

Brad Duchaine, November 6, 2023

Dear John & Leda,

I'm very sorry to hear about John's health problems. I got in touch with Deb after I received an email from Ben Gelbart, and she suggested I text you directly.

I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from the two of you. Since I left Santa Barbara, my research approach has been that of a standard cognitive neuropsychologist, but my intuitions about the organization of the mind/brain haven't changed at all. I still expect the mind to be made up of many specialized mechanisms that have been generated to solve adaptive problems, and that's the perspective I try to sell to Dartmouth's Intro Psych students.

I picked up much of that thinking from your publications (which I still follow closely), but I also learned so much from our lab meetings. I look back on the lab meetings from the mid-90s as my most exciting intellectual experience. The range of topics covered in the meetings was crazy broad, the discussions were great, and I was regularly amazed at the insights you two had into a wide variety of topics. The most memorable example for me was a night in which the topic of early Christian church history came up. Somehow John had a deep knowledge of the topic, and he gave an impromptu mini-lecture on it.

Since you're always interested in evidence of domain-specificity, I want to mention work we're doing in my lab that I think will provide the strongest evidence for face specificity. For the last three years, we've been putting a lot of effort into studying people who see distortions when they look at faces. This is a condition called prosopometamorphopsia (PMO). In about half the cases, the whole face is distorted, while in the other half, only the left half or only the right half of the face is distorted (hemi-PMO). In some cases, obvious distortions are seen on every face they encounter. Because of the immediacy of their distortions, the face-specificity of the distortions is constantly being tested. Every non-face item they look at could distort, but in most cases, our participants say that faces are the only item in their visual world that distorts. I find their self-reports to be the clearest evidence that their distortions are affecting face-specific mechanisms, but to satisfy reviewers and readers, we're assembling a set of 1150 images to formally assess the specificity of their distortions. I'm confident that many of our PMO participants will only see distortions to faces. I also expect to see a few cases with distortions to other categories, but I suspect it will be a limited set of other categories that will hopefully provide hints about non-face mechanisms that are closely related to face mechanisms.

I'll be thinking of you John and hoping that your health improves quickly. I also hope that I see you two again soon.

Brad