

Evolution of human behavior: studies on attractiveness



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During the course we spent a significant amount of time discussing the scientific findings on attractiveness. Because of this, I decided to participate in studies that involved rating the faces of people on qualities like attractiveness, masculinity, and femininity. I was mostly asked to compare two pictures of the same person with alterations to their face; jaw shape, nose shape, eye position, things like that. It was interesting to sort of see the differences that can change the perception of attractiveness between people. All of the studies I participated in were from the website, faceresearch.org.

The first study that I participated in was titled "What makes a face attractive?" (faceresearch.org/exp/exp?id=14). For this study, I was presented with eight sets of two faces that had a similar look and asked to rate which face was more attractive on a scale of "slightly more attractive", "somewhat more attractive", "more attractive", and "much more attractive". These faces varied in features such as roundness of facial features, number of wrinkles, skin tone, and broadness of the face or certain features. The purpose of this study was to test whether there was a preference for feminine and healthy faces with 58% of subjects preferring more feminine images. In this case, the variance between facial features in terms of roundness and broadness was to show differences in femininity, with smaller chins, rounder cheeks, and larger eyes meant to show more feminine faces in contrast to the broader jawline and round chin associated with masculinity. On the other hand, variances in skin tone and quantities of wrinkles were meant to show the healthiness of the face, with smooth complexions and more skin blood color being associated with health (Buss,

2016). The results of this study should reflect on the facial features that are found to be the most attractive when evaluating a mate. In terms of the females when being evaluated by males, the most attractive subjects (and thus the ideal mate) would be those that have qualities such as smooth skin, full lips, relatively large eyes, high cheekbones, thinner jaws, and small chins. These traits are not only associated with femininity, but youth as well. Being youthful is an important trait for an ideal female mate to have because it is a cue to both the fertility and reproductive value of a woman. Women who are youthful tend to have a more feminine face and femininity is an indicator of high levels of estrogen, a hormone that correlates with fertility. Thus, women who are younger tend to have a higher fertility and reproductive value than those who are older. In order to have the maximum number of offspring possible, males prefer young and healthy women as mates (and thus find the traits associated with these qualities more attractive), as they are more likely to be able to have a larger number of children and to conceive during sex when compared to older women (Buss 1989, 2016). It can be assumed that these preferences evolved due to the fact that males who had them were more likely to have a greater reproductive success and thus pass more of their genes down into the next generation. This preference for youth is not found in terms of what females find attractive for men, as the fertility of males is not as dependent on age as it is for females, thus having little correlation with physical appearance (Buss 1989).

The second study I participated in, titled "Which is more trustworthy?" (faceresearch.org/exp/exp?id=333), had me look at twenty sets of two

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faces with slight differences and rate which one I found more trustworthy on a scale of “slightly more trustworthy”, “somewhat more trustworthy”, “more trustworthy”, and “much more trustworthy”. Similar to the last experiment, these faces varied in terms of facial proportions in order to give different perceptions of their masculinity and femininity. The results of this study thus far are that majority of people find feminine faces for both sexes significantly more trustworthy than their masculine equivalents with feminine women being selected as more trustworthy 71% of the time and feminine men being selected 67% of the time. This can be attributed in part to the negative personality traits and behaviors associated with masculinity. Though women generally find masculine men more attractive because it is a sign of genetic health, they are not desirable as long-term mates. This is due to masculinity’s association with high testosterone, which is in turn correlated with infidelity, unsuccessful long-term relationships, and poor parenting skills. Men with feminine faces are likely to have a higher paternal investment and be a better choice in terms of a long-term partner, as they are more likely to remain with their mate and their paternal investment increases the reproductive success of their offspring (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, feminine features for both males and females are seen as more trustworthy, especially when evaluating a mate, as they are more likely to be faithful and supporting of their partner due to lower levels of testosterone.

The final study that I participated, referred to as “Female Voice Attractiveness” (faceresearch.org/exp/exp?id=366), involved listening to six trials of two clips of a woman saying the various vowel sounds and then rating which voice I found more attractive on a scale of “slightly more

attractive”, “ somewhat more attractive”, “ more attractive”, and “ much more attractive”. Each clip was of the same woman speaking, however one was altered in terms of pitch, either decreasing or increasing it. This study correlates to one of the important traits that men use to determine the overall attractiveness of a woman when assessing her as a potential mate. Men tend to find relatively high pitched voices the most attractive, as they are indicators of both femininity and youth (Buss, 2016). As discussed before, the femininity and youth of females are good indicators of their fertility and reproductive value. Men are more attracted to traits that are associated with both femininity and youth because it increases their reproductive success, helping to ensure that his genes will survive in the future gene pool.

Each of these studies were related in terms of evaluating a person based on their femininity and masculinity. The studies showed that much information is taken from these traits, from attractiveness to trustworthiness. This is a result of our evolutionary past, which caused humans to have biases against or for particular traits which could be indicators for greater reproductive success.

Works Cited

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