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Facial Beauty Is Independent Of Bilateral Left-Right Face Symmetry

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Symmetry in nature is considered to be critical in expression of health, genetic quality, and predicting species survival. The biological notion of symmetry in nature has been extended to human facial beauty as well so that, according to this notion, the greater the beauty, the greater the bilateral symmetry. However, not all studies agree that there is a positive relationship between beauty and symmetry (see references below). To help resolve the issue here, 56 head-on photographed faces of women and men were split in half (mid-sagittal) down the midline and participants (23 males, 32 females) rated each hemi-face (exposed for 7 seconds on a computer screen) on a 5-point attractiveness scale. Then, the hemi-face ratings were compared to the ratings of the full-faces viewed by another group of participants (12 males, 15 females). One would have expected poor, or no relationship between hemi- and full-face ratings, given the biological notion of bilateral left-right symmetry and facial beauty. Our findings indicate the opposite: A robust positive correlation between the attractiveness ratings of hemi- and full-faces emerged, $r=0.94$, $p<0.0001$. Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean attractiveness ratings between the hemi-faces and full-faces. This strongly puts into doubt the relevance of biological bilateral symmetry to facial beauty in humans and supports findings from studies using full-faces that have previously challenged the bilateral symmetry-beauty relationship. Although the nature of facial beauty is elusive empirically, the present results clearly suggest that beauty assessment need not rely on the presence of a full, bilateral normal face, and that it can be gleaned when only its half is seen.

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