

## 1 **Facing the truth**

2 original at:

3 <http://www.economist.com/node/18925759>

4 These days, physiognomy is an unfashionable science. The idea that the  
5 face reveals an individual's character is so much at variance with modern  
6 notions of free will that research in the area almost disappeared a long  
7 time ago. But it is making a tentative comeback. A recent study of faces  
8 suggests that their features do matter, biologically speaking: they can  
9 predict dishonesty.

10 Researchers wondered if a feature already known to reflect  
11 aggressiveness in men (but not women) might also predict a tendency to  
12 lie and cheat. That feature is the ratio of a face's width to its length. The  
13 wider a man's face, the more likely he will hit you.

14 Honest signals of aggressiveness make sense. Potential victims avoid  
15 starting fights they cannot win and the aggressive get their way without  
16 risking an injury. It does not, however, obviously make sense to give  
17 away in advance of a negotiation that you are likely to lie or cheat in it.

18 Yet the Researchers found this was the case. They found (in an  
19 experiment in which ordinary undergraduates were given an opportunity  
20 to earn more money if they misreported the results of a series of die rolls)  
21 that the wider a man's face was, compared with its height, the more likely  
22 he was to cheat. That did not, however, apply to women.

23 The probable explanation is that the advantage of being seen, reliably, as  
24 aggressive outweighs the disadvantage of being, predictably, a cheat and  
25 a liar. Also, the fear of retaliation provoked by aggressiveness means  
26 victims of cheating and lying might not want to push the point anyway,  
27 although they know full well what is going on. Since women rarely use  
28 violence to get their way, they do not evolve such signals.

## Questions

- 1) Why did physiognomy come out of fashion a long time ago? (Hint: 'at variance' means *in disagreement, not complying with or going against*.)
- 2) According to the article, what is the connection between what people's faces look like and how aggressive they are?
- 3) What is the rational explanation for this connection?
- 4) According to the article, what is the relationship between what people look like and their tendency to lie?
- 5) What is the rational explanation for the above relationship? (Hint: 'to outweigh' (line 24) means *to be more important than something*; 'retaliation' (line 25) means *action against someone who has done something bad to you*.)
- 6) What is the rational explanation for the fact that neither of the above relationships applies to women?
- 7) Do you judge people by their faces? If so, do the judgements you make based on the physical appearance of other people tend to be vindicated (shown to be true) by your later experience?

## Vocabulary

**predict** (line 9 and elsewhere) – be linked or connected to something; to foretell with precision of calculation, knowledge, or shrewd inference from facts or experience, to state or make a declaration about in advance, especially on a reasoned basis;

**get/have their way** (line 15 and 28) – be allowed to have or do what you want

**give away** (line 16-17) – to reveal (a confidence or secret, hidden motives, true feelings, etc.), to tell something secret

**push the point** (line 26) – to try hard to persuade people to accept or agree with a new idea

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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