

Study shows attractiveness of people not dependent on facial expression

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Credit: AutismSpot

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers from the U.K.'s University of Portsmouth have conducted a study with the aim of attempting to discern if the attractiveness of a person's face is impacted by facial expression. In their paper published in the *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, the team describes how they asked volunteers to look at pictures of people with different facial expressions and found that most rated the same people as attractive regardless of the expression on their face.

It's a common [assumption](#) that people look more attractive to other people when they smile, but do less attractive people look more attractive when they do so, or do more attractive people look less so when their face shows anger, sorrow or displeasure? In this new effort, the research team set out to find the answers to such questions.

The researchers asked 128 male and female volunteers to look at

headshot photographs of 16 women and 14 men, each displaying six different [facial expressions](#): anger, [sadness](#), happiness, fear, [disgust](#) and surprise as well as a neutral expression. Participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of each of the people in the pictures but saw each person only once with a randomly chosen expression.

In analyzing their results, the team found that the volunteers rated the same people as attractive regardless of which facial expression they displayed. They also found that those people regarded as less attractive didn't fare any better when happy (smiling). They noted also that the results were the same regardless of the gender of the person in the picture, or the person looking at them.

The researchers suggest that despite the many ways people can move their faces around to express emotion, there is still a core that doesn't change and people can see that and use it to help in judging general attractiveness. They note also that facial attractiveness has long been believed to be a part of human mating rituals, with most people preferring those that look the best. They add that facial expression is still believed to play a role in helping people decide on whether to approach someone as a possible mate, however. A person seen as attractive, but scowling, for example, would not be seen as worthy of pursuit, whereas one smiling would be.

More information: The Stability of Facial Attractiveness: Is It What You've Got or What You Do with It? *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, DOI: [10.1007/s10919-013-0145-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-013-0145-1) , link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10919-013-0145-1

Abstract

Physical attractiveness is suggested to be an indicator of biological quality and therefore should be stable. However, transient factors such as gaze direction and facial expression affect facial attractiveness,

suggesting it is not. We compared the relative importance of variation between faces with variation within faces due to facial expressions. 128 participants viewed photographs of 14 men and 16 women displaying the six basic facial expressions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise) and a neutral expression. Each rater saw each model only once with a randomly chosen expression. The effect of expressions on attractiveness was similar in male and female faces, although several expressions were not significantly different from each other. Identity was 2.2 times as important as emotion in attractiveness for both male and female pictures, suggesting that attractiveness is stable. Since the hard tissues of the face are unchangeable, people may still be able to perceive facial structure whatever expression the face is displaying, and still make attractiveness judgements based on structural cues.

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