

# BLUSHING

adapted from an article by **Caroline Williams**

In a species with a reputation for cunningly manipulating others to maximise personal gain, blushing is pretty difficult to explain. One wonders why humans would develop a response that puts us at a social disadvantage by forcing us to 36 that we have cheated or lied. It is a question Darwin struggled with. He pointed out that while all people of all races blush, animals – other primates included – do not. When it came to explaining the evolution of "the most peculiar and the most human of all the expressions", he was 37. That has not stopped others from trying to find an explanation.

One suggestion is that blushing started out as a simple appeasement ritual. It is a way to show dominant members of the group that we 38 their authority. Perhaps later, as our social interactions became increasingly complex, it became associated with higher emotions such as guilt, shame and embarrassment. This would seem to put individuals at a disadvantage, but blushing might actually make a person more attractive or socially desirable.

Noting that women blush more than men, neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran of the University of California, San Diego, has come up with another suggestion. Blushing might have evolved as a way for women to demonstrate their 39 to men and so enlist their help in rearing offspring. He explains: "Blushing is telling someone that you can't cheat. If you ask me about infidelity I can't lie – my blush gives me away." Primatologist<sup>1)</sup> Frans de Waal of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, also thinks blushing could have emerged as a way to foster trust. He says: "If you were to go hunting with a partner with a face of stone, you could never tell what he wanted. You would feel uncomfortable and wouldn't be sure if you could rely on him."

*newscientist.com, 2009*

noot 1 primatologist: deskundige op het gebied van mensapen