

An Objective System for Measuring Facial Attractiveness

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Dr. Bashour should be applauded for undertaking this enormously daunting task and attempting to develop an objective tool to measure facial attractiveness. Numerous previous efforts in this regard have yielded very few results.

In the Introduction, Dr. Bashour reviews several of the germane studies and identifies some partial reliability to a few and no reliability to most methods of measuring facial pulchritude. Dr. Bashour begins with a definition of attractiveness and beauty. He defines facial attractiveness as “the visual properties of a face that are pleasing to the visual sense of an observer.” Dr. Bashour next proposes that beauty is “the assemblage of graces or properties pleasing to the eye, the ear, any or all of the senses, the intellect, the aesthetic faculty, and/or the moral sense.” These definitions set the stage for significant debate and discussion. Indeed, one can argue that beauty is ideal symmetry with a golden relationship between facial features. On the other hand, attractiveness is more of a symmetry and congruity between the dominant facial features, while the nondominant features do not have the most optimal relationship. Considering that Dr. Bashour has introduced some psychological and perceptual constructs, such a definition becomes more of a personal rather than a scientific designation. In fact, it would be an equally colossal task to have observers identify the differences between beauty and attractiveness. There is no question, however, that these are two separate entities, since a beautiful face is not necessarily attractive. What complicates the definition offered here, especially as it relates to “beauty,” is the inclusion of some variables that one is not able to measure, such as “moral sense” and “intellect.”

The assumption that two-dimensional measurements can accurately assess attractiveness is perhaps the most significant shortcoming of this study. Some individuals are recognized as photogenic and attractive, yet they may not seem as

attractive in person. On the contrary, there are those who may be attractive in person but may not be considered as such when their photographs are reviewed. It is my clinical observation that those who are photogenic are the ones who possess symmetrical facial features that follow the golden ratios, but these features may not necessarily be pleasing by themselves. Those who are more attractive in person, compared with their photographs, have a skin tone, eye color, and facial depth that are individually optimal but may not necessarily have the symmetry and harmony inherent to their photogenic counterparts. Thus, when it comes to a two-dimensional analysis, some of these otherwise cardinal elements lose their role.

A foible in the methodology is asking the participants to close their mouths at the time of photography. We know there are patients with a long face deformity who look very different with their lips closed compared with their lips in the repose lip posture, in which the lips are incompetent and the mouth remains open, making the face look elongated. With the lips closed, the chin could have a completely different shape and the forced contraction of the mentalis muscle may readily be discernible with dimpling of the chin skin, although on the profile view, the face looks ostensibly normal. In addition, the color of the eyes, the color and quality of the skin (thickness, irregularities, pore size), and the beauty of each facial feature individually were not taken into consideration. The measurement offered here does not encompass these prodigious factors in the equations of beauty or attractiveness.

Moreover, assuming a mobile index for facial size, such as interpupillary distance, may not be accurate. Depending on the rotation of the face, however small, the direction of gaze, and the intensity and number of lights used for photography, these measurements may lose their reliability. Fixed elements of a face, such as the intercanthal or intertrigal distance, would offer more dependable reference points. However, this is not a blemish that detracts from the value of this study. Furthermore, not considering the profile view poses a significant problem in assessing the face. A dorsal nasal hump, a receding

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chin, an imbalance between the upper and lower lip position, and a flat or prominent forehead can easily detract from the desirability of the face, yet these are not factors included in this measurement because they may not be apparent on a frontal view.

Considering the above points, were the author's efforts futile? Not exactly. On the contrary, I believe that Dr. Bashour's attempts to find unswerving tools to measure beauty and his efforts to define a better means of quantifying attractiveness are admirable. Dr. Bashour's interest in facial analysis and defining beauty and attractiveness is clear from his previous work and is further enhanced with this work. It would be extremely difficult to design a multifaceted and

unfailing system that would take all of the aforementioned factors into consideration. Perhaps most of the factors that were not included in this study will be considered in future studies, to develop a comprehensive, objective, and steadfast tool for assessing beauty and attractiveness.

This report is indeed a great leap in the right direction, and those of us who focus on facial aesthetic and reconstructive surgery cannot sufficiently express our gratitude for the time and effort Dr. Bashour devoted to this study.

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