example, a friend or relative would look like a completely different person with each turn of the head or change in light and shade," said Alina Liberman, a doctoral student in neuroscience at UC Berkeley and lead author of the study in the online edition of the journal, Current Biology.

"Without the extraordinary ability to recognize faces, many social functions would be lost. Imagine picking up your child at school and not being able to recognize which kid is yours. Fortunately, this type of face blindness is rare. What is common, however, are changes in viewpoint, noise, blur, and lighting changes that could cause faces to appear very different from moment to moment. Our results suggest that the visual system is biased against such wavering perception in favor of continuity," Whitney said.

It would be frightening if we had no recognition of our loved ones. I would have to wholeheartedly agree with the assessment that face recognition is arguably one of the most important human social and perception functions. How could we ever build relationships without the ability to perceive a face and tether a memory to it? We would have no art, love, or contemplation. As science reveals the complexity of reality and our perception of it, you have to admire the human brain in its evolution to acquire such an abstruse and overlooked gift like perception.

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