

Correspondence

Causality and the Need of Nose Length to Height Curves

To the Editor:

The Swiss cross-sectional study by Zankl et al. [2002] on nose length and age is a good example of inspiring pioneering work performed to answer questions that the literature does not resolve. The observed sex- and age-specific distributions of nose length provide useful reference curves for clinical practice.

The authors observed an increased nose length by age among adults. They conclude a growth of nose throughout adulthood although the study design has some methodological constraints. Increased nose length might reflect increased survival among people of same ethnic origin: men with smaller noses might die selectively at younger ages. Nose length may be a marker of a biological process related to health/survival.

The association could also be due to a secular trend such as the observed increments in height in opposite direction [Cole, 2000; Dey et al., 2001]. Increments in height with the assumption of constant proportional growth among generations would implicate longer noses among younger generations. This seems to be unlikely because an opposite association among adults could be observed [Zankl et al., 2002]. An analysis of nose length by height among participants with constant stature would be interesting with respect to height-specific length curves. No difference of proportions of nose length to height among adults of different ages would support the hypothesis of lasting nose growth. Possible differences of proportions suggest other mechanisms. It is

possible that nose length is getting shorter by each generation while stature increases, which could be a consequence of Allen's and Bergmann's rule [Griffing, 1974] describing shorter protruding body parts in taller animals adopted to cold. Apart from Allen's rule, different nose length/height proportions among generations might be a result of a genetic drift.

Prospective studies are indicated to confirm the tempting hypothesis suggesting a lasting growth of the nose after reaching maximum height.

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