Aesthetic Dentistry


Lea Höfel, Germany

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 our No. 3/2003 issue, and dealt mainly with cognitive theories that use a neural basis to explain what 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 clutch at straws when deviations from the prevalent beauty ideal can be found. Attractiveness undermines 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 another attractive person who can, depending on the time and culture we put her into, adapt and maintain them. To allow one another person to be considered beautiful. But before we start, we’ll have a look at the evolutionary perspective of mate selection.

Evolutionary Theories

In his fundamental work “Origins of Species,” Darwin developed several basic principles of evolutionary selection (1859). He argued that those beings survived, who adapted to changes in the environment (natural selection). Later, he introduced the concept of sexual selection (Darwin 1871). This concept says that members of one sex are strongly selected against their competitors (intersexual selection). Additionally, members of the other sex are preferred, and favorable characteristics (introsexual selection). This perspective leads to an advantage for an animal species, if it can convey beautiful and more symmetric faces. This third part in the series explains evolutionary theories, which are rarely involved in current scientific studies.

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The connection between immunity and ornaments was investigated by Hamilton and Zuk (1982). The tail feathers of swallows were larger and more symmetric, so the more the swallow was plagued by parasites and infections. Thus, beauty is also an indicator that he or she is strong enough to fight against all disasters. The tail feathers of the swallow or the peacock are an outward sign of the birds’ resistance against parasites. The greater the mating success of these species, the more the females are likely to mate with it. A potential partner hopes to give these good immunity genes to their offspring.

All evolutionary attractiveness theories are based on the idea of “Darwin’s survival of the fittest.” Those partners that are in little danger of mutation and whose outward signs are similar for all European fertility goddesses of that time (Pontius 1987). 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. Chamelea’s beauty ideal was that of a rather flat and small mouth and a long slender neck. Many ancient recipes for skin and hair care are still common today. "Pretty Woman). And, if there is no way to reach the preferred look naturally, plastic surgery is now also a possibility. Considering the passage of time, it is interesting to note if older people still prefer outward signs of youth and health. From an evolutionary point of view it is the old and "underweight" and "healthy." Today’s ideal is that of a rather long black hair, pale skin, and a narrow waist, she represents the trend of the time. The dresses were very costly and, despite health risks, women wore them tight corsets. This is why Chamelea happily leaves the role of the perfect woman to Sissi and continues to keep her figure. In the 19th century, emancipation begins and short haircuts are now the modern style. This change is followed by the Second World War. Full-bodied figures such as Marilyn Monroe and Sophia Loren, with long flowing hair, represent the ideal type of woman.

Later though, Chamelea has to go on a strict diet because slender women with huge eyes are perceived as beautiful. Models, such as Twiggy in 1966 with her big eyes and white skin, were considered to fit this type. However, the currents in the 1980s, the beauty ideal required a sportive and somewhat muscular physique. At the beginning of the 1990s, a part of everyday life from this time forward and today’s beauty ideal is often attained with the help of computer animation (Laura Croft in the video game “Tomb Raider”), or body doubles (for example, Julia Roberts’s legs in “Pretty Woman”). And, if there is no way to reach the preferred look naturally, plastic surgery is now also a possibility. Considering the passage of time, it is interesting to note if older people still prefer outward signs of youth and health. From an evolutionary point of view it is the old and "underweight" and "healthy." Today’s ideal is that of a rather long black hair, pale skin, and a narrow waist, she represents the trend of the time. The dresses were very costly and, despite health risks, women wore them tight corsets. This is why Chamelea happily leaves the role of the perfect woman to Sissi and continues to keep her figure. In the 19th century, emancipation begins and short haircuts are now the modern style. This change is followed by the Second World War. Full-bodied figures such as Marilyn Monroe and Sophia Loren, with long flowing hair, represent the ideal type of woman.

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