

Here's looking at you, kid:

**Relationships between mothers' visual scanning, parental reflective functioning,
emotional availability and child development.**

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Christy Jones

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Abstract

The ability to detect and respond to infant facial affective cues is crucial in the way early parent-infant relationships develop. A small amount of research has linked infant cue processing with the quality of the mother-infant relationship (Pearson, Lightman, & Evans, 2011) and a mother's capacity to reflect on her child's emotions, feelings and behaviours (Rutherford, Maupin, Landi, Potenza, & Mayes, 2017). A series of studies sought to integrate the assessment of clinically relevant parenting capacities, namely, parental reflective functioning and emotional availability, with an objective psychophysiological measure of a mother's visual processing of their infant's affective cues. The findings reveal that mothers' reflective functioning and emotional availability predicted patterns of visual scanning to their own infant's face, even when differential visual processing of 'own' verses 'unknown' (control) infant faces was not observed. Understanding the neurocognitive mechanisms underlying infant cue processing is important for supporting healthy parent-infant relationships and child wellbeing, in so far as attending to infant cues is implicated not only in parental behaviours but in parental reflective capacities about their child's emotions and behaviours.