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Personality manipulations: Do they modulate facial attractiveness ratings?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of personality manipulations on female facial attractiveness ratings. One hundred and twenty participants (60 males and 60 females) were randomly divided into three groups (40 per group). Prior to the experiment, all participants rated 60 facial stimuli on attractiveness. After two weeks, the participants again rated the same facial stimuli on attractiveness, when they were presented with positive, negative, or no personality information. Results showed no significant difference in attractiveness scores among the three groups during the first rating. However, during the second rating, a significant effect for each group as well as a significant interaction between attractiveness and the group were found, with the attractiveness scores of all three groups differing significantly for the faces with high, medium, and low attractiveness (positive information group > no information group > negative information group, all $p < 0.05$). We find that “what is good is beautiful,” with personality reflecting desired traits as facial attractiveness. This phenomenon can also be called the “halo effect.” We can thus presume that personality traits may contribute to judging facial attractiveness and that the personality traits desired in a person are reflected in facial preference.

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1. Introduction

Facial attractiveness reflects inner beauty, that is, spiritual and moral beauty. The beauty-is-good stereotype (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) has been the focus of social psychological research for more than three decades (Dion et al., 1972). The facial attractiveness stereotype illustrates that attractive individuals are assumed to possess positive personality traits and to be morally good (Dion et al., 1972; Langlois et al., 2000). Therefore, facial attractiveness is positively related to socially favorable personality traits such as friendliness, kindness, honesty, and trustworthiness (Tsukiura & Cabeza, 2011). The attractiveness stereotype has received extensive empirical support (Feingold, 1992). Evidence gathered over the past 10 years has suggested that the key factors used in judging facial attractiveness are averageness (Komori, Kawamura, & Ishihara, 2009a,b), symmetry (Baudouin &

Tiberghien, 2004; Jones, DeBruine, & Little, 2007; Little, Burt, Penton-Voak, & Perrett, 2001), and hormone-dependent facial features (DeBruine, Jones, Smith, & Little, 2010; DeBruine et al., 2006; Rennels, Bronstad, & Langlois, 2008). Although research on facial attractiveness and health is prevalent in literature (Boothroyd, Scott, Gray, Coombes, & Pound, 2013; Coetzee, Re, Perrett, Tiddeman, & Xiao, 2011; Fink, Bunsen, Madsen, & D’Emiliano, 2012; Gray & Boothroyd, 2012; Kramer & Ward, 2010; Marcinkowska et al., 2014; Matthews, Rhee, Neuburg, Burzynski, & Nattinger, 2006; Reither, Hauser, & Swallen, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2007; Stephen, Law Smith, Stirrat, & Perrett, 2009; Thornhill & Gangestad, 2006), studies on personality attributions to facial attractiveness remain lacking, particularly within an evolutionary framework. Only a few studies have explored the association between facial characteristics and personality in this domain (Coetzee et al., 2011; Gray & Boothroyd, 2012; Jones, Kramer, & Ward, 2012; Kramer & Ward, 2012).

Regarding facial symmetry, research has shown that people who are facially symmetrical are emotionally healthy (Shackelford & Larsen, 1997). This finding is based on the assumption that facial symmetry is an indicator of physiological health. Moreover, recent studies have extended and tested the hypothesis

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that facial symmetry may be related to certain personality characteristics. In one study, 121 undergraduate students were asked to use the 44-item Big-Five Inventory to rate digital photograph targets of 16 females of various races and ages (Noor & Evans, 2003). Targets with asymmetrical faces were rated to be significantly more neurotic, less agreeable, and less conscientious than targets with normal faces. However, the study failed to detect an effect of facial symmetry on facial attractiveness ratings. Similarly, Fink et al. investigated associations between facial symmetry and actual self-report personality assessed by using the 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory among 120 undergraduate students (Fink, Neave, Manning, & Grammer, 2005). In contrast to previous results, the data collected from the aforementioned research confirmed that facial symmetry is positively associated with extraversion but significantly negatively related with agreeableness and openness. In particular, neuroticism and conscientiousness are not significantly related with facial symmetry. Furthermore, the same authors recorded 20 female faces with varying facial symmetries and recruited 55 Caucasian volunteers to rate the faces based on 10 adjectives by using a seven-point Likert scale (Fink, Neave, Manning, & Grammer, 2006). The results showed that faces with high symmetry received significantly high ratings on attractiveness and on some personality attributes such as sociability, intelligence, and self-confidence (Fink et al., 2006). Pound, Penton-Voak, and Brown (2007) tested the findings of Fink et al. (2006) a significant positive association between self-reported extraversion and facial symmetry by using a landmark-based measure of facial symmetry in males and females. These results are inconsistent with those of previous experiments.

Gangestad and Thornhill (2003) showed that the degree of facial masculinity is an indicator of honesty in men. However, Thornhill and Gangestad (2006) argued that this finding may apply to both sexes. Furthermore, facial masculinization was found to covary with symmetry, thus resulting in the conclusion that facial masculinity partly reflects underlying developmental stability and disease resistance (Fink et al., 2006; Rhode & Arriaza, 2006). However, the findings of Rantala et al. (2013) challenged the view of masculinity-health association, which indicated that adiposity, compared with masculinity, serves as a more important cue to immunocompetence in female mate choice. In addition, masculinized faces, in relation to high levels of androgen, were considered to possess fewer desirable personality traits compared with feminized faces (Boothroyd, Jones, Burt, & Perrett, 2007; Kruger, 2006; Penton-Voak et al., 2001). Furthermore, Koehler, Simmons, Rhodes, and Peters (2004) provided reliable measures of asymmetry, which are perceived to be symmetrical, and of sexual dimorphism, which are perceived as feminine in females and masculine in males; however, they did not examine the relationship between facial sexual dimorphism and personality.

Previous studies have examined the relation among facial symmetry, masculinity, perceived dimorphism, and personality, but the results found were mixed. Fink et al. (2005) showed that facial symmetry contributes to personality attributes but they did not consider other attractiveness factors, which hinders direct comparisons. Moreover, such associations may arise if perceived attractiveness covaries with other facial traits (such as averageness, masculinity, and perceived dimorphism) that drive personality attributions rather than if symmetry directly drives these attributions (Scheib, Gangestad, & Thornhill, 1999). Rhodes et al. found that averageness, symmetry, and masculinity were all significant components of attractiveness, as rated from videos (Rhodes et al., 2011). Furthermore, existing studies have investigated whether facial attractiveness contributes to personality, but only a few studies have explored whether personality contributes to facial attractiveness because the effects are considered reciprocal. Therefore, the present study explored whether integral facial

attractiveness, rather than one kind of traits (such as symmetry, averageness, or dimorphism), is affected by personality information. We hypothesized that facial attractiveness is significantly affected by personality information. In particular, the rating scores on facial attractiveness were evaluated by following positive personality words in contrast to without personality words. Moreover, the rating scores on facial attractiveness were reduced by following negative personality words in contrast to without personality words.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants comprised 120 volunteers (60 males and 60 females) between 19 and 22 years old from native Chinese Han in a university. Each participant signed an informed consent before the procedure was fully explained. Participants were given small tokens for their participation. All participants were right-handed and had normal vision, with no self-reported history of neurological or psychiatric disorder.

2.2. Stimuli

We collected 845 photographs of unfamiliar Chinese female faces (approximately 20–30 years of age) with neutral emotional expression from the Google database. Standardized facial stimuli was validated from a recent study (Zhang et al., 2011), with 60 facial images (including 20 each with high, medium, and low attractiveness) selected as experimental stimuli. Personality attributes were also selected from a standardized personality word pool (Kong, Zhang, & Chen, 2012). A total of 30 words were selected to describe positive personality traits (e.g., decent, honest), whereas the remaining 30 were selected to describe negative personality traits (e.g., evil, mean). The ratings demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha was 0.857 for positive personality traits, and 0.869 for negative personality traits) by a sample of 125 college students. The visual stimuli was 2-character Chinese words above the facial images.

2.3. Procedure

The participants were randomly divided into three groups, with first group 18 boys, 22 girls (age ranges from 19 to 22 years old), second group 21 boys, 19 girls (age ranges from 19 to 21 years old), and third group 21 boys, 19 girls (age ranges from 19 to 22 years old). Prior to the experiment, all the participants rated the 60 facial stimuli from 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest) in terms of attractiveness. Each trial began with a fixation cross (300 ms), and the target stimulus (800 ms), followed by a 300-ms clear screen, and finally followed by a 1500-ms responded screen.

After two weeks, the participants again rated the same 60 facial stimuli from 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest). However, one of three conditions (positive personality, negative personality, or no information) was assigned to each group before the second rating. Two words belonging to either the positive or negative personality traits were randomly selected from the personality word pool to describe the personality of each facial image before the participants rated the facial stimuli. The facial stimuli were then randomly presented within two rating processes.

2.4. Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed using SPSS 17.0 for windows (SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois). The repeated-measure ANOVA was conducted to

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