



A beauty-map of London: Ratings of the physical attractiveness of women and men in London's boroughs

Viren Swami*, Eliana G. Hernandez

Department of Psychology, University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1B 2UW, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 March 2008
Received in revised form 7 April 2008
Accepted 8 May 2008
Available online 17 June 2008

Keywords:

Beauty-map
Physical attractiveness
London
Human beauty
Francis Galton

ABSTRACT

In 1908, Francis Galton discussed anecdotal data he had collected for the compilation of a 'beauty-map of the British Isles'. Based on his discussion, the present study attempted to compile a more empirical beauty-map of London. A community sample of 461 Londoners completed a questionnaire in which they rated the physical attractiveness of women and men in London's 33 boroughs, as well as their familiarity with those boroughs. Results showed a significant interaction between borough and rated sex, with women being rated as more attractive across boroughs, and three boroughs in particular (the City of London, the City of Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea) being rated high in physical attractiveness. Overall, ratings of attractiveness were significantly positively correlated with familiarity of boroughs, as well as objective measures of borough affluence (specifically, annual gross pay and average house prices) but not of borough health (life expectancy). These results are discussed in relation to the association between wealth and attractiveness, as well as Galton's original beauty-map.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Sir Francis Galton was one of the great Victorian polymaths, producing over 300 papers and books throughout his life (Forrest, 1974). Although he is sometimes reviled as the 'father of eugenics' (see Brookes, 2004), Galton was also a pioneer in the fields of scientific meteorology, fingerprinting, psychometrics, differential psychology, and statistics. Among Galton's lesser-known endeavours was his attempt to collect data for a 'Beauty-Map' of the British Isles. In his autobiography, Galton (1908) wrote:

I may here speak of some attempts by myself, made hitherto in too desultory a way, to obtain materials for a 'Beauty-Map' of the British Isles. Whenever I have occasion to classify the persons I meet into three classes, 'good, medium, and bad,' I use a needle mounted as a pricker, wherewith to prick holes, unseen, in a piece of paper, torn rudely into a cross with a long leg. I use its upper end for 'good,' the cross-arm for 'medium,' the lower end for 'bad.' The prick-holes keep distinct, and are easily read off at leisure. The object, place, and date are written on the paper. I used this plan for my beauty data, classifying the girls I passed in streets or elsewhere as attractive, indifferent, or repellent. Of course this was a purely individual estimate, but it was consistent, judging from the conformity of different attempts in the same population. I found London to rank highest for beauty; Aberdeen lowest.

While Galton's Beauty-Map was based entirely on his personal observations of women, it is possible to construct contemporary maps of beauty that are more empirical in nature. This was the aim of the present study, although our map was more modest, focused on Galton's epicentre of beauty: the boroughs of London. To our knowledge, no previous study has empirically examined perceptions of physical attractiveness as a function of geographical region (although there is a great deal of research on what constitutes culturally-defined beauty ideals; see Swami, 2007; Swami & Furnham, 2008). Nevertheless, there are two relevant bodies of work that guided the formulation of our hypotheses.

First, we predicted that there would be a correlation between perceptions of attractiveness and the socioeconomic status of boroughs. Although there remains a dearth of studies examining this association in detail, at least one recent study has reported a positive association between socioeconomic status and attractiveness (O'Reilly, Steele, Patterson, Milsom, & Harte, 2006). Specifically, this study of general practitioners showed that patients from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were assessed as more facially attractive than less affluent patients. Within the psychological literature, there has also been a discussion of the positive correlation between socioeconomic status and symbols of beauty, with the latter typically being defined in terms of body fat or skin tone (for a review, see Swami & Furnham, 2008).

Various explanations may underlie this association, including the greater ability of affluent classes to shape beauty ideals (e.g., through their greater access to media resources), cultural associations of physical attractiveness with wealth, and the greater access of affluent individuals to resources that enhance physical beauty.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 2079115000x2120.
E-mail address: virenswami@hotmail.com (V. Swami).

O'Reilly et al. (2006) also suggest that affluent individuals may have more positive outlooks (e.g., as a result of suffering fewer stressors or being buffered against misfortune), and that this has an effect on how they are perceived in terms of their physical appearance. In short, then, we expected to find a significant positive correlation between ratings of physical attractiveness and objective measures of socioeconomic status in London's boroughs.

A second possibility is that ratings of physical attractiveness will be associated with the health of individuals in various geographical regions. Some evolutionary psychologists have suggested that perceptions of physical attractiveness are, in part, influenced by honest signals of health (Buss, 1987, 1994; Symons, 1995). Thus, it might be expected that geographical regions that have lower incidences of disease or ill-health should also be perceived as having more physically attractive individuals. Of course, this prediction is predicated on the assumption that the attractiveness-health association is strong (but see Weeden & Sabini, 2005) and that lay individuals have accurate health information about various geographical regions. Nevertheless, as a preliminary hypothesis, we expected to find a positive correlation between the health status of London's boroughs and perceptions of physical attractiveness.

Of course, these predictions will only be borne out if perceptions of physical attractiveness do indeed vary as a function of geographical region. To begin with, therefore, we sought to compile a beauty-map of London and examined whether there was geographical variation in perceptions of physical attractiveness. Specifically, participants rated how physically attractive they believed women and men were in the various boroughs of London. These ratings were then correlated with socioeconomic and health indicators for the various boroughs to examine their associations as discussed above.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were a community sample of 224 women (age $M \pm SD = 39.21 \pm 12.62$) and 237 men (age $M \pm SD = 36.73 \pm 9.25$), all of whom were resident in London at the time of study. In terms of ethnicity, 36.9% were of European Caucasian descent, 21.6% of Asian descent, 12.7% of African Caribbean descent, and 28.8% of other ethnic descent. Most participants were Christians (43.0%), while other religious denominations included Muslims (16.7%) and atheists (11.5%; other = 26.7%, not sure = 2.2%). In terms of marital status, most participants were single (41.9%), in a dating relationship (29.1%), or married (20.8%). Finally, in terms of educational qualifications, 7.2% of participants had been educated to a GCSE level, 21.5% to A-Level, 46.9% to undergraduate level, and 11.5% to postgraduate level (other = 13.0%).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Beauty-map of London

This novel questionnaire asked participants to provide ratings of how "physically attractive" they believed women and men are in the various London boroughs. Participants were provided with a map of London showing the borough boundaries as well as the names of the 32 boroughs and the City of London (although the latter is *sui generis*, it is usually included in maps that present borough demarcations). These boroughs are the principal local authorities in London and are responsible for the running of most local services. They are, therefore, likely to be familiar to lay individuals, at least in relation to their own borough of residence. Participants provided ratings of women's and men's physical

attractiveness for each of the boroughs (33 ratings for women and men, respectively), based on a 9-point scale (1 = *Not at all physically attractive*, 9 = *Extremely physically attractive*). In addition, participants also rated how familiar they were with each of the boroughs (that is, how often they visited the borough, how many people they know who live there, and so on), again on a 9-point scale (1 = *Not at all familiar*, 9 = *Extremely familiar*).

2.2.2. Demographics

All participants provided their demographic details, namely sex, age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, and highest educational qualifications. They also indicated which of the boroughs they were currently residing in (see Table 1).

2.3. Borough data

Indicators of socioeconomic development and health for each of the boroughs was obtained from the London Health Observatory website (details from the corresponding author), which provides health and income data by local authority. In the present study, the following indicators were used: (1) pooled male life expectancy for the years 2001 to 2006; (2) pooled female life expectancy for the years 2001 to 2006; (3) annual gross pay for full-time workers by borough workplaces for 2006; (4) annual gross pay for full-time workers by borough residence for 2006; (5) percentage of the population unemployed in 2005, and; (6) average house prices in 2006. Indicators (1) and (2) were used as proxies of health status, whereas indicators (3) to (6) were used as proxies of socioeconomic development (gross domestic product, or GDP, data is not collected at the borough level). All data were for the most recent available year.

2.4. Procedure

All participants were recruited opportunistically by the authors through their personal contacts and using purposive sampling to ensure that residents from all boroughs were included in the study. Once ethical approval was obtained, potential participants were invited to take part in a study on interpersonal attraction. No participant declined participation, and all took part on a voluntary basis. Once written consent was obtained, participants completed a four-page, paper-and-pencil questionnaire in the presence of an experimenter. All participants were verbally debriefed following completion of the questionnaire.

3. Results

3.1. Physical attractiveness ratings

Mean ratings of women's and men's physical attractiveness, and mean familiarity ratings are reported in Table 1. We initially conducted a 33 (Borough) \times 2 (women's or men's physical attractiveness, henceforth Rated Sex) \times 2 (Participant sex) repeated measures analysis of variance, with the first two variables as within-subject factors and participant sex as a between-subject factor. Mauchley's test of Sphericity was significant for Borough, $\chi^2(527) = 8270.03$, $p < .001$, and Borough \times Rated Sex, $\chi^2(527) = 7731.01$, $p < .001$. For these variables, therefore, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied.

The results showed a significant effect of Borough, $F(10.32, 4734.45) = 71.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, but not of Borough \times Participant sex, $F(10.32, 4734.45) = 3.26$, $p > .05$. Tests of simple effects showed that the City of Westminster was given higher attractiveness ratings than all boroughs (all $t_s > 3.58$, all $p < .05$). The City of London did not receive significantly higher attractiveness ratings than Kensington and Chelsea, $t(460) = .36$, $p > .05$, but both these

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات