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How to Look Younger Without Plastic Surgery

How to look younger without plastic surgery? Psychologists of the Jena University (Germany) have a simple solution: Those who want to look younger should surround themselves with older people. That's because when viewing a 30-year-old, we estimate his age to be much younger, if we have previously been perceiving faces of older people.

"People are actually quite good at guessing the age of the person next to them," Dr. Holger Wiese says. The psychologist of the Jena University is responsible for one of six research projects in the DFG-sponsored research unit "Person Perception" lead by Professor Dr. Stefan R. Schweinberger.

In the experiment the Jena psychologists were able to prove that the volunteer testers were systematically wrong at estimating other people's age after having adapted to the faces of people of a specific age group by intensely looking at them. If many faces of elderly people were shown on the computer first, followed by the test face of a middle aged person, the test candidates estimated this person as substantially younger. After studying younger faces the middle aged test face was estimated as being substantially older.

"These effects occur independently of the viewer's age and sex," Schweinberger says. When faces used for adaptation and test faces show people of the same sex the after-effects of age perception are even stronger. In other words: the perception of age and sex in faces is not a completely independent process.

These results may hardly surprise non-experts but they contradict various previous opinions of experts.

The scientists at Jena University used the most modern digital image editing techniques and a data bank of faces without any make-up and with distracting elements having been touched up. The first people partaking in the experiment were students. In a second so far unpublished study elderly people were being asked to give their estimations.

Stefan Schweinberger sums up the result of their findings: "We are able to change the subjective perception of a face." Nobody knows though how long this effect lasts. Holger Wiese adds: "The age of the person next to you is one of the most important characteristics for our perception of other people. This leads to exciting crossovers into other areas of scientists who are dealing with the interactions of social groups."

The founder of the Playboy magazine might be surprised by the findings of the Jena scientists. He prefers to surround himself with young women, not knowing that they make him look much older. So Hugh Hefner should surround himself with elderly gentlemen instead, this study suggests.

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