

Perceived facial similarities studied

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U.S.-led research has found judgments of facial similarity are highly predictive of genetic similarity.

Participants in the study judged pairs of pictures of children, half of which portrayed actual siblings. In one condition, participants were only asked to rate the facial similarity of each pair of children. In a second condition, participants were asked to classify each pair as sibling or non-siblings.

Researchers found the mean similarity ratings of the first group contained as much information about genetic relatedness as did the actual judgments of genetic relatedness by the second group. The ratings could also be transformed into accurate estimates of the probability that a given pair of children portrayed siblings.

The study was conducted by Laurence Maloney of New York University and Maria Dal Martello, of the University of Padova in Italy.

"We have shown that a complex, difficult to characterize perceptual judgment (facial similarity) can be simply defined in evolutionary terms: judged facial similarity of children appears to be little more than a visual assessment of genetic relatedness," said Maloney.

The research was recently published in the *Journal of Vision*.

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