



The effect of unrelated social exchanges on facial attractiveness judgments[☆]

Natalie T. Faust^{a,b,c,h}, Anjan Chatterjee^{d,e,f,g}, George I. Christopoulos^{a,b,c,*}



^a Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, 50 Nanyang Avenue, 639798, Singapore

^b Decision, Environmental and Organizational Neuroscience (DEON) Lab, Culture Science Institute, Nanyang Technological University, 50 Nanyang Avenue, 639798, Singapore

^c Institute on Asian Consumer Insight, Nanyang Technological University, 50 Nanyang Avenue, 639798, Singapore

^d Penn Center for Neuroaesthetics, University of Pennsylvania, United States of America

^e Center for Neuroscience and Society, the University of Pennsylvania, United States of America

^f Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, United States of America

^g Department of Neurology, Pennsylvania Hospital, United States of America

^h Nova School of Business and Economics, Campus de Carcavelos, Rua da Holanda, n.1, 2775-405 Carcavelos, Portugal

ARTICLE INFO

Handling editor: Ursula Hess

Keywords:

Attractiveness

Cooperation

Competition

Own-gender face perception

Prisoner's dilemma

Self-affirmation

ABSTRACT

Whereas the influence of facial attractiveness (FA) on social judgments has been well documented, much less is known about the converse influence of social exchanges on FA judgments. Previous research has shown that social dimensions inherently related to the face judged, such as status, can affect such judgments. However, we found that facial attractiveness ratings were affected by social exchanges unrelated to the face judged. In three experiments, we examined how competitive and cooperative financial exchanges influence subsequent facial aesthetic judgments. Compared to cooperation, competition decreased women's (but not men's) ratings of men's facial attractiveness; this pattern of effects also occurred for ratings of buildings, suggesting that competition suppressed aesthetic appreciation. However, women's responses to women's faces followed an inverse pattern, as competition (rather than cooperation) elevated women faces' attractiveness ratings. Introducing self-affirmation, a psychological mechanism that alleviates the effects of social competition, restored attractiveness ratings. This finding suggests that women's own-gender judgments in a competitive environment are affected by a perception of threat induced by social comparison. Overall, this study suggests that aesthetic judgments are not immune to social conditions. Such moderating effects contribute to our understanding of how sociocultural environments dynamically regulate aesthetic preferences.

The evaluation of faces is a key factor in social life. Indeed, the face is one of the most important visual objects in our environment (Leder & Carbon, 2004). It is an important channel of communication (Liang, Zebrowitz, & Zhang, 2010) and a rich source of information (Engell, Haxby, & Todorov, 2007) that informs humans' social judgments (Franklin & Adams, 2009). Among other factors, facial attractiveness powerfully affects these social judgments (O'Doherty et al., 2003; Tsukiura & Cabeza, 2011). Similar to money or status, attractiveness underlies not only mating behavior (Luxen & Van De Vijver, 2006) but also other social functions, such as professional success and leadership (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Langlois et al., 2000).

1. The effect of facial attractiveness on social judgments

Facial attractiveness has an impact on social decisions, such as

mating and friendship choices (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999), perceptions of goodness (Tsukiura & Cabeza, 2011), trustworthiness (Wilson & Eckel, 2006), intelligence (Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002), self-confidence (Langlois et al., 2000), age stereotypes (Palumbo, Adams, Hess, Kleck, & Zebrowitz, 2017), and even social hierarchy (Belmi & Neale, 2014). Previous research suggests that physically attractive people receive more favorable treatment compared to less attractive people (Langlois et al., 2000). Attractive people are also perceived to be more socially skilled (Langlois et al., 2000), are favored in hiring (Luxen & Van De Vijver, 2006), earn more money (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994), and receive lesser punishments for misbehavior (Gunnell & Ceci, 2010). The concepts of a “beauty premium” (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994) and “beautiful is good” (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) highlight the privilege and social advantage of being beautiful. Facial beauty is of particular interest, as it is a major determinant of

[☆] This work was supported by a grant from Institute on Asian Consumer Insight (Grant number: M4081641.C90) to the Corresponding Author.

* Corresponding author at: Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, 50 Nanyang Avenue, 639798, Singapore.

E-mail address: georchris7@gmail.com (G.I. Christopoulos).

judgments of the overall beauty (and, by extension, other aspects such as personality) of a person. Information about “good looks” and overall attractiveness is largely gathered from facial attributes (Furnham, Lavancy, & McClelland, 2001; Thornhill & Grammer, 1999). In addition, neuroscientific evidence confirms that beautiful faces are “rewarding” (Aharon et al., 2001; O’Doherty et al., 2003).

2. The role of social exchanges in facial attractiveness judgments

Facial attractiveness is a highly salient social signal that impacts social behavior. Yet, the opposite relationship, regarding how social conditions affect attractiveness judgments, has not been well studied. Given that facial attractiveness conveys social meaning and values, such judgments might depend on the social context in which the judgment is made. Researchers of aesthetics have long sought to determine whether attractiveness is defined by objective parameters (dating back to Plato’s objective view of aesthetic perception (Plato, 1961)) or subjective factors (i.e., beauty perception depends on taste and preferences, the idea that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”; e.g., Zhang, Kong, Zhong, & Kou, 2014), or both (Di Dio, Macaluso, & Rizzolatti, 2007; for a discussion of the objectivist, subjectivist, and interactionist views/perspectives on beauty, please see Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman (2004)). Some research suggests that several objective, measurable properties of faces determine their attractiveness. These properties include symmetry, averageness, and sexual dimorphism (Rhodes, Jeffery, Watson, Clifford, & Nakayama, 2003). Facial features are linked to attractiveness, including neonate features (e.g., large eyes, small nose, and small chin), maturity features (e.g., prominent cheekbones, narrow face), and expressive features (e.g., high eyebrows, large pupils, and large smile; Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, & Wu, 1995). Perceptions of attractive faces seem to be consistent cross-culturally (Cunningham et al., 1995; Etcoff, 2000) and among infants (Langlois et al., 2000). This literature suggests that, at least for some basic aspects, facial attractiveness is shaped by universal parameters (Eisenthal, Dror, & Ruppin, 2006) and is thus disconnected from the context in which they are encountered.

On the other hand, facial attractiveness judgments also depend on information unrelated to physical features (Kniffin & Wilson, 2004; Zhang et al., 2014) and are influenced by a variety of social inferences (Etcoff, 2000). Factors such as situational context, social categorization and culture can modulate the evaluation of facial attractiveness (e.g., Franklin & Adams, 2009; Marcinkowska et al., 2014). For example, faces of unfairly disadvantaged and fairly advantaged job applicants were judged as more attractive compared to fairly disadvantaged and unfairly advantaged ones (Michniewicz & Vandello, 2013). Women tend to integrate information from facial cues (masculine or feminine) with characteristics related to social behavior (e.g., faithfulness) when judging attractiveness in men (Quist, DeBruine, Little, & Jones, 2012). Other factors such as affection, respect, and familiarity (Kniffin & Wilson, 2004), eye contact or smiles (O’Doherty et al., 2003), personality characteristics (Zhang et al., 2014), reputation (Rucas et al., 2006), and attitudes towards the observer (Jones, DeBruine, Little, Conway, & Feinberg, 2006) significantly contribute to the assessment of facial attractiveness. A recent study (Marcinkowska et al., 2014) provides evidence that resources available in the environment affect attractiveness judgments: in harsher environments characterized by worse health, life-span, and mortality rates, men preferred masculinized (more than feminized) women’s faces. This is in accordance with more general theorizations of the how uncertainty of resources available interacts with culture and preferences (Christopoulos & Hong, 2013; Christopoulos & Tobler, 2016). The authors suggested that masculine features mark social dominance, signalling survival skills, whereas high femininity in women is associated with lower success in competition for (natural) resources. In harsher environments, with greater competition over scarce resources, men might prefer resource appropriating, potentially cued by “masculine” women’s faces.

Building on the literature highlighting the role of social conditions in facial attractiveness judgments, we sought to better understand this relationship by focusing on the impact of social exchanges on such judgments. Specifically, we investigated a major dimension of most social exchanges: cooperation versus competition. In our experiments, participants were exposed to a competitive or cooperative partner in a purely monetary task in which facial information or aesthetic judgments were absent. Subsequently, in a seemingly unrelated task, they rated facial images for attractiveness. We focused on how the output of unrelated social exchanges influenced perceptions of facial attractiveness. We demonstrated the malleability of aesthetic judgments and also, importantly, potential mechanisms through which attractiveness judgments might be modulated by social conditions. This knowledge is important from both a theoretical perspective of addressing the yet-unanswered question of how attractiveness preferences change and an applied/marketing perspective (cosmetic and fashion companies are highly interested in understanding how beauty trends and preferences are formed). The present research offers some potential explanations.

3. Competition versus cooperation

3.1. The effects of competition versus cooperation on attractiveness judgments

Cooperation and competition are cornerstones of social behavior. Smith (1976, chap. X) and Darwin (1871) referred to these two conditions as major forces of economic behavior and biological evolution, respectively. In competition, people predominantly work independently and against others to attain resources (Deutsch, 2011). In cooperation, people tend to work together and for each other to achieve common goals and share resources (Deutsch, 2011), building social capital in the process (Garcia, Tor, & Gonzalez, 2006). Although both cooperation and competition can co-exist, we focused on these two main states as the ones most commonly researched in economics, decision science and psychology.

We hypothesized that competitive and cooperative social exchanges influence facial aesthetic judgments, based on three theoretical perspectives. First, facial attractiveness judgments involve aesthetic processing. Aesthetic processing depends on many factors, one of which is the situation and the overall context in which the aesthetic processing takes place. For instance, an object will most likely be processed differently when it is encountered in a supermarket versus a museum or a theatre (Jacobsen, 2006). The study of aesthetics in arts has demonstrated that aesthetic appreciation is not only influenced by characteristics of the artwork and the viewer, but also by contextual information (Gartus & Leder, 2014; Swami, 2012). For instance, Wiersema, van der Schalk, and van Kleef (2012) found that participants who judged paintings under time pressure showed a stronger preference for figurative than for abstract paintings. In another example, Tousignant and Bodner (2014) reported that beauty ratings for average-beauty photos of buildings were higher after viewing low-beauty rather than high-beauty photos. In our study, we expected that a competitive or cooperative context would influence aesthetic appreciation of faces. In fact, the aesthetic processing of faces as a social process might be more likely to be influenced by a social context compared to non-social targets such as artwork or objects. As discussed in the previous section, aesthetic judgments of faces in particular have been shown to be influenced by various social inferences.

Second, social judgments are themselves influenced by the context in which they are made (Bless, Schwarz, & Wänke, 2003; Mussweiler, 2003). As a type of social judgment, one would expect that the social conditions in which facial aesthetic judgments are made would shape these judgments. In forming social judgments, individuals make social comparisons (Dunning, 2000). In fact, social judgments could be considered an implicit social comparison with the self being – consciously or not – the frame of reference (Dunning, 2000). We expected that when

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11004716>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11004716>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)