

Facial Attraction: Symmetry Considered Harmful

Nicol N. Schraudolph
Zürich, Switzerland

FACE@SCHRAUDOLPH.ORG

Abstract

An experiment in self-symmetrization yields surprising results about using computers to make unattractive faces.

1. Introduction/Results/Conclusion

It has been argued that human “facial bilateral . . . symmetry is a certification of overall phenotypic quality and developmental health”, and therefore perceived as sexually attractive by potential mates (Thornhill and Gangestad, 1993). To independently test that claim, I (Figure 1(a)) boldly decided to follow the shining example given by the many intrepid, selfless pioneers of science without ready access to undergraduates, and resort to self-experimentation¹—with surprising results (Figure 1(b)).

Using the right (here: left) half of the face as template for the symmetrization operation produces, as expected, an at least superficially attractive result (Figure 1(b) (left)), evidenced by a square, masculine, aerodynamic face, bright eyes alertly scanning the horizon for dangers, and gorgeous suntan testifying to an active, outdoor lifestyle. Should, however, the wrong (here: right) half of the face be used by mistake, the outcome (Figure 1(b) (right)) looks pale, sickly, and hung over, with gray hair, droopy eyes and ears, double chin, and pencil neck. I urge plastic surgeons in particular to take note of this dramatic left/right bias, as yet unexplained by evolutionary psychosociophysics.

Stranger still, an impromptu scientific survey² found that while—as expected—100% of respondents preferred Figure 1(b) (left) over Figure 1(b) (right), they also *all* preferred the asymmetric original (Figure 1(a)) over *either* of its symmetrized variants!³

Based on this (admittedly limited) data, I can only conclude that contrary to the claims by Thornhill and Gangestad (1993), facial symmetry can be rather detrimental to perceived attractiveness. I would welcome further contributions of images to this journal, so that we may yet get to the bottom of this complex phenomenon.

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1. Trained professional with image manipulation software—do not try this at home. Try it at work!
 2. Methodology: I asked the secretaries, postdocs, and Ph.D. students around the institute.
 3. Especially once the importance of a correct response was made clear to them.



(a) The author before symmetrization operation.

(b) Author after symmetrization operation.
Left: right (left) half; right: wrong (right) half.

Figure 1: The results of self-symmeterization.

References

- R. Thornhill and S. W. Gangestad. Human facial beauty: Averageness, symmetry, and parasite resistance. *Human Nature*, 4(3):237–269, 1993.