Software uses DNA to predict facial appearance

Mark D. Shriver, a professor of anthropology and [genetics](#) at Penn State University and his colleagues have studied the ways that genes influence facial development. Based on their research, they have come up with a predicitive tool that creates a facial rendering by plugging an individual genetic profile.

How accurate or useful are these DNA portraits? That is something that Shriver is still researching – and that experts are still debating.

On The New York Times's science desk, we tried a somewhat unscientific experiment to test the predictions, sending DNA profiles from two colleagues who volunteered 65-year old John Markoff and 31-year-old Catherine Spangler to Shriver.

We distributed the images to colleagues, and asked them if they could identify these individuals. We told them that because age and weight could not be determined from DNA, the person might be older or younger, heavier or lighter than the image suggested. At least a dozen people immediately responded that they could not guess because the images felt too generic. Among the 50 or so people who did venture guesses, none identified Mr Markoff.

When it came to the computer's DNA portrait of Spangler, 31, staffers had more luck. About 10 people correctly identified her.

"People with same ancestry levels can come out looking different," Dr.Shriver said. But just how different — and how much like the actual flesh-and blood-person — is something he and his team are still testing.

Read full, original story: [I've Just Seen a (DNA-Generated) Face](#)