

## **Family resemblance may be in eyes of beholder**

By Melissa Schorr

NEW YORK, Mar 08 (Reuters Health) - Do children really inherit their fathers' chins and their mothers' eyes? Perceptions that a child resembles a parent may be based on an assumption the two are genetically related rather than a strong similarity in features, Italian researchers report.

"Parents and children resemble each other more than unrelated people, but this effect is small," lead author Dr. Paola Bressan, a research scientist in the department of psychology at the Universita di Padova in Italy, told Reuters Health.

"When we remark on a baby's resemblance to its parents, we see a resemblance, even when it's not there, because we believe it exists. We are not consciously lying, but we are deceiving ourselves," Bressan explained.

The researchers performed three studies in which men and women were asked to estimate the facial resemblance of photographs of pairs of children and adults, while being given either true or false information, or none, about their relatedness.

According to the findings, which will be published in the May issue of the journal Psychological Science, the factor that most determined whether a parent and a child were perceived to look alike was whether or not the observer believed the two were related--regardless of their actual genetic relationship.

"Pairs believed to be parent and child are judged as more resemblant than pairs believed to be unrelated," Bressan noted.

The investigators conclude that there may be an evolutionary advantage for this self-delusion: society has a compelling interest in having fathers help raise offspring, even in cases where the children are not genetically their own. Thus, there may be a need to reassure fathers that the presumed child is theirs, even if this is not actually the case.

"A truly efficient evolutionary strategy would combine a poor sensitivity to actual relatedness with a strong effect of presumed relatedness," Bressan noted. "This self-deception was advantageous because, in a society where adultery is common, babies who are believed to be the children of their official fathers have more chances of surviving than babies who are not."

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