Aesthetic Dentistry


Mankind has always been interested in beauty and attractiveness. The search for a universal beauty ideal is a major topic in everyday life as well as in science. Evolutionary and cognitive theories try to give answers to the question of what is perceived as being beautiful and why this is so. In social psychology, it is furthermore investigated which effects in social life correlate with an attractive appearance.

The second part of “The Psychology of Aesthetics” (“Perception of Beauty: What is Beauty?”) appeared in No. 23, 3rd Edition mainly dealt with cognitive theories that use a neural basis to explain why people prefer symmetric faces. This third part in the series explains evolutionary theories, which are rarely involved in current scientific studies.

All the different angles clutched at straws when deviations from the prevalent beauty ideal can be found. Attractiveness underlies cultural differences as well as differentiating opinions over the history of mankind. The main focus of this article is these differences. To exemplify this, we will create an example which are rarely involved in current scientific studies.

The connection between immortality and ornaments was investigated by Darwin (1871). This concept says that members of one sex seek access to the opposite sex. To achieve this, they have to compete against conspecifics of their own species (intrasexual selection). Additionally, members of the other sex are interested in particular characteristics (intersexual selection). This perspective leads to an analysis of the reproductive behavior in selection (e.g., Buss & Barnes 1986; doosje, Bojarcz, & Fischer 1999; Karter, Trust 1995).

The aim of selection processes is mainly the stabilization of the species where extreme characters are avoided. Individuals who come off as the trendiest or innovative characters are less endangered of mutation than those individuals whose characteristics are conserved. Individuals who come off as the trendiest or innovative characters are less endangered of mutation than those individuals whose characteristics are conserved. Those characteristics differentiate from the norm (e.g., Barash & Bumpass 1989; doosje, Banazzky, 1979). Sex-oriented individuals favor descendants that also possess those stabilizing characteristics. This is why we are interested in those characteristics that are different from the rest of the group in order to be noticed. This is called attractiveness, which is also called an outward sign of a good, healthy lifestyle.

The fat reserves around the hip helped the mother and her children to survive in rather meager times. Additionally, these reserves were a protection against the cold. Furthermore, sexual selection also depends on reproduction ability. Individuals who father more descendants have greater chances of survival than individuals who live longer. Following this hypothesis, on the one hand it is important to have attractive characteristics that are different from the rest of the group in order to be noticed. This is called attractiveness, which is also called an outward sign of a good, healthy lifestyle.

Following Margo’s thoughts, the ornamental features of the doll are considered as characteristics that are linked to a high fitness level are considered attractive (for further details, see Menninghaus 2003). In order to show that science is in line with everyday phenomena as well, a study by Magro (1997) is worth noting.

Margo sees a somewhat unusual connection between evolution and the beauty ideal. On the basis of human history, he explains why Barbie is perceived as beautiful. Students evaluated drawings and photographs of persons with green or black hair and light eyes or blue eyes. Ancient human beings were noted for their ornaments. Keeping or losing ornaments resulted in differing choices. The ornamented individual shows the possibility of survival since they are better prepared for the judgment of a person, and the ornamented individual achieves this, they have to compete against conspecifics of their own species (intrasexual selection). Additionally, members of the other sex are interested in particular characteristics (intersexual selection). This perspective leads to an analysis of the reproductive behavior in selection (e.g., Buss & Barnes 1986; doosje, Bojarcz, & Fischer 1999; Karter, Trust 1995).

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Intercultural Differences

Many studies support the opinion that there is only one universal beauty ideal that exists and is independent of cultural background. Studies from Jones for example (1995; Jones & Hill 1995) postulate that neonous features, such as a childlike face with a small nose, huge eyes and full lips, are preferred by Americans in the US, people from Brazil, Russia, and Indians in Venezuela and Paraguay. Furnham, McClelland and Omer (2005) came to the conclusion that people from Kenya and Britain perceive the same female figure as attractive.

Deviations from this result were found by Marlowe and Wetsman (Marlowe & Wetsman 2001; 1999). They conducted an experiment in a hunter-gatherer society whose members were not touched by Western civilization. They asked Hadza who live in Tanzania to rank the drawings of women that had already been used as stimulus material in previous studies (Singh, 1995b, 1994). The figures varied in weight (underweight, normal, overweight) and waist-to-hip ratio (WHR), from 0.7 to 0.9. In Western cultures, a normal body weight with a WHR of 0.7 is usually preferred. Contrary to these results, the Hadza found heavy women more attractive than normal women, and thought that underweight women looked rather sick. So Chamelea as a Hadza woman would have to gain weight and her WHR should be higher than 0.7.

Yu and Shepard conducted a similar experiment (Yu & Shepard 1999) in Peru. They questioned Matsingenka men (Yombywats) who live in Mama Park, which is restricted to all but scientific and official visitors. There, women were judged according to their weight, with overweight women considered as being more attractive, healthy and desirable. Additionally, a population that lives outside of the park (Shiwar), but that is still not really touched by Western civilization, was also asked to judge the photos. This group also preferred overweight women and found them to be healthier. However, women with a lower WHR were judged to be more attractive and were chosen as potential mates.

The last group of men who were questioned belonged to an ethnically mixed group (Alto Madre) that lives along the Alto Madre River, which is a major trading route. Thus, these people have more contact to other populations. The results here did not differ significantly from the US population. They grouped female figures by WHR and then by weight. Taken all together, the judgments become more like those of the US population in places where it was clear that there was a stronger Western influence. Following the arguments of Marlowe and Wetsman, the WHR is of interest in those cultures that have enough food. Poorer populations and those far from Western influence look at weight as an indicator of fertility. In these populations, the danger of starvation is greater, thus a well-fed woman is more desirable than a skinny one.

Preview

So far, this series on “The Psychology of Aesthetics” has dealt with the term “aesthetics,” and illuminated the features that are perceived as beautiful and given explanations as to why this is so. Deviations from the norm have also been discussed in this article. This leaves the question of the consequences of beauty and attractiveness on everyday life.

Does a person’s outer appearance influence how he or she lives together with other humans? Is beauty advantageous or disadvantageous? Does the saying “what is beautiful is good” reflect the truth? Or are there any studies that can contradict this statement? Examples to answer these questions will be the subject of the final article in the series. We will see if we can convince Chamelea or another person to test the effects of her physical appearance. So for now we allow her to have some time to relax and take care of her intrinsic values and not just her outer qualities.