

# Face-ism Ratio

The ratio of face to body in an image that influences the way the person in the image is perceived.<sup>1</sup>

Images depicting a person with a high face-ism ratio—the face takes up most of the image—focus attention on the person’s intellectual and personality attributes. Images depicting a person in a low face-ism ratio—the body takes up most of the image—focus attention on the physical and sensual attributes of the person. The face-ism ratio is calculated by dividing the distance from the top of the head to the bottom of the chin (head height) by the distance from the top of the head to the lowest visible part of the body (total visible height). An image without a face would have a face-ism ratio of 0.00, and an image with only a face would have a face-ism ratio of 1.00. Irrespective of gender, people rate individuals in high face-ism images as being more intelligent, dominant, and ambitious than individuals in low face-ism images.

The term *face-ism* originated from research on gender bias in the media. It was found that images of men in magazines, movies, and other media have significantly higher face-ism ratios than images of women. This appears true across most cultures, and is thought to reflect gender-stereotypical beliefs regarding the characteristics of men and women. While there is little consensus as to why this is the case, it is likely the result of unconscious processes resulting from a mix of biological and cultural factors. In one experiment, for example, male and female college students were randomly assigned a task to draw either a man or a woman. The students were told they would be evaluated on their drawing skills, and were given no additional instructions. Both genders drew men with prominent and detailed faces, and drew women with full bodies and minimally detailed faces.<sup>2</sup>

Consider face-ism in the representation of people in photographs and drawings. When the design objective requires more thoughtful interpretations or associations, use images with high face-ism ratios. When the design objective requires more ornamental interpretations or associations, use images with low-face-ism ratios. Note that the interpretations of the images will be the same irrespective of the subject’s or viewer’s gender.

See also Attractiveness Bias, Baby-Face Bias, Classical Conditioning, Framing, and Waist-to-Hip Ratio.

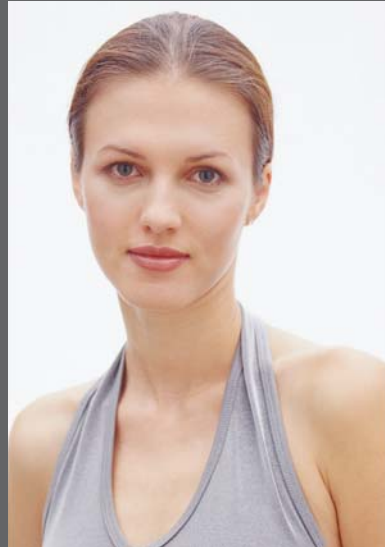
<sup>1</sup> The term *face-ism* is used by some researchers to refer to the tendency of the media to represent men in high face-ism images, and women in low face-ism images—also referred to as *body-ism*.

<sup>2</sup> The seminal work on face-ism is “Face-ism” by Dane Archer, Debra D. Kimes, and Michael Barrios, *Psychology Today*, 1978, p. 65–66; and “Face-ism: 5 Studies of Sex-Differences in Facial Prominence” by Dane Archer, Bonita Iritani, Debra D. Kimes, and Michael Barrios, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1983, vol. 45, p. 725–735.

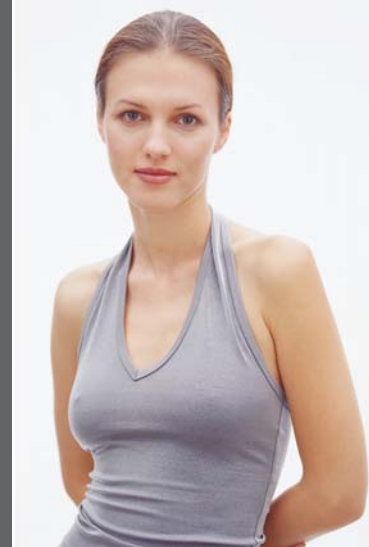
Face-ism Ratio = .96



Face-ism Ratio = .55



Face-ism Ratio = .37



The effect of face-ism is evident in these photographs. The high face-ism photograph emphasizes more cerebral or personality-related attributes like intelligence and ambition. The lower face-ism photographs emphasize more physical attributes like sensuality and physical attractiveness.