



Editorial

Is beauty equivalent of fair/white skin?

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WHAT IS “BEAUTY”?

“Beauty” as per the dictionary is a combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form, that pleases the esthetic senses, especially the sight. According to consultant orthodontist Dr. Farhad Naini, “facial beauty has perhaps always been the most valued aspect of human beauty”

WHY IS “BEAUTY” NEEDED?

Culturally and traditionally, beauty is highly prized since childhood. Factors such as “white skin” is still praised and thus during summer months, ladies cover head-to-toe of the body with clothing including facial skin from the sun. Beauty remains a key factor in interpersonal relationships, educational growth, work opportunities, and choice of spouse. This is summed up in the Chinese proverb, “your face is your rice bowl.”

IS “FACIAL APPEARANCE” IMPORTANT?

The human face is infinitely complex and variable. Much of the architecture of the face is linked to its physiological functions, yet the face is so much more than just a functioning part of the human body. We are living in an era of selfies, social media, and an extreme obsession with appearance, particularly facial appearance. Market forces are perpetually pushing vulnerable people toward appearance-altering treatments that they do not need.

WHAT DETERMINES FACIAL ATTRACTIVENESS?

Facial attractiveness as per biologically based standards of beauty is based on three components- averageness, symmetry, and sexual dimorphism. However, internationally linked to attractiveness are six main attributes- youth, body type, perceived health, averageness, sexual dimorphism, and symmetry.

In physical attractiveness studies, averageness describes the physical beauty that results from averaging the facial features of people of the same gender and approximately of the same age. The majority of averageness studies have focused on photographic overlay studies of human faces, in which images are morphed together.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED AN “ATTRACTIVE FACE”?

Feminine faces with increased sexually dimorphic feminine features (high cheekbones and smaller lower face and chin, full lips) on female faces are reported to be attractive in Asians.

These features denote youthfulness and fertility. More recent male attractiveness studies report feminine male faces are the ones that are rated as more attractive. On the other hand, increased masculine facial features are linked to negative attributes and perceptions, including aggressiveness, dominance, cold character, and dishonesty

HOW TO ENHANCE “FACIAL ATTRACTIVENESS”?

Attractive faces activate the reward centers of the brain and an enhanced response with positive attributes, e.g., smiling increases facial attractiveness.

IS “NEOTENY” PREFERRED IN HUMANS?

Studies have shown neoteny plays a role in facial attractiveness. In females, features such as full/thick lips, large eyes but thin eyebrows, high forehead, prominent but small cheekbones, and relatively small chin and nose are found to be attractive. All these are considered “baby-like” features.

What is “facial symmetry”?

Rule of facial thirds—first described by Roman artists for ascertaining symmetry of the face. “Forehead height = nose length = lower face height”

Do “beauty standards” vary?

The actress Fan Bingbing from China is known as the symbol of female beauty. She possesses neotanzed facial features, a round facial shape, thin, gently arched eyebrows, relatively large eyes with a lower eyelid roll known as, oval facial shape with a round and a narrow chin and sexually dimorphic features including plump prominent lips. In comparison, Angelina Jolie, who has been praised as the ideal of female beauty in the West, has prominent cheeks and jawline, submalar hollowing and very plump lips. Indian standards are still unknown and are mostly based on the facies of actresses in India.

WHAT ARE THE GENERAL “IDEALS OF BEAUTY” IN ASIA?

The ideals of beauty in Asia are:

- Facial shape—Oval, heart/inverted triangle
- Jawline—Obtuse jawline for both men and women, esthetic practitioners preferred a more angular jaw angle for men
- Nose—High bridge, 90-degree tip
- Chin—Round and pointy chin for both women and men, less pointy for men
- Lips—Full medially and taper off laterally with well-defined borders and Cupid’s bow.

To achieve these ideals of beauty, nonsurgical, noninvasive procedures with lesser downtime are being preferred over

the surgical procedures. In spite of this, in Asia, Korea is emerging as the Mecca of plastic surgery, and one in five Korean women have undergone plastic surgery with growing numbers in male counterparts too. Asia’s medical esthetic industry is emerging as one of the largest in the world and fast-growing with increased emphasis on good looks for socioeconomic growth, job, and marriage prospects.

DO “BODY PROPORTIONS” CONTRIBUTE TO BEAUTY?

A feature of beautiful women that has been explored by researchers is a waist-hip ratio of approximately 0.70. The women with hourglass figures are thought to be more fertile than other women because of higher levels of certain female hormones.

In the fashion industry, body shape of women has been categorized into four types. (a) Rectangular- The waist is 9 inches (23 cm) smaller than the hips and bust. (b) Inverted triangle- The shoulders are broader than the hips. (c) Spoon- The hips are wider than the bust. (d) Hourglass- The hips and bust are almost of equal size, and the waist is narrower than both.

Beauty concept has been applied to the breast too. The ideal ratio for breast is an upper pole to lower pole ratio of 45:55 with a skyward pointing nipple.

According to both sexes, the primary predictor of female beauty is a relatively low BMI combined with a relatively curvaceous body.

WHAT ARE THE “ALTERATIONS OF BODY SHAPE” INCLUDED UNDER ESTHETICS?

In 2019, 92% of all cosmetic procedures in the US were undertaken by women, with the most popular being a breast augmentation. Breasts can be surgically enlarged using breast implants or reduced by the systematic removal of parts of the breasts. Hormonal breast enhancement may be another option.

For waist reduction, corsets have been used. Now a days, liposuction and liposculpture are common surgical methods used for reducing the waist line permanently.

Buttock augmentation surgery may be used to increase the size of hips and buttocks to make them look more rounded.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “WHITE SKIN” IN ASIA?

There are old proverbs in the region regarding white and fair skin; Japanese: “white skin covers the seven flaws” and Chinese: “white skin can help conceal 100 flaws in your appearance.” A more recent popular saying in China: “white, rich, and beautiful” and “A pretty face is a star’s bread and butter.”

IS “FAIR SKIN” AN OBSESSION AMONG INDIANS?

Fair skin is thought to be equivalent to beauty. Fairness of skin is related to prestige and attractiveness to both genders, and for women, increased matrimonial prospects. Desire for fairness leads to all kinds of treatments to achieve a desirable skin color. Indians have obsession with skin color as evidenced by rampant use of topical steroids for fairness and systemic whitening agents such as glutathione. In Asia, skin whitening products account for 60% of sales of skincare items. Roughly 60–65% of women use some form of skin lightening product in their daily routines.

FINALLY, IS BEAUTY EQUIVALENT OF FAIR/WHITE SKIN?

Thus, based on the discussions, it is evident that “beauty” has different connotations and standards, and perspectives and cannot be just attributed to only “fair/white skin.” This goes with the saying “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” which means that beauty does not exist on its own but is created by observers.

Declaration of patient consent

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