**This Is Why You Trust Some Strangers and Not Others**

Imagine you are sitting in a cafeteria, fiddling with your laptop, when nature calls. He decides to ask one of the people who sits near you to look at his computer while using the bathroom. To his surprise, the person sitting to his left looks suspiciously like Betty White, a nonagenarian Emmy winner, and the person to his right is the living image of Al Capone. Who do you ask to watch over your property, the Golden Girl or the gangster?

There is no right or wrong answer, but if the choice seems obvious it will probably depend on your previous experience, a new study suggests.

The researchers found that their ability to trust strangers depends on the stranger's likeness to other people you know are reliable or unreliable. [5 Ways Your Emotions Influence Your World]

In the study, published today (January 29) in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, researchers describe this biased appearance phenomenon as a "Pavlovian" response by the emotional learning regions of their brain. In other words, certain parts of your brain are conditioned to trust others thanks to their resemblance to friendly faces.

"Our study reveals that we distrust strangers even when they are minimally similar to someone previously associated with immoral behavior," study lead author Oriel Feldman Hall, an assistant professor in the Department of Cognitive, Linguistic and Psychological Sciences, said in a statement. Brown University. "Like Pavlov's dog, who, despite being conditioned to a single bell, continues to salivate the bells that have similar tones, we use information about a person's moral character … as a basic Pavlovian learning mechanism to make judgments about strangers. "

For the study, Feldman Hall and his colleagues recruited 91 participants to play a basic computerized confidence game. Participants received $ 10 to invest with three possible "partners," each of whom was represented by a different head shot on a computer screen. Any money invested with a partner quadrupled automatically (an investment of $ 2.50 with any partner would yield a return of $ 10, for example), at which time the partner could divide the profit with the player or keep everything.

As each participant discovered, a partner was always very reliable (he divided the profits 93 percent of the time), one was of some confidence (corresponded 60 percent of the time) and one was unreliable (corresponded to 7 percent of the time) . During several rounds of play, participants quickly learned which partners could be trusted and which were not, according to the researchers.

After being conditioned by these reliable and unreliable faces, each participant played a second game with a new group of potential investment partners. Without the knowledge of the players, many of the new faces they saw were modified versions of their own companions from the initial game. When players were again asked to choose an investment partner, they consistently chose the faces that most resembled the trustworthy partner of the previous game and rejected the faces that most resembled the unworthy partner.

Neuronal scans of the participants also revealed that the same regions of their brains were functioning when they initially learned to trust a partner in the first experiment and when deciding whether to trust a stranger in the second experiment. Brain activity was surprisingly similar when participants learned that a couple was not trustworthy and then decided not to trust a stranger.

"We make decisions about a stranger's reputation without any direct or explicit information about them based on their similarity to others we have found, even when we do not know this resemblance," lead author of the study Elizabeth Phelps, professor at New York University Department of Psychology, said in a statement. "This shows that our brains deploy a learning mechanism in which moral information encoded from past experiences guides future choices."

Originally published in Live Science.

https://tinsera.info/2018/01/29/this-is-why-you-trust-some-strangers-and-not-others/