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## Research shows first impressions really count

David Fickling  
 Wednesday August 23, 2006  
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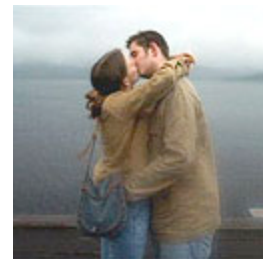
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It takes only one tenth of a second for us to make up our minds about people, according to research published today.

Only long experience can dislodge our initial preconceptions, psychologists at Princeton University, in the US, said.

They found that people made judgements about the attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence and aggressiveness of other people after looking at their faces for 100 milliseconds.

Rather than correcting initial judgements, longer glances at the same faces caused people to become more convinced of their initial opinions, the scientists found.



Photograph: Getty Images

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"The link between facial features and character may be tenuous at best, but that doesn't stop our minds from sizing other people up at a glance," Alex Todorov, an assistant professor of psychology, said.

"We decide very quickly whether a person possesses many of the traits we feel are important, such as likeability and competence, even though we have not exchanged a single word with them. It appears we are hard-wired to draw these inferences in a fast, unreflective way."

The researchers showed photographs of faces to 200 participants and asked them to rate the images according to how attractive, likeable, trustworthy, competent or aggressive the people seemed.

There was no significant change between the opinions people formed after one-tenth of a second and those they formed after half a second or a whole second.

"What we found was that, if given more time, people's fundamental judgment about faces did not change," Mr Todorov said. "Observers simply became more confident in their judgments as the duration lengthened."

He suggested the speed of judgement of trustworthiness could reflect activity in an area of the brain connected with feelings of fear.

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