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3 Development of Stereo Vision in Young Infants

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25

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29

Abstract

30 In this study, infants' visual processing of depth-inducing stimuli was tested using a new
31 method suitable for experimental settings. Stereograms of the Lang-Stereopad® were
32 presented in a timed preferential-looking paradigm to determine infants' preference for a
33 stereogram as compared to a stimulus not inducing an impression of depth. A total of 80
34 infants were tested at 7 months of age; of these, a sub-sample of 41 infants were tested
35 longitudinally at 4 and 7 months to characterize the developmental trajectory of their
36 preference. Infants were simultaneously presented with a card showing a random-dot
37 stereogram (800" disparity) and a similar looking dummy card without stereogram. In the
38 total sample, 7-month-olds showed a clear preference for the stereogram regardless of sex. In
39 the longitudinal sample, 7-month-olds but not 4-month-olds looked significantly longer to the
40 stereogram as compared to the dummy card. On individual level, 56% of the 4-month-olds,
41 and 85% of the 7-month-olds predominantly looked at the stereogram. The findings yield
42 evidence for a clear developmental progression, and show that the test cards of the Lang-
43 Stereopad® prototype provide a viable instrument to determine the preference for depth-
44 inducing stimuli in young infants when used in a controlled experimental setting.

45 Development of Stereo Vision in Young Infants

46 Depth perception and accurate distance estimation is fundamental in human daily life
47 and relevant for basic activities such as locomotion in a three-dimensional environment, eye-
48 hand coordination, and tool use. Monocular (pictorial) depth cues such as relative size,
49 interposition, or linear perspective can provide some information about the three-dimensional
50 environment. However, binocular depth perception, also known as *stereopsis*, yields largely
51 superior information and is necessary for calculating exact size and distance information.

52 In spite of its important role in processing three-dimensional (3D) sensory input,
53 binocular depth perception is rarely considered in developmental studies that present stimuli
54 and events in a 3D context. However, the lack of binocular depth perception may affect
55 infants' and young children's performance in such studies. Lacking binocular depth
56 perception may also reduce infants' interest in 3D stimuli, and hence bias the results of
57 studies that measure looking times. It is therefore crucial for developmental research to
58 identify infants with impaired binocular depth perception. However, measuring binocular
59 depth perception in young children poses a considerable challenge for clinicians and
60 researchers, as tests are mainly designed for adults and older children (Fricke & Siderov,
61 1997).

62 In the present study, we presented test cards of the Lang-Stereopad® prototype to
63 young infants in a timed preferential-looking paradigm and assessed their preference for a test
64 card that evokes an impression of depth in an observer with functional stereopsis. By testing a
65 large group of 7-month-olds, who had not been diagnosed with visual deficiencies, we first
66 aimed to establish whether this method is suitable for testing infants in an experimental
67 setting, and whether the results are comparable with findings of previous studies using
68 different paradigms. By additionally testing a subgroup of infants longitudinally at 4 and
69 again at 7 months of age, we investigated the development of this preference across an age
70 range that is of major interest with respect to the development of visual perception, object

71 recognition, and mental rotation. Major progression in the development of stereopsis could be
72 expected in this age range based on previous research, as described in the following.

73 **Development of Binocular Depth Perception**

74 Binocular depth perception results from processing information from both eyes,
75 comparing the slightly different retinal images that arise when a distal stimulus is projected
76 onto each retina. This disparity between the two images is due to the horizontal distance of 50
77 to 75mm between the eyes in humans. If this disparity is small, the images are typically fused;
78 if it is large, no fusion of the two images is possible and double “diplopic” images are seen.
79 Nevertheless, diplopic images may still provide the observer with depth information (Wilcox
80 & Allison, 2009). Disparities are measured in minutes (') and seconds (") of arc. The upper
81 threshold for image fusion in adults is at about 3600" (Ogle, 1952a, 1952b). The term
82 *stereopsis* refers to the ability to process depth information from both fused and non-fused
83 images.

84 Stereopsis is not present at birth and typically emerges during the first year of life
85 (Birch, Gwiazda, & Held, 1982; Birch & Petrig, 1996; Birch, Shimojo, & Held, 1985; Held,
86 Birch, & Gwiazda, 1980; Norcia & Gerhard, 2015). Research using binocular visual evoked
87 potentials has suggested that brain cells that are sensitive to differences in disparity may be
88 present in different visual areas of the cortex as early as 2 months of age (Amigo, Fiorentini,
89 Pirchio, & Spinelli, 1978). It has been hypothesized that younger infants have superimposed
90 percepts from each eye (Shimojo, Bauer, O'Connell, & Held, 1986). However, Brown and
91 Miracle (2003) found that infants as young as 6 weeks old preferred a fusible stimulus over a
92 non-fusible one. In the same vein, at 8 weeks of age, infants have been found to prefer a
93 fusible stereogram with horizontal disparity over a non-fusible stereogram with vertical
94 disparity (Kavšek, 2013), and 9-week-olds have been shown to look longer to a stereogram
95 compared to a stimulus evoking a blurred impression of depth (Wattam-Bell, 2003). This
96 suggests that infants have some sensitivity to binocular depth information before 4 months of

97 age. Binocular fusion still improves gradually up to 21 weeks of age with maturation of
98 oculomotor control (Thorn, Gwiazda, Cruz, Bauer & Held, 1994) and with growing contrast
99 sensitivity (Brown, Lindsey, Satgunam, & Miracle, 2007).

100 In a seminal study, Held et al. (1980) found evidence for coarse stereopsis from an
101 average of 4 months on, which was confirmed in subsequent studies. For example, Birch et al.
102 (1982) tested whether 2- to 12-month-olds looked longer at a pattern that provoked an illusion
103 of depth – which can only be seen with functional stereo vision – as compared to a similar
104 pattern that did not induce an impression of depth. At 4 months, 62% of the infants looked
105 longer at a depth-inducing pattern at a very large disparity (58°). At 6 months, 100% of the
106 infants looked longer at a depth-inducing pattern at disparities from 58° to 6°. Birch and Petrig
107 (1996) used a similar preferential-looking paradigm and also found that 60% of the 4- to 5-
108 month-olds looked longer at depth-inducing patterns of varying disparities. This percentage
109 increased to 80% at 6 months, and reached 100% by 7 months of age. In a similar vein, Braun
110 and Kavšek (2018) showed that the percentage of infants looking longer at a depth-inducing
111 pattern showing a novel shape increased from 56% to 72% between 4 and 5 months.

112 Yonas, Arterberry, and Granrud (1987) tested 4-month-old infants for their recognition
113 of objects, as well as their sensitivity to disparity. Infants were first habituated to moving,
114 solid objects and tested for sensitivity to disparity with the same method as used by Held et al.
115 (1980). Results indicated that, in the group of infants who showed a sensitivity to disparity,
116 looked significantly more at the novel object, whereas infants without disparity sensitivity
117 looked equally at the two objects. These findings suggested that 4-month-old infants who
118 were sensitive to disparity in the displays were also able to extract object information from
119 binocular cues and not only responded to disparity per se.

120 In a large-scale behavioral study, Birch and Salomao (1998) identified 80% of 95
121 tested 4-month-olds as showing stereopsis at a disparity of 1735° or less (with a mean of 2.75
122 log sec, which corresponds to 562°). From 6 months on, virtually all infants showed

123 stereopsis at a disparity of 1584" or less. Moreover, Birch et al. (2005) found evidence for
124 stereopsis in 4-month-old infants at a disparity of 600", and in 6-month-old infants at a
125 disparity of 200" when measured with random dot stereograms (see below). Thus, at 4 months
126 of age, infants can typically process stereograms with a disparity of 600" or more.

127 Taken together, the above studies suggest, that stereo vision is typically acquired
128 between 4 and 7 months of age. However, fine stereopsis or stereoacuity, i.e., the depth
129 perception arising from very small disparities, develops continuously throughout the entire
130 childhood (Ciner, Schanel-Klitsch, & Scheiman, 1991), and an adult level of stereoacuity is
131 not achieved before adolescence (Giaschi, Narasimhan, Solski, Harrison, & Wilcox, 2013; for
132 an overview see Norcia & Gerhard, 2015).

133 Yet, the development of stereopsis is disrupted in some children, which – if untreated
134 – may result in visual deficits and restricted processing of spatial information in a three-
135 dimensional context (Fawcett, Wang, & Birch, 2005; Simonsz, Kolling, & Unnebrink, 2005).
136 Incomplete or lacking stereopsis may also have a negative influence on the development of
137 eye-hand coordination (Fielder & Moseley, 1996). Critically, children with reduced stereopsis
138 – particularly in connection with decreased near visual acuity – score significantly worse in
139 visual-motor integration assessments and visual attention tasks (Kulp et al., 2017). Identifying
140 infants with impaired binocular depth perception is therefore of central importance, as it may
141 also affect developmental progression in other domains.

142 Measuring Depth Perception

143 Stereopsis is typically measured using stereograms (Fricke & Siderov, 1997;
144 Westheimer, 2013). A stereogram is a two-dimensional image giving rise to an impression of
145 depth in the observer. This is achieved by presenting two disparate images to the left and the
146 right eye. For example, in random-dot stereograms, which were introduced by Julesz and
147 Miller (1962), two almost identical images filled with randomly arranged dots are used. The
148 difference of the images consists in a predefined region that has been displaced slightly

149 against the background. Whereas the contour or shape of the displaced region is not
150 discernable monocularly, the separate presentation of the two images to each eye results in
151 perception of the displaced region as either closer to or further away from the observer with
152 respect to the random-dot image. This evokes the simultaneous perception of depth and shape.
153 The separation of the two images is usually achieved by either viewing black and white dots
154 on a polarized surface through polarizing glasses, or by viewing red and green dots through
155 red-green glasses.

156 Even though a multitude of random-dot stereo tests exist, few are suitable for young
157 infants. In practice, two main types of random-dot stereograms are used for children and
158 infants: contour stereo displays and plain random-dot stereograms. Contour stereo displays,
159 such as the classical Titmus Fly Stereotest (Stereo Optical Co.), contain monocular contour
160 cues – a feature that may bias the results in the sense that individuals without stereopsis may
161 be able to distinguish the target from the distractor stimulus. Plain random-dot stereograms,
162 such as the Randot Stereo Smile Test “Happy Face” (Ciner, Schanel-Klitsch, & Herzberg,
163 1996), the Random-Dot E (Stereo Optical Co.), the Lang Stereotest® (Lang & Lang, 2018),
164 or the TNO Stereotest (Lameris Ootech) do not contain such monocular cues and require
165 adequate binocular fusion. Therefore, these stereo tests are better suited for experimental and
166 clinical use (Ciner et al., 1996; Fricke & Siderov, 1997).

167 Yet, most of the above random-dot stereo tests require the use of viewing devices such
168 as polarizing or red-green glasses, which may be problematic when used with young infants.
169 Calloway, Lloyd, and Henson (2001) for example, reported moderate goggle tolerance in the
170 age groups from 2 to 4 months (66%) and from 8.5 months to 13 months (69%). Birch and
171 Salomao (1998) reduced the problem by using polarized filters mounted in soft foam frames;
172 yet, panoramic stereograms, such as the versions I and II of the Lang-Stereotest® (Lang
173 Stereotest AG, Küsnacht, Switzerland), completely avoid it.

174 The Lang-Stereotest consists of a set of random-dot stereograms (Lang & Lang, 2018).
175 The two images of each stereogram have been sliced and intertwined into one image, which is
176 covered by a transparent layer (known as lenticular sheet) with a three-dimensional surface
177 structure in the form of parallel half-cylinders acting as prisms. Under each half-cylinder lies a
178 pair of image slices, of which one slice is projected to the left eye and one to the right eye,
179 due to the prism effect of the cylinders. Observation of the test card from reading distance (35
180 to 40cm) evokes the impression of depth and the perception of a shape (e.g., a star) popping
181 out from the image. Although the lenticular sheet may reduce the contrast of the black-and
182 white random dot images, it has the advantage that the participants' eyes are clearly visible.
183 Therefore, infants' looking direction can be observed more precisely than with viewing
184 devices.

185 The Lang Stereotest has previously been applied successfully in infants and children
186 from 6 to 72 months (Pai et al., 2012). Within the age group of 6- to 12-month-olds, 92%
187 could be tested with the Lang Stereotest, but only 50% completed the Stereo Smile Test. In a
188 study that compared different tests in 28 children under 2 years (Broadbent & Westall, 1990),
189 only 2 children under the age of 12 months were willing to wear glasses, whereas 50%
190 completed the Lang Stereotest. In the present study, we thus used one card of the Lang-
191 Stereopad®, a newly developed prototype version using the same technology as the Lang-
192 Stereotests I and II. Whereas the Lang Stereotests I and II show four stereograms of different
193 disparities on the same card, the Lang Stereopad contains square cards, each presenting only
194 one stereogram. It is thus particularly suitable for use in a preferential-looking paradigm. The
195 Lang Stereopad has recently been tested on 217 children with suspected minimal esotropia
196 between the ages of 3 and 10 years. It showed a high specificity and sensitivity, and higher
197 predictive value as compared to the Lang Stereotest I (Piantanida, 2019).

198 **Preferential-Looking Paradigm**

199 In many of the stereopsis studies with infants, a two-alternative preferential-looking
200 paradigm was applied. In the classic preferential-looking paradigm, infants are presented with
201 pairs of stimuli that differ in one specific aspect such as shape or pattern (Fantz, 1961).
202 Typically, a few trials of fixed duration are administered, and a naive observer measures the
203 infant's looking time to both stimuli (Kavšek, 2013). The proportion of the looking time
204 directed to the target in relation to the total looking time is calculated. This proportion is then
205 averaged across a number of trials with counterbalanced target location, in order to obtain a
206 preference score. Another widely used paradigm in infant vision research is the forced-choice
207 preferential-looking paradigm or "FPL" (Birch et al., 1982; Birch et al., 1985; Birch & Petrig,
208 1996; Dobson, Teller, Lee, & Wade, 1978; Held et al., 1980; Teller, 1979). In FPL, multiple
209 short trials are conducted, and trial durations are not fixed. The trials last until the observer
210 judges which stimulus has been preferred by the infant. The preference score in this case is an
211 average of the observer's binary judgements across the trials. Classic and FPL paradigms are
212 widely used in infant research and in assessments of visual acuity. According to Kavšek
213 (2013), both yield comparable results.

214 In the present study, we used a commercially available stereotest and presented it in a
215 timed preferential-looking paradigm, which was based on looking-time measurement. A
216 random-dot stereogram card from the prototype of the Lang-Stereopad® was presented along
217 with a similarly looking dummy card without a stereogram. Infants' looking times were
218 measured online during the experiment and also coded offline from video recordings by a
219 second naïve rater in order to determine inter-rater reliability. We expected infants who are
220 sensitive to binocular depth information to look longer at the stereogram, as this would be
221 more informative than the dummy card and thus attract their attention. Based on previous
222 literature, this could be expected for the majority of infants at the age of 7 months. By testing
223 some of the infants longitudinally at 4 and 7 months of age, we aimed to characterize the
224 developmental trajectory of infants' processing of binocular depth cues. Furthermore, by

225 comparing the results with findings of previous studies using different paradigms should yield
226 valuable information on the usefulness of this method for testing infants in an experimental
227 setting.

228 **Methods**

229 **Participants**

230 A total of 80 full-term healthy infants (38 girls, 42 boys) were tested. Two additional
231 infants (2.4%) had to be excluded for fussiness. All infants were tested at 7 months of age
232 (mean age = 7 months, 19 days, $SD = 8$ days, range: 7 months, 1 days – 8 months, 7 days). A
233 sub-sample consisting of 41 infants (19 girls, 22 boys) were tested longitudinally, at 4 months
234 (T1, mean age = 4 months, 19 days, $SD = 7$ days, range: 4 months, 5 days – 4 months, 30
235 days) and at 7 months of age (T2, mean age = 7 months, 20 days, $SD = 8$ days, range: 7
236 months, 7 days – 8 months, 7 days). The two samples did not differ significantly with regards
237 to sex, $\chi^2(1, N = 121) = 0.02 p = .904$, nor mean age at T2, $t(119) = 1.16, p = .25$. Four
238 additional infants were tested at T1 but were not available at T2.

239 The infants were recruited via maternities of local hospitals, nurseries, baby
240 workshops, and an office for family planning. The families were predominantly from middle-
241 class background and lived near or in a small city in Switzerland. All infants were
242 accompanied by their mother or father. Infants were rewarded with a small toy and a diploma.
243 The present study was conducted according to guidelines laid down in the Declaration of
244 Helsinki, with written informed consent obtained from a parent or guardian for each child
245 before any assessment or data collection. All procedures in this study were approved by the
246 Internal Review Board of the University of Fribourg (reference # 154).

247 **Stimuli and Apparatus**

248 Test cards of the prototype of the new Lang Stereopad® (Lang Stereotest AG,
249 Küsnacht, Switzerland) were used as stimuli. One of the cards displayed a random-dot
250 stereogram of a 5-pointed star with an outer diameter of 2 cm. This stereogram was presented

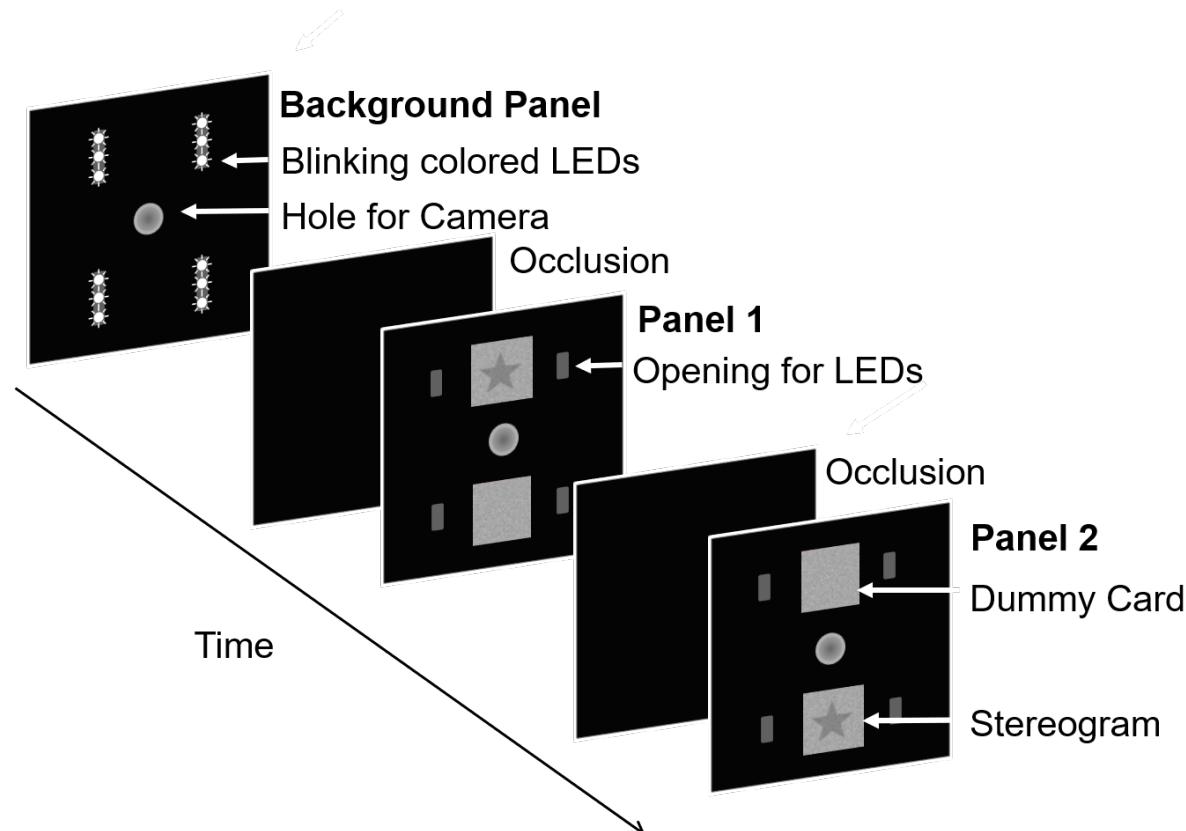
251 at a disparity of 800". This disparity was chosen based on reports of Birch et al. (2005),
252 showing a mean stereoacuity of 600" as measured by randot stereograms in a large sample of
253 4-month-olds. The stereogram (target) card was always presented together with a dummy
254 (distractor) card. This dummy card was created by the manufacturer of the Lang Stereopad,
255 had the same physical characteristics and showed a dot pattern similar to the stereo card,
256 except that it did not contain a stereogram. (The dummy card can now be purchased for a
257 small production fee.) Both the stereo and the dummy card measured 6.4cm x 6.4cm, were
258 printed with 600 points per inch, and were covered by a lenticular sheet with 60 half-cylinders
259 per inch. These half-cylinders acted as lenses, each of which was 0.432 mm wide, resulting in
260 a dot size of 0.432 mm. Viewing distance was about 30 cm, resulting in a visual angle of 297"
261 per dot. The illuminance on the stimuli was 60 lux on average, which corresponds to a
262 luminous intensity of about 587 candelas at a distance of 30 cm. The cards were presented
263 with lenticular half cylinders running in the vertical direction, which is necessary for 3D
264 perception. To ensure that the cards are viewed from the same horizontal angle (which should
265 not exceed 27°), the cards were arranged one above the other, on a vertical panel (40.5 x 40.5
266 cm). The top card was located at 7 cm from the top of the panel, the bottom card at 7.5 cm
267 from the bottom of the panel. The distance between the lower edge of the top card and the
268 upper edge of the bottom card was 11.5 cm. A hole of 4 cm diameter for the camera was
269 situated exactly in the center between the cards. There were vertical slits of 2 cm height and 1
270 cm width in the panel, 2 cm to the left and right of the cards. These openings were covered
271 with a black, semi-transparent fabric, through which a blinking colored LED could be seen
272 during attention getting. These LED lights were mounted on a background panel, which was
273 placed behind the panel with the cards. Panels were coated with black self-adhesive felt. For
274 an illustration, see Figure 1.

275 The panels were mounted inside a puppet stage of 41 cm height, 59 cm width, and 41
276 cm depth. All visible parts of the puppet stage were covered with black felt. The front opening

277 of 28 x 32 cm could be closed by a sideways sliding screen, in order to exchange the panels
278 out of the infant's view. A black curtain hung from the ceiling and fully enclosed the front of
279 the puppet stage and the seat with the caregiver and the infant, thus hiding the experimenter
280 who exchanged the panels through the ceiling of the puppet stage.

281 Infants were seated on their parents' lap at about 30 cm distance from the
282 stereograms in front of the puppet stage. A white high-density LED chain illuminated the
283 inside of the puppet stage. It was placed behind and around the front opening, so that it would
284 not blind the infant but evenly illuminate the stimuli. A standard lamp was directed towards
285 the ceiling of the experimental room.

286 Video recording was done with a Sony DCR-AX33 camcorder capturing the infant's
287 face through the 4-cm hole in the center of the panels. The night-shot function of the camera
288 was turned on allowing for clearer observation of the infant's looking direction. The
289 experiment was controlled by a MATLAB® script (MATLAB and Statistics Toolbox Release
290 2014b, The MathWorks, Inc., Natick, Massachusetts, United States). Puppet stage light onset
291 and offset was controlled by an Arduino UNO R3® board with the Arduino IDE 1.8.5
292 Software (<https://www.arduino.cc/en/Main/Software>) by way of MATLAB® Support
293 Package for Arduino® Hardware. The colored LEDs on the background panel were activated
294 manually.



295

296 *Figure 1.* Schematic depiction of the experiment flow (showing one out of
297 two possible orders). The white arrows were not visible for the infants.

298

299 **Design**

300 Infants saw two trials: In one trial, the stereogram was at the top and the dummy card
301 at the bottom; in the other trial, the stereogram was at the bottom and the dummy card at the
302 top. The order of these two trials was counterbalanced between participants, so that about half
303 of the infants in each sample saw the stereogram at the top in the first trial and at the bottom
304 in the second trial, and half of them saw the inverse order.

305 **Procedure**

306 Throughout the experiment, two experimenters were present: a desktop operator
307 coding the infants' looking times online, and a stage operator presenting the stimuli. While
308 the participants were being seated, only the background panel with the blinking colored LEDs
309 was visible and a cheerful music was playing. The desktop operator ensured that the infant

310 was ready, dimmed the ceiling light and closed the curtain. Then, the stage operator closed the
311 screen, slid in the first panel, and opened the screen again. The desktop operator observed the
312 live camera feed of the infant’s face on a monitor and started the trial as soon as the infant
313 looked steadily at the panel. At the trial start, the music stopped, and the stage operator turned
314 off the blinking LEDs. The stage light turned on, rendering the two stimulus cards visible.
315 While being unaware of the stereogram position, the desktop operator registered the infant’s
316 looking to the top card, to the bottom card, and away. Maximal trial duration was 30 seconds,
317 in order to allow infants plenty of time to recognize the stereogram. However, trials were
318 terminated if infants lost interest in both of the cards and looked away for 2 consecutive
319 seconds after the first 6 seconds of a trial had elapsed. After the first trial, the stage operator
320 closed the screen and replaced the panel with the one presenting the cards in the opposite
321 locations, which took an average of 8.25 s ($SD = 1.85$ s). Then, the second trial was presented
322 analogously. Trials were not repeated.

Results

324 Reliability

Trained but naïve second coders analyzed 95% of the videos of infants' looking behavior offline using Datavyu (Datavyu Team, 2014). They coded the times infants looked (a) toward the stereogram, (b) toward the dummy card, or (c) anywhere else. One-way random intraclass correlation (ICC) analyses were used to assess inter-rater agreement, because several second coders were involved (Landers, 2015). The average ICC of (a) and (b) was excellent both at T1, $ICC(36, 35) = .96, p < .001$, and at T2, $ICC(73, 74) = .96, p < .001$ (Cronbach's alpha = .96 at both timepoints).

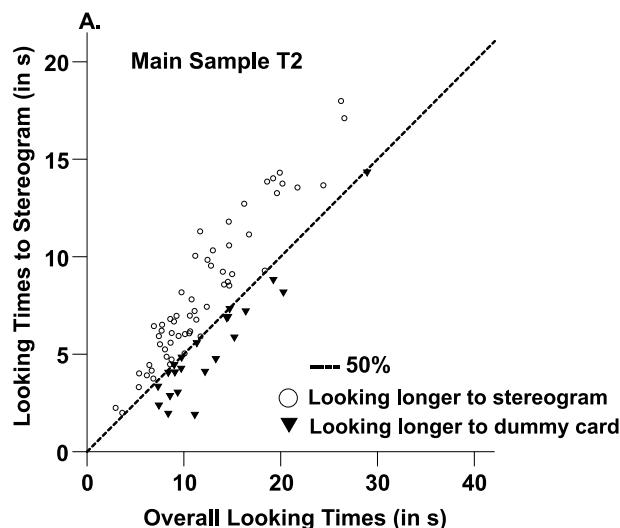
332 Total Sample

The infants in the total sample on average looked at the stimuli for 6.58 s ($SE = 0.41$) in the first test trial, and 5.62 s ($SE = 0.39$) in the second test trial, which did not differ significantly, $t(79) = 1.76 p = .082$, Cohen's $d = 0.27$. To assess the 7-month-olds' individual

336 looking preferences, their looking times toward the stereogram and the dummy card was
337 analyzed. Infants' looking times were averaged across the two test trials, in order to account
338 for a possible bias to preferentially look at the top or bottom card. In addition, a relative
339 preference score was calculated as the percentage of looking towards the stereogram in
340 relation to the total looking time (i.e., the sum of the looking time to the stereogram and the
341 dummy cards).

342 Out of 80 infants, 58 (28 girls, 30 boys) looked longer to the stereogram than to the
343 dummy card (i.e., had a relative preference score > 50%), which is significantly different from
344 an equal distribution (binomial test, $p < .001$; Figure 2). Boys and girls did not differ
345 significantly in their preference for the stereogram or the dummy card, $\chi^2 (1, N = 80) = 0.051$,
346 $p = .821$.

347



348

349 *Figure 2.* Looking times to the stereogram as a function of total looking times in 7-
350 month-olds ($N = 80$). The dotted line indicates equal looking times to both cards.

351

352 Next, we analyzed whether the infants as a group looked significantly longer at the
353 stereogram compared to the dummy card. Using IBM® SPSS® Statistics 25.0, a repeated-
354 measures ANOVA was performed, with mean looking times as the dependent variable. The
355 position of the stereogram (top vs. bottom) and card (stereogram vs. dummy) were entered as

356 within-participant variables, sex and order (card with stereogram at top first vs. card with
357 stereogram at bottom first) as between-participant variables. In addition, permutation tests
358 were performed using R (R Core Team, 2014) as looking time data deviated from a normal
359 distribution. The *p* values resulting from permutation tests are reported in square brackets.
360 The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of card, $F(1, 76) = 36.75, p < .001$ [permuted
361 $p < .001$], $\eta^2 = 0.33$, indicating that infants looked significantly longer at the stereogram ($M =$
362 3.70 s, $SE = 0.2$) than at the dummy card ($M = 2.42$ s, $SE = 0.2$). A significant effect of the
363 position of the stereogram, $F(1, 76) = 6.02, p = .016$ [permuted $p = .025$], $\eta^2 = 0.07$, indicated
364 that looking times were longer when the stereogram was at the bottom position ($M = 3.47$ s,
365 $SE = 0.3$) as compared to the top position ($M = 2.65$ s, $SE = 0.2$). Furthermore, the analysis
366 yielded an interaction of card and order, $F(1, 76) = 5.99, p = .017$ [permuted $p = .015$], $\eta^2 =$
367 0.07 . Post hoc comparisons with Sidak corrections showed that infants in the condition that
368 presented the stereogram at the top position first and at the bottom position second looked
369 significantly longer to the stereogram ($M = 4.07$ s, $SE = 0.3$) compared to the dummy card (M
370 $= 2.26$ s, $SE = 0.2, p < .001$). Likewise, infants who saw the stereogram at the bottom position
371 first also looked longer to the stereogram ($M = 3.34$ s, $SE = 0.3$) than to the dummy card ($M =$
372 2.57 s, $SE = 0.2, p = .01$), but the looking time difference was not as large. No other main
373 effect or interaction was found (all F s < 2.95 , all p s $> .08$ [all permuted p s $> .08$], all $\eta^2 <$
374 0.04).¹

375 Similar analyses were conducted with preference scores as dependent variables.
376 First, it was analyzed whether the overall preference score was significantly different from
377 50%, which would indicate an unequal distribution of looking times across the two cards. A *t*

¹ An analogous ANOVA that excluded infants whose looking time per trial did not exceed 2s (remaining $n = 75$) yielded the same significant effects. Most crucially, the main effect of card was still significant, $F(1, 71) = 31.47, p < .001$ [permuted $p < .001$], $\eta^2 = 0.31$.

378 test indicated that the average preference score of 61% ($SD = 16\%$) was significantly different
379 from 50%, $t(79) = 5.99, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.67$. Then preference scores were analyzed by
380 means of an ANOVA with the same independent variables as above, except for the variable
381 card which was now obsolete due to the use of the preference scores. The ANOVA yielded a
382 significant interaction of stereogram position and order, $F(1, 76) = 4.41, p = .04$ [permuted p
383 = .04], $\eta^2 = 0.06$, which was due to a higher preference for the stereogram in the top position
384 for infants who saw the stereogram at the top first ($M = 0.68, SE = 0.05$) compared to those
385 who saw the stereogram at the bottom first ($M = 0.5, SE = 0.05, p = .011$); yet, preference
386 scores did not differ for the stereograms in the bottom position ($p = .848$). No other main
387 effect or interaction was found, all F s < 3.46 , all $ps > .07$ [all permuted $ps > .07$], all $\eta^2 < 0.04$.
388

389 **Longitudinal sub-Sample**

390 The longitudinal sub-sample included 41 infants from the total sample, who
391 were tested twice, a first time at 4 months (T1) and a second time at 7 months (T2) of
392 age. This sub-sample did not differ in their preference for the stereogram at T2 from
393 the sub-sample of 39 infants who were only tested cross-sectionally, $t(58.46) = 1.64,$
394 $p = .106$, Cohen's $d = 0.37$. Again, there was no significant difference between the
395 looking times in the first trial ($M = 5.66$ s, $SE = 0.67$), and the second trial ($M = 4.59$
396 s, $SE = 0.44$) at T1, $t(40) = 1.52, p = .137$, Cohen's $d = 0.29$, nor at T2 (first trial: M
397 = 6.81 s, $SE = 0.66$; second trial: $M = 6.17, SE = 0.57$), $t(40) = 0.72, p = .479$,
398 Cohen's $d = 0.16$.

399 Table 1 and Figure 3 show the number of infants who predominantly ($> 50\%$
400 of the total time) looked to the stereogram or the dummy card at T1 and T2. The
401 looking preference of boys and girls did not differ at T1, $\chi^2 (1, N = 41) = 0.17, p =$
402 .678, nor at T2, $\chi^2 (1, N = 41) = 0.04, p = .846$. A significantly larger number of
403 infants showed a preference for the stereogram at T2 than at T1 (McNemar test: $p =$

404 .004). Table 1 also shows the changes in the preference for the stereogram from T1
 405 to T2. Whereas 51% of the infants showed a preference for the stereogram both at 4
 406 and 7 months (column labeled s/s), 34% apparently developed a preference for the
 407 stereogram between 4 and 7 months (column d/s). However, 10% of the infants
 408 looked longer at the dummy card at both time points (d/d), and 5% showed a
 409 preference for the stereogram at 4 but not at 7 months of age (s/d).

410

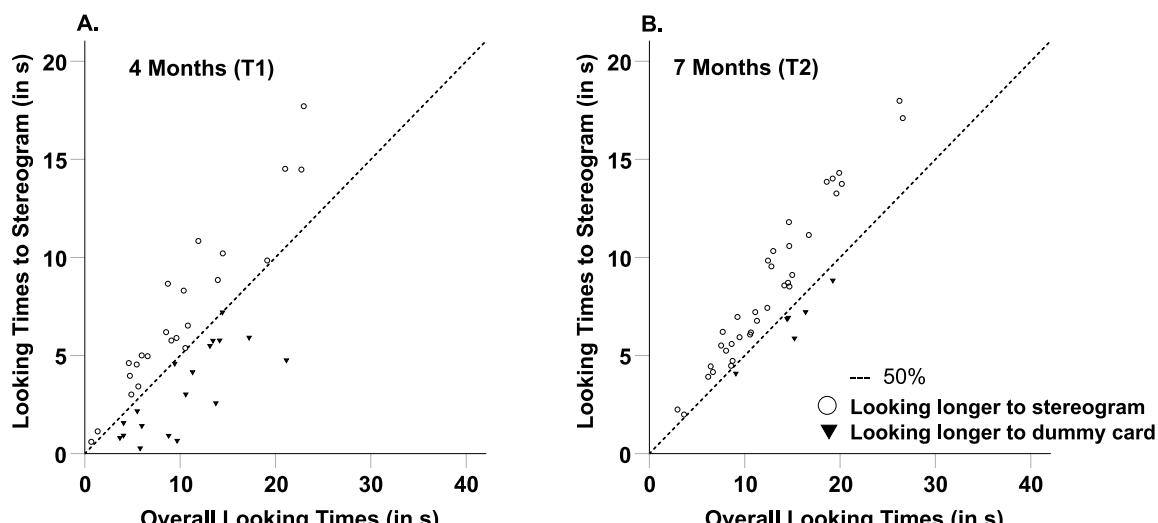
411 Table 1

412 *Number (and percentage) of infants looking longer to the stereogram (s) or the*
 413 *dummy card (d) and changes from 4 months (T1) to 7 months of age (T2) in the*
 414 *longitudinal sub-sample.*

Sex	T1		T2		Changes from T1 to T2				
	d	s	d	s	d/d	d/s	s/s	s/d	Total
female	9 (22)	10 (24)	3 (7.5)	16 (39)	2 (5)	7 (18)	9 (22)	1 (2.5)	19 (46)
male	9 (22)	13 (32)	3 (7.5)	19 (46)	2 (5)	7 (18)	12 (29)	1 (2.5)	22 (54)
Total	18 (44)	23 (56)	6 (15)	35 (85)	4 (10)	14 (34)	21 (51)	2 (5)	41 (100)

415 Note: n = 41

416



417

418 *Figure 3.* Average looking times to the stereogram as a function of total looking
419 times in the longitudinal sub-sample ($n = 41$) at 4 months (A) and at 7 months (B) of
420 age. The dotted line indicates equal looking times to both cards.

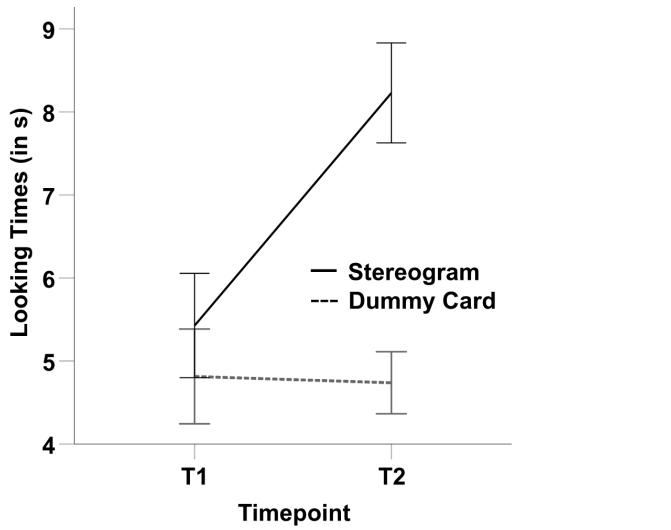
421

422 To investigate the developmental progression of infant's stereogram
423 preference at group level, a repeated-measures ANOVA was performed, with
424 timepoint (T1 vs. T2), stereogram position (top vs. bottom), and card (stereogram vs.
425 dummy) as within-subject variables, and sex and order (card with stereogram at top
426 first vs. card with stereogram at bottom first) as between-subject variables. Again,
427 permutation tests were performed, and the resulting p -values are reported in squared
428 brackets. A first analysis showed no effects or interactions with sex or order (all F s <
429 2.19, all $ps > .14$ [all permuted $ps > .18$], all $\eta^2 < 0.06$), nor with stereogram position
430 (all F s < 3.42, all $ps > .07$ [all permuted $ps > .06$], all $\eta^2 < 0.09$); therefore, these
431 variables were not considered in the following analysis.

432 An ANOVA with timepoint (T1 vs. T2) and card (stereogram vs. dummy) as
433 within-subject variables yielded significant main effects of card, $F(1, 40) = 13.42, p$
434 = .001 [permuted $p < .001$], $\eta^2 = 0.25$, and timepoint, $F(1, 40) = 5.63, p = .023$
435 [permuted $p = .024$], $\eta^2 = 0.12$, as well as an interaction of card and timepoint, $F(1,$
436 $40) = 13.73, p = .001$ [permuted $p = .001$], $\eta^2 = 0.26$ (Figure 4). Post hoc
437 comparisons with Sidak correction showed that at T1, infants looked equally long to
438 the stereogram ($M = 5.43$ s, $SE = 0.6$) and the dummy card ($M = 4.81$ s, $SE = 0.6, p =$
439 .450). In contrast, at T2 infants looked significantly longer to the stereogram ($M =$
440 8.23 s, $SE = 0.6$) than to the dummy card ($M = 4.74$ s, $SE = 0.4, p < .001$). Moreover,
441 post hoc tests showed that looking times to the stereogram increased significantly

442 between T1 and T2 ($p = .001$), whereas looking times to the dummy card did not ($p =$
 443 $.902$)².

444



445

446 *Figure 4.* Means of cumulated looking times across the two trials at T1 and T2. Error
 447 bars indicate +/- 1 standard error.

448 Again, a preference scores was calculated for both timepoints. At T1, infants
 449 on average looked to the stereogram 54% ($SD = 26$) of the time, which was not
 450 significantly different from an equal distribution, $t(40) = 1.08$, $p = .287$, Cohen's $d =$
 451 0.17. In contrast at T2, infants looked at the stereogram 64% ($SD = 11$) of the time,
 452 which differed significantly from 50%, $t(40) = 8.00$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.25$. An
 453 ANOVA was carried out with preference scores as a dependent variable and
 454 timepoint and stereogram position as within-participant variables (sex and order
 455 again showed no significant effects or interactions and were therefore omitted). The

²An analogous ANOVA that excluded infants whose looking time in each trial did not exceed 2s (remaining $n = 29$) yielded similar results, except that the main effect of timepoint was no longer significant ($F < 1$). Crucially, the interaction of timepoint and card was still significant, $F(1,28) = 9.34$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.25$. Thus, it is unlikely that the developmental increase in looking longer to the stereogram between T1 and T2 was merely caused by a few infants with very short looking times or due to an age difference in attention span.

456 analysis resulted in a significant main effect of timepoint, $F(1, 40) = 4.85, p = .034$
457 [permuted $p = .037$], $\eta^2 = 0.11$, and an interaction between timepoint and stereogram
458 position, $F(1, 40) = 5.9, p = .020$ [permuted $p = .018$], $\eta^2 = 0.13$. Yet, the main effect
459 for the stereogram position was not significant, $F(1, 40) = 0.004, p = .949$ [permuted
460 $p = .953$], $\eta^2 < 0.001$. Pairwise comparisons (Sidak corrected) showed that especially
461 when the stereogram was at the top position, the preference scores at T1 ($M = 0.45,$
462 $SE = 0.05$) were significantly lower than at T2 ($M = 0.65, SE = 0.04, p = .002$). When
463 the stereogram was at the bottom position, preference scores were also lower at T1
464 ($M = 0.55, SE = 0.04$) than at T2 ($M = 0.56, SE = 0.04$), but this was not statistically
465 significant ($p = .872$).

466

467 Discussion

468 The development of infants' visual processing of depth-inducing stimuli was
469 investigated by presenting infants with stereograms of the Lang Stereopad® prototype, in a
470 timed preferential-looking paradigm. Of the 80 infants tested at 7 months of age, 58 (72.5%)
471 looked longer to the stereogram as compared to a dummy card devoid of depth cues. Our
472 findings thus indicate that at the age of 7 months, a majority of infants prefer to look at a
473 stimulus giving an impression of depth.

474 Previous studies found that 100% of 7- to 8-month-olds could be classified as having
475 stereopsis at various disparities from 58' to 1' (Birch et al., 1982; Birch et al., 1985; Held et
476 al., 1980). Compared to these studies, the percentage of infants in our total sample who
477 looked predominantly at the stereogram was considerably lower, which may have several
478 reasons. First, we did not test the infants for oculomotor status or refractive errors beforehand,
479 whereas these former studies only included infants within the normal range regarding
480 refractive errors such as myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness), or astigmatism
481 (irregularity of the cornea or the lens). Large scale vision screenings show that in a healthy

482 population, about 5-6% of infants between 7 and 9 months have refractive errors, which may
483 impair the development of stereopsis (Atkinson et al., 1996). It is therefore possible that our
484 sample included infants with atypical or delayed development.

485 A second reason may lie in the stimulus presentation, as Birch et al. (1982; 1985), and
486 Held et al. (1980) did not use random-dot stereograms. They rear-projected black-and-white
487 bar stereograms on a screen, and disparity was achieved through polarizing filters on the
488 stereo-projector and glasses worn by the infants. It is conceivable that their high contrast
489 stimuli might have attracted the infants' gaze more than the stereo cards used in the present
490 study.

491 A third reason for the lower percentage of stereo-sensitive infants in our sample may
492 lie in the low dropout rate (2.4%). Whereas in the present study, infants were presented with
493 only two trials, some of the previous studies presented a much larger number of trials.
494 Unfortunately, most of them did not report their dropout rates. In the studies that did report
495 dropout rates, twice to ten times as many infants did not complete all trials and were excluded
496 from analyses (Birch et al., 1985; Braun & Kavšek, 2018). It is possible that these infants had
497 no impression of depth and got bored earlier. Such a selective dropout of infants not
498 perceiving the stereograms could have resulted in a disproportionately large percentage of
499 infants showing a preference for the stereogram in the analyzed sample.

500 A further methodological difference may lie in the use of a forced-choice preferential-
501 looking procedure in the cited studies (Birch et al., 1982; Birch et al., 1985; Held et al., 1980;
502 Thorn et al., 1994), whereas the present study applied a preferential-looking method that was
503 based on looking time measurement. The excellent inter-rater agreement in the present study
504 suggests that this measure was highly reliable and objective.

505 Results from the longitudinal sample further showed that 56% of the infants exhibited
506 a preference for the stereogram over the dummy card at 4 months of age and 85% at 7 months
507 of age. The proportion of infants developing a preference for a stereogram between 4 and 7

508 months of age is roughly consistent with the developmental trajectory outlined by Birch et al.
509 (1982) and Held et al. (1980; Birch et al., 1982; Held et al., 1980). Their results showed a
510 steep increase in the preference for a stereogram, as compared to a stimulus without disparity,
511 from about 40% of the infants at 4 months, to 100% at 8 months of age. In our sample, about
512 half of the infants who showed a preference for the stereogram at 7 months did so already at 4
513 months, and a third of them seemed to have developed a preference for the stereogram between
514 4 and 7 months. However, four infants did not show a preference for the stereogram at either
515 timepoint, and two showed a preference for the stereogram at 4 but not at 7 months of age. It
516 is conceivable that these infants may have had problems with binocular vision or shown false
517 positive results.

518 Given the young starting age of our longitudinal sample, it should also be considered
519 whether some of the younger infants may not have had the necessary visual acuity to
520 recognize the stereogram. In a longitudinal study, Sokol (1978) presented 27 infants between
521 2 and 7 months of age with checkerboard patterns with check sizes from 7.5 to 90' at the
522 retina. Visual evoked potentials were measured to determine visual acuity. As a group, the
523 infants showed a rapid improvement in acuity from about 9' at 2 months, to 4' at 4 months,
524 and 1' at 7 months. Thus, because the dot size of 4.95' (297") in the Lang stereograms is
525 larger than 4', the stereogram should be discernible for 4- and 7-month-old infants.

526 Analyses of looking times on group level further confirmed that 7-month-olds in the
527 total sample looked significantly longer at the stereogram than at the dummy card. Group
528 analyses also confirmed that the preference for the stereogram increased significantly from 4
529 to 7 months of age in the longitudinal sample, as reflected in an interaction of card and
530 timepoint in the analyses of looking times, and in a main effect of timepoint in the analyses of
531 preference scores.. In fact, infants looked significantly longer to the stereogram than the
532 dummy card at 7 months of age, but there was no significant looking time difference at 4
533 months of age (Figure 4). Total looking time also increased from T1 to T2, however this

534 increase was solely due to an increase in looking to the stereogram, whereas looking time to
535 the dummy card stayed the same across the two timepoints. In light of the specificity of this
536 increase, it is rather unlikely that a general increase in visual attention span was responsible
537 for the present results. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the results did
538 not change if infants with very short looking times were excluded from the analyses. The
539 preference for the stereogram was distributed equally among girls and boys both at 4 and 7
540 months of age, and we found no sex differences on group level. Findings of earlier studies
541 have indicated a slightly earlier onset of stereopsis for girls than for boys (i.e., at 9.1 and 12.1
542 weeks, respectively, in Gwiazda, Bauer, and Held, 1989, and at 11.6 and 13.5 weeks in Thorn
543 et al., 1994). Yet, the earlier onset of stereopsis in girls does not appear to influence the ability
544 to extract depth information from stereograms at a later age, as none of the studies by Held et
545 al. (1980), Birch et al. (1982; 1985), Gwiazda et al. (1989), and Thorn et al. (1994) yielded a
546 sex difference at 18 weeks or older. The absence of an effect of sex in the present study is
547 thus in line with these findings.

548 Group analyses further showed that looking times were generally longer when the
549 stereogram was presented at the bottom position, and they also yielded significant interactions
550 with stereogram position or order. These variables were likely to affect looking times in an
551 infant study due to effects of postural control and familiarization. However, as we fully
552 counterbalanced these variables across participants, and the effects went in the same direction
553 and were just smaller in one condition, they were not pertinent to our interpretations.

554 Finally, it should be considered that infants may have been sensitive to the disparity of
555 the stereogram per se, rather than reacting to a perceived shape. Although this possibility
556 cannot be ruled out complete based on the present design, there is evidence from previous
557 studies suggesting that even young infants are able to recognize the shape of an object based
558 on 3D cues. For example, in a study by Yonas et al. (1987), 4-month-old infants who were
559 sensitive to disparity also recognized an object shape based on binocular depth cues, but not

560 infants who did not display a sensitivity for disparity. On the same subject, Braun and Kavšek
561 (2018) reported that at 5 months, infants preferentially looked at a novel shape as compared to
562 a familiar shape on a stereogram. If the infants had only reacted to the disparity per se, they
563 would not have shown any preference for the novel object, since both the known and the
564 novel object had the same disparity. These results suggest that, at least by the age of 5
565 months, infants are able to process 3D cues provided in stereograms in order to recognize an
566 object shape. They thus support the assumption that the 7-month-old infants in the present
567 study showed a preference for the object shape on the stereogram and were not only attracted
568 by the disparity.

569 Conclusion

570 In the present study, stereo cards of the Lang-Stereopad® were presented in a timed
571 preferential-looking paradigm to 80 infants at the age of 7 months, and roughly half of the
572 infants were also tested at 4 months of age. To our knowledge, the present study is the first to
573 investigate the usability of a commercially available stereo test in a standardized experimental
574 setting and with a large sample of young infants. The number of infants showing a preference
575 for the stereogram increased significantly from 4 to 7 months of age, and this increase was
576 also reflected in group analyses, showing a significant interaction of timepoint of testing and
577 looking to the stereo card. As no children were excluded and the drop-out rate was very low,
578 the present findings may be considered as representative. Moreover, the excellent inter-rater
579 agreement indicated that this new method allows for reliable and objective measurement, even
580 though it is highly efficient and can easily be combined with other assessments. Thus, the test
581 cards of the Lang-Stereopad® are well suited for application in an experimental setting and
582 provide an easily available instrument for assessing very young infants' sensitivity to depth-
583 inducing stimuli in future research.

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