

How Blair can smooth away his cares

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Tony Blair's classic worry lines

It's been dubbed 'the mark of the beast' or 'the mark of Cain' (after the chap who slew his brother Abel in the Bible). Others suggest –more credibly - that the W-shaped furrow on Tony Blair's forehead is a sign of 'Worry'.

In fact, it's more likely a throwback to the time of the great apes, in the opinion of consultant dermatologist Dr Nicholas Lowe of the Cranley Clinic in London, who is also clinical professor at the University of California in Los Angeles.

'Look at photos of primates', he suggests 'and you'll see they are great frowners with very heavy brows, which was probably a warning sign to the competition. With Blair and other public figures, it may be related to deep thought or stress.

'But some people frown intentionally, to create an appearance of concern, involvement or even aggression – although eventually they may not be aware they're doing it. Blair could be warning the Opposition to be careful.'

Professor Lowe, who has for many years been involved in clinical research of facial lines, says that Blair's 'dynamic wrinkles' as they're called medically are far from unique: ' You see them quite regularly, perhaps more on men than women.

'They're caused by activating the muscles of the central forehead, which are otherwise redundant. The patterns vary from W or M shapes, to straight vertical lines, predominantly horizontal lines [like Menzies Campbell, leader of the Liberal Democrats] or deep lines over the bridge of the nose. When these muscles are activated, the upper eyebrows and lids are often also pulled down – as with Gordon Brown.'

Some experts have recommended that Mr Blair have injections of Botox, the botulinum toxin derivative, which paralyses the muscles temporarily (for four months or so) so you can't furrow your brow in any direction.

Dr Lowe is dubious: 'I've seen several photos of our leader at rest, and the lines are not there –another reason why I think it may be an intentional facial expression. When lines are temporary and transient, my advice would be that Botox is of no advantage.'

For those who resemble Guy the Gorilla even when they're playing with their children, Dr Lowe says that Botox, which should always be administered by a qualified and experienced doctor, is very effective and may, if carefully placed, help to lift heavy brows as well.

Many prominent men who want to look more accessible and open when they give speeches or presentations are now signing up for it, he says. Botox has a 16 year long safety record (it was originally developed for ticks in eyes), with no significant problems.

In five to 10 per cent of patients, however, it may lose its effect over time, presumably due to acquired drug resistance. For very deeply furrowed foreheads, Dr Lowe combines Botox with a thin hyaluronic acid filler.

An alternative no-cost option is to retrain yourself not to frown by looking in the mirror and consciously relaxing your face, then practising frequently. Stress-induced lines may be helped by relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga.