

Facial features predictor of future success, says researcher

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Psychologists at the University of Toronto and Tufts University have shown that law firms are more profitable when led by managing partners with powerful looking faces. Further, an individual's career success can be predicted as much as 30 to 40 years earlier simply by looking at their face.

"Appearance matters a great deal when it comes to judging people," says Professor Nicholas Rule of the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto, lead author of a new study published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. "This includes clothing, posture, and hairstyles, but the real window to judging people is the face. We developed a method to measure facial power and found that it is a strong predictor of law firm profitability."

Rule and co-investigator Nalini Ambady of the Department of Psychology at Tufts University had people judge photos of 73 managing partners from the top 100 law firms in the United States for the year 2007. They used a scale of 1 to 7 to measure qualities such as dominance, facial maturity, likeability, and [trustworthiness](#), with 7 indicating high amounts of those qualities. Half of the judges rated current photos downloaded from law firm websites, while the other half rated college yearbook photos of the same individuals, which on average were taken 33 years prior.

"The ratings of dominance and facial maturity for photos averaged together to form a measure of perceived power for each leader," says

Rule. "We correlated those scores with the profits of the leaders' respective firms and found that they are positively associated with one another, both for the judgments made from current photos and those made from college yearbook photos."

"So, if you knew nothing about law firms other than what the faces of their leaders looked like when they were in college, you could predict their firms' profits today," Rule says. "Facial cues to success may therefore be consistent across much of the lifespan – approximately 20 years."

Although the researchers studied only leaders of law firms, Rule says that the findings could have applications for business, government, and other sectors. "In previous work, we've found similar effects with CEOs and political candidates," he says. "Judgments of faces predicted a Fortune 1,000 company's success and the percentage of votes that candidates received in the US, Canada, and Japan. These findings suggest that judging college yearbook photos might predict the outcomes for leaders in those domains as well."

The findings are presented in a paper titled "Judgments of Power from College Yearbook Photos and Later Career Success", published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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