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## Ability to spot cheats innate

THE human brain has a centre devoted to responding to cheating and broken promises, and injury to this part of the brain raises people's risk of being conned, researchers say.

'Detecting cheating is a real problem for people with neurological and developmental disorders,' said Dr Valerie Stone, a University of Denver neuroscientist.

Researchers found that a tribe living in one of the remotest areas of the Amazonian jungle were as adept at spotting cheats as Harvard University undergraduates who underwent similar testing.

This helps to show that people have an inborn ability to detect cheats that does not depend on book learning or social differences.

The researchers did card-game tests on people in traditional communities in Ecuador's Amazonian region. They proved to be equally proficient at social exchange tasks, even when the problems concerned unfamiliar social rules.

Dr John Tooby of the University of California said: 'What is quite amazing about their performance on cheater detection is that it flies in the face of all ordinary ideas about learning a higher-level cognitive skill.

'People are just as good at utterly unfamiliar rules as they are with rules that are personally and culturally highly familiar.'

Further studies of brain disorders that prevent people from fulfilling agreements could help habitual scam victims, Dr Stone said.

'If we can understand the brain systems and psychological mechanisms involved in trust, we have some hope of being able to develop interventions to protect such individuals from being exploited.' --Bloomberg, New Scientist

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