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We like the look of lookalikes

John Whitfield

People trust people that resemble themselves.



We're more likely to trust someone who looks a bit like us, says a psychologist. The same tendency may have helped our ancestors to help their kin.

Lisa DeBruine of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, got volunteers to play a game in which they could either divide a sum of money between themselves and another player or trust the other player to divide a larger sum.

She showed them a picture of the person they were playing with, and told them that players would interact over the Internet.

In fact, the opponents' responses were programmed into the computer. And some pictured faces were composites including elements from the subject's own face, created using morphing software.

People were significantly more likely to put their trust in partial lookalikes¹. "Unconsciously, we seem to be attracted to features that are like our own," comments behavioural ecologist Paul Sherman of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Some animals, including baboons, hamsters and rhesus monkeys, seem to be able to recognize relatives by comparing a new acquaintance's smell with their own.

DeBruine's finding raises the possibility that we use sight to do the same thing, says Sherman. But it doesn't show that people are prejudiced towards those who share their genes, he adds.

The ability to tell family from unrelated individuals may have evolved out of animals' powers to tell predator from prey or food from poison, Sherman suggests.

Baby face

There is "no question" that humans can recognize their kin, and bias their behaviour accordingly, believes psychologist Gordon Gallup of the State University of New York at Albany.

Gallup has found that men who are shown pictures of babies are more kindly disposed towards images that are morphed with their own faces. They find them more attractive, and say they are more likely to invest effort in caring for them².

The same is not true of women. Gallup thinks that this is because women do not have the same uncertainty about whether or not a child is theirs, and so do not need acute powers of recognition to identify their own offspring.



The person at the top trusts the bottom face, which is computer morphed to contain elements of their own, more than the face in the middle.

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References

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2. Platek, S. M. *et al.* Reactions to children's faces; Resemblance affects males more than females. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 159 - 166 (2002). | [Article](#) | [ISI](#) |

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