

The Attractiveness of Dark Triad Characteristics in Facial Composites

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Abstract

The attractiveness of the human face is influenced by many different facial characteristics, which convey important information about the other person. Facial features provide signals related to various biological and psychological qualities of an individual, and feelings of attraction/aversion should support/minimise further mutual interactions. Previous studies have mainly focused on the identification of features that indicate positive and desirable characteristics in the other person. However, it is equally important for people to react to the presence of negative characteristics. In terms of high-risk characteristics, Dark Triad characteristics, including subclinical narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, play a major role. The study focuses on the assessment of the attractiveness of these three characteristics in female and male faces, while taking the gender of the assessor into consideration. It uses computerised facial composites that represent prototypes of individuals with high and low levels of the individual Dark Triad characteristics. The results show that the most preferred characteristic, in the assessments of both the male and female facial prototypes (by men and women), is Machiavellianism. Furthermore, there was significant agreement between individuals (male and female) in the assessment of the attractiveness of the male facial composite. The attractiveness of Dark Triad characteristics in the female facial composite is significantly more diffused and ambiguous. The subjects considered male faces with high levels of psychopathy and Machiavellianism and low levels of neuroticism to be attractive. Only Machiavellianism proved to be attractive in the assessment of the female facial composites.

Keywords: facial features, attractiveness, Dark Triad, evolutionary psychology