

How much do looks really matter? Trustworthiness, friendliness judged at a glance

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A newly published series of experiments by cognitive neuroscientists at New York University is reinforcing the relevance of facial expressions to perceptions of characteristics such as trustworthiness and friendliness. More importantly, the research also revealed the unexpected finding that perceptions of abilities such as physical strength are not dependent on facial expressions but rather on facial bone structure.

The team's first experiment featured photographs of 10 different people presenting five different facial expressions each. Study subjects rated how friendly, trustworthy or strong the person in each photo appeared. A separate group of subjects scored each face on an emotional scale from "very angry" to "very happy." And three experts not involved in either of the previous two ratings to avoid confounding results calculated the facial width-to-height ratio for each face. An analysis revealed that participants generally ranked people with a happy expression as friendly and trustworthy but not those with angry expressions. Surprisingly, participants did not rank faces as indicative of physical strength based on facial expression but graded faces that were very broad as that of a strong individual.

The findings suggest facial expressions strongly influence perception of traits such as trustworthiness, friendliness or warmth, but not ability (strength, in these experiments). Conversely, facial structure influences the perception of physical ability but not intentions (such as friendliness and trustworthiness, in this instance).

Read full, original post: [Your Facial Bone Structure Has a Big Influence on How People See You](#)