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January 06, 2005

Fear can be found in the eyes: Neuroscientist [Ralph Adolphs](#) has been working with a woman known only by the initials SM. She has damage to the [amygdala](#) on both sides of the brain, and although she can recognise emotions such as happiness, anger, surprise, sadness and disgust on people's faces, she can't recognise fear.

Adolphs investigated exactly what SM was looking at when she viewed emotional expressions and found that she rarely looked at the eyes. Most other emotional expressions can be recognised from other parts of the face, but recognising fear seems to particularly involve viewing the eyes.



When prompted to look specifically at the eyes, SM became a lot better at recognising fear, although quickly reverted back to avoiding them if not reminded.

The amygdala has been traditionally associated with emotion, particularly the negative emotions, but Adolphs suggest that maybe it has a wider function, also involving visual attention and analysis.

Why damage to the amygdala might specifically cause problems with viewing the eyes of other people remains to be investigated, as does whether SM's ability to focus in on other parts of the face is entirely normal.

[Link to story on nature.com](#)

—Vaughan.

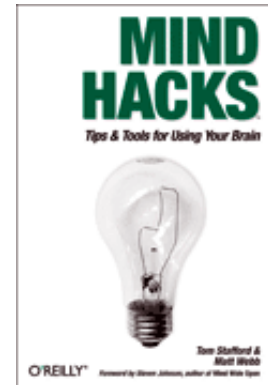
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-after three days off this week, and all of last week off. Yes, it's FINALLY
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