

SYMMETRY, FAT, AND HALOS

THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN BEAUTY?

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In the field of Plastic Surgery, I have always been impressed by how patients are able to see even the most minor differences in symmetry, mostly after surgery. I learned a long time ago to point out asymmetries before any procedure and to explain what effect surgery would have on a patient's asymmetrical face, breast or body. After a procedure a patient tends to look at themselves more critically than before the procedure.

'SYMPPLY' ATTRACTIVE

Along those lines it turns out that babies will stare at pictures of symmetric faces longer than asymmetric faces. Elaborate studies have determined that combining or 'averaging' several facial photos to create a composite leads to subjects choosing the most symmetrical faces as the most attractive. Presumably the averaging tends to eliminate the asymmetries any one individual may have.

There is some evidence that symmetry may carry with it a more robust immune system and therefore confer some survival or mating benefit. And whether Caucasian, Latino, or Asian- basic markers and preferences for beauty seem to cut across cultural boundaries.

FACE VALUE

In the west, men tend to prefer women with smaller jaws, smaller noses, larger eyes and defined cheeks. The characteristics could be described as 'baby-faced'.

Women, on the other hand seem to prefer men who appear more mature with stronger chins and full lips. Both sexes prefer that the forehead and chin are balanced on the profiles and 'weak' chins are not considered as attractive. So do these preferences indicate that individuals possessing them may have more long term potential as mates?

FAT IS WHERE IT'S AT

Much research on attractiveness has been devoted to body proportions. The waist to hip ratio is one of the most important of these proportions. In general western men prefer women with less fat around the waist and more fat on the hips and buttocks.

Of course the breast is composed largely of fat and in the west there is a significant preference on the part of men for women with well proportioned breasts, and yes, breasts that many might find entirely too large.

HALOS

There are many researched and validated biases that are associated with attractiveness. This 'Halo' effect is a reference to the perfection of angels.

These biases may be due to our tendency to categorize others before getting to know them. This may be due to the cultural stereotypes we carry around with us. On the other hand, there is the 'self-fulfilling' prophecy where a person's confident and positive self image is reinforced by positive feedback by others.

VANITY OR REALITY

I think that most people at least intuitively realize, and research has confirmed, that beauty does matter. This reality pervades society; it influences the choices we make in choosing a mate and very often plays a role in the success individuals achieve in society. Our interest in fashion, hairstyles, makeup and even plastic surgery will be around for some time.

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