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This Week

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## If the face fits, a woman will know

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WOMEN beat men hands down when it comes to recognising faces, according to an Internet-based experiment conducted in Sweden. The finding could mean that employers may have to rethink their hiring strategies in hitherto male-dominated industries such as security.

Josef Bigun and his colleagues at **Halmstad** University approached 10,000 people via e-mail, asking them to take part in an online face-recognition trial. More than 1800 took part. "The results are quite sizeable, you can see that there's a difference," says Bigun.

They found that not only were women much better at face recognition than men, but they were also less susceptible to distracting factors such as hairstyles or changes in facial expression. "In other words, the best female skills were far better than the best male skills," explains Bigun.

Subjects were given eight face-matching tasks to complete. They were shown a picture of a face and then shown 10 similar faces under different conditions, such as a selection of similar-looking profiles or silhouetted faces, different facial expressions and varying degrees of picture quality.

At this stage, it's difficult to explain the results, says Bigun. "My guess is that it's a combination of training and genetic predisposition." He speculates that one reason women are better at studying and remembering faces is that they are more likely to take on the role of primary carer in the family, and may have lengthier eye contact with children.

Whatever the reason, says Bigun, when it comes to employing someone in a job where facial recognition is important-such as a security guard or a customs officer-he would always choose a woman. His group will present their results at the Audio and Video-based Biometrics Person Authentication conference in **Halmstad** next month.

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