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The Impact of Facial Symmetry on Perceived Favorability

Alwella Gail Rebusas¹, Rassja Nyasha Secang², Jaceybell Estrecho³, Karla Gabayeron⁴, Chloe Marguerite Meneses⁵, Edrienne Natabio⁶, Frances Clare Vallejera⁷, Reymart Shan Tinosan^{8*}

¹⁻⁷ Student, School of Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Teacher Education, La Consolacion College Bacolod, Philippines

⁸ Course Instructor, School of Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Teacher Education, La Consolacion College Bacolod, Philippines

* Corresponding Author: **Reymart Shan Tinosan**

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Abstract

People often connect the idea of facial symmetry with beauty, believing that balanced features tend to make a person more attractive or likable, but it is not always clear whether or not it actually does affect others when it comes to judging one's favorability. This study sought to find whether a difference exists between symmetrical and asymmetrical faces with regard to perceived favorability among college students. In an experimental design, thirty-six (36) participants from a private institution were randomly assigned into two groups. The control group evaluated five facial photographs that were perfectly symmetrical, and the experimental group evaluated the same faces but adjusted to display symmetry variation at 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, and 100%. Using a Likert scale, the participants rated how likable each face appeared. Analyses were performed through descriptive statistics, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, independent samples t-test, and Cohen's d to measure effect size. Although the experimental group gave a slightly higher overall rating in many instances, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. This would mean that, although symmetry may have a minor role in building first impressions, everything else that people consider is not symmetry. Other factors like facial expression, cultural influence, and personal taste may hold a more significant impact in how favorably a person is perceived. Therefore, attractiveness and likability appear to depend on a mix of qualities rather than just symmetry alone.

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1. Introduction

Facial symmetry plays an important role in judging attractiveness or beauty. It has been proven that facial asymmetry can be well quantified by computational methods based on facial landmarks with low computational cost, and they are even comparable to the complex feature extraction process^[1]. Facial asymmetry is among the most frequently cited conditions in studies of facial attractiveness. It is a congenital, developmental, or acquired condition that frequently carries negative psychological impacts, particularly when it comes to the fostering or believability of attractiveness^[2]. Humans use several major criteria to determine the attractiveness of another human, and facial attractiveness is among the most frequently cited conditions in studies of desired symmetrical features^[3]. Research on facial symmetry and global perspectives on beauty reveals complex relationships between symmetry and attractiveness. Contrary to traditional assumptions, facial symmetry shows no significant effect on facial attractiveness across diverse populations^[4]. In natural scenes, symmetry's role varies by type and context, with local and vertical global symmetry reducing complexity and interest, while horizontal global symmetry can enhance pleasure^[5]. Beauty standards are evolving globally through the influence of social media and cultural forces, with natural beauty being perceived similarly across cultures while maintaining unique ethnic characteristics^[6]. Research on Asian groups more recently also teaches us about the complex interaction between facial symmetry, culture, and judgments of attractiveness.

It has been found that while the traditional Japanese tastes preferred some degree of asymmetry, symmetric patterns were also rated consistently as being more lovely with an inbuilt tendency to prefer symmetry even regardless of different cultural preferences^[7]. It has been found that while the traditional Japanese tastes preferred some degree of asymmetry, symmetric patterns were also rated consistently as being more lovely with an inbuilt tendency to prefer symmetry even regardless of different cultural preferences^[7]. Moreover, massive facial beauty studies indicate that, although symmetry is a predictor, independent contributions toward East Asian judgments of beauty are made by other facial qualities like averageness and femininity/femaleness^[8]. There are inconclusive results concerning the predictive function of symmetry for sex and ethnicity^[4]. These results illustrate that facial symmetry preference in Asian groups is not just biologically based but also culturally sophisticated, which impacts social group judgments and notions of beauty within different groups. Although considerable literature exists on facial symmetry, limited research has explored its influence on social judgments among Filipino college students in Catholic institutions—an important group shaped by social media and globalized beauty ideals. This focus is both novel and necessary, as these students are at a critical stage of identity formation where social perception is highly valued, making them ideal for examining how facial symmetry functions within a culturally diverse and modern context. Facial symmetry plays a significant role in Filipino constructions of identity and beauty, shaped by both biological and social factors. Previous studies highlight culturally specific expressions of facial symmetry in Filipino social interactions, while biological research shows that minor deviations from perfect symmetry indicate developmental stability and well-being^[9,10]. Moreover, asymmetries linked to dental extraction relate to environmental stress^[11], collectively underscoring facial symmetry as a meaningful biological signal and culturally significant aesthetic element in Filipino social identity. Existing literature on facial symmetry and its effects on perceived favorableness in social situations is limited and inconclusive with variable results and failure to examine underlying processes of this effect. This research fills those gaps by examining subtle processes whereby facial symmetry influences social perception. Furthermore, there is variability between researchers in how they view symmetry and integrate it within their overall judgements; this indicates that a more thorough investigation is merited. Existing literature further suggests that the impact of facial symmetry is context-dependent, however there is a lack of empirical evidence to account for these tentative findings. This study aims to fill these voids by targeting naturalistic facial images and diverse perceptions, especially among students, making our research novel in that it offers new and ecologically life-like findings of the function of facial symmetry on perceived favorability. This study aims to explore how facial symmetry affects how much people like a face, focusing especially on college students today. It will be an experiment where students from a private college will look at faces with different levels of symmetry and rate how likable they find them. Conducting the study in a controlled setting will help keep the testing fair and consistent. The goal is to better understand how facial symmetry influences social opinions, which could be useful for areas like psychology, marketing, and communication.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored in Halo Effect Theory explaining the effect of facial symmetry on impressions and judgments of individuals. The Halo Effect Theory was originally proposed by Edward Thorndike in 1920 as a psychological bias where a positive trait leads to general impression concerning an individual^[12]. In facial beauty and symmetry, this would result in the meaning that beautiful people are rated as intelligent, nice, or capable, whether or not they actually are. The theory is supported with empirical evidence. Furthermore, studies also found that beautiful faces and bodies caused German and Japanese participants to make more vivid health, prosociality, and dominance inferences^[13]. Moreover, symmetry-beauty-enhancing filters caused perceivers to rate such individuals as more competent and trustworthy^[14]. In the current study, Halo Effect Theory explains why highly urbanized city college students will attribute positive qualities to symmetrical peers even when they possess no explicit knowledge about their personality.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed an experimental design, specifically, two independent groups design to investigate the effect of facial symmetry on perceived likability. In this design, participants were randomly split into two (2) groups: a control group, which viewed five (5) facial images with perfect (100%) symmetry, and an experimental group, which viewed the same faces altered to display varying symmetry levels (20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, and 100%). This design was selected because it enabled the comparison of perceived likability between groups to determine whether differences in facial symmetry significantly influence social favorability.

3.2. Participants

The study comprised a total of 36 participants and were selected through simple random sampling to explore how facial symmetry influences perceptions of favorability. Through systematic random assignment, the first half of the participants were assigned to the experimental group and the other half to the control group. The arbitrary number of participants was achieved since the experimental methodologies require at least 15 participants^[15]. There should be at least 15 participants in control and experimental groups for comparison^[16].

3.3. Research Instruments

The primary materials used in this study were a set of printed AI-generated facial images with symmetrical and asymmetrical faces which served as the stimuli for participants' choices. These images were generated in high quality and carefully standardized in terms of facial expression, lighting, background, and orientation to ensure that symmetry was the only variable influencing participants' judgments. Participants were presented with photos of different faces and were instructed to rate each photo (Likert scale) on a prepared answer sheet.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

A total of 36 students from four college departments in a Bacolod City institution were selected through simple random sampling to participate in the study. Upon arrival, participants aged 18 and above signed informed consent forms and were randomly assigned to either the control or

experimental group. The control group viewed and rated five perfectly symmetrical faces, while the experimental group rated the same faces digitally altered to show varying levels of symmetry (20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, and 100%) using a Likert scale. After completing the ratings, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation, and the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, to summarize group responses.

3.5. Data Analysis

The favorability rating data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, to summarize each group's responses. An independent samples t-test was then conducted to examine whether a significant difference existed between the control group (100% symmetrical faces) and the experimental group (faces with varying levels of symmetry) in perceived favorability. Before performing the t-test, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was carried out to verify the assumption of equal variances. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used to determine statistical significance, and Cohen's d was computed to assess the effect size or the magnitude of the difference between the two groups.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of the control and experimental groups across five rounds of testing. The mean for the control group as a whole is ($M = 3.611$, $SD = 0.642$), while for the experimental group as a whole is ($M = 3.744$, $SD = 0.639$). During Round 1, the control group obtained a mean of ($M = 3.889$, $SD = 0.832$), whereas the experimental group had a slightly higher mean of ($M = 4.222$, $SD = 0.732$). In Round 2, the control group recorded ($M = 3.389$, $SD = 0.778$), while the experimental group showed ($M = 3.889$, $SD = 1.132$). For Round 3, the control group had ($M = 3.778$, $SD = 1.003$) and the experimental group had ($M = 3.944$, $SD = 0.873$). In Round 4, the control group obtained ($M = 3.000$, $SD = 0.907$), and the experimental group recorded ($M = 3.056$, $SD = 1.056$). Lastly, during Round 5, the control group showed ($M = 4.000$, $SD = 0.767$), while the experimental group had ($M = 3.611$, $SD = 1.243$).

The differences in the mean scores between the control and experimental groups may be attributed to the varying levels of facial symmetry presented to participants. The consistently higher mean scores of the experimental group suggest that faces with greater symmetry were perceived as more favorable compared to those with asymmetrical features. This supports previous findings in facial perception research, indicating that individuals tend to associate symmetrical faces with attractiveness, health, and positive personality traits. The results further suggest that facial symmetry has a positive, though modest, impact on perceived favorability. Across the five rounds, the experimental group (faces with higher symmetry) consistently obtained slightly

higher mean favorability ratings compared to the control group (faces with asymmetry), with overall mean scores of 3.744 (Exp) and 3.611 (Ctrl). These small differences, along with relatively consistent standard deviations, imply that while symmetry influences favorability perception, it may not be the sole determining factor. The variation across rounds may also be explained by differences in individual preferences, perceptual sensitivity, cultural standards of beauty, and personal biases or experiences with facial attractiveness, all of which could have influenced participants' ratings and contributed to minor inconsistencies across sessions.

The results of this study, where faces with varying levels of symmetry were rated slightly more favorably than perfectly symmetrical ones, reflect recent findings that the link between symmetry and attractiveness is not always straightforward. Technological assessments, such as those using augmented reality, reveal that while facial symmetry contributes to attractiveness, small asymmetries are often perceived as natural and can even enhance realism—suggesting that flawless symmetry is not always the most appealing^[17]. Individuals' preference for symmetry depends on how it is shown in an experiment—faces with moderate or natural symmetry often appear more appealing than those that look artificially balanced^[16]. Small differences from perfect symmetry can influence attractiveness in subtle ways, supporting the idea that humans tend to prefer a “natural balance” rather than mathematical perfection^[18]. In professional settings, it was observed that higher facial symmetry was linked to more favorable impressions, reinforcing the general belief that symmetry plays a positive role in social perception^[19]. However, it was pointed out that factors like distinctiveness and femininity may matter more than symmetry alone when it comes to facial attractiveness, which helps explain why the difference in your data was modest^[4]. Moreover, it was found that people can only detect symmetry up to a certain limit and may not even notice small imperfections—suggesting that nearly symmetrical faces can be just as attractive as perfectly symmetrical ones.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that future studies and practical applications consider incorporating facial symmetry alongside other facial qualities such as averageness and femininity in enhancing perceived favorability and attractiveness. While results suggest that symmetrical faces tend to receive slightly higher favorability ratings, the effect remains modest, emphasizing the need to view symmetry as one of several contributing factors rather than the sole basis of positive perception^[18]. Therefore, it is advisable for researchers to explore how other variables—such as facial expression, cultural background, and individual differences in aesthetic preference—interact with symmetry to influence judgments of favorability. Moreover, future research should aim to include more diverse facial samples and participant groups to better understand how symmetry interacts with social and cultural contexts in shaping perceptions of attractiveness and likability.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	As a Whole		Round 1		Round 2		Round 3		Round 4		Round 5	
	Ctrl	Exp	Ctrl	Exp	Ctrl	Exp	Ctrl	Exp	Ctrl	Exp	Ctrl	Exp
Mean	3.611	3.744	3.889	4.222	3.389	3.889	3.778	3.944	3.000	3.056	4.000	3.611
SD	0.642	0.639	0.832	0.732	0.778	1.132	1.003	0.873	0.907	1.056	0.767	1.243

4.2. Test of Equality of Variances (Levene's)

The result of Levene's Test of Equality of Variances indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(1, 34) = 0.002$, $p = .962$. Since the p -value (.962) is much greater than the significance level of .05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which states that the variances between the groups are equal.

Table 2: Test of Equality of Variances (Levene's)

	F	df ₁	df ₂	p
As a Whole	0.002	1	34	.962

4.3. Independent Samples T-Test as a Whole

Table 3 presents the results of the Independent Samples T-Test conducted to compare the overall perceived favorability ratings between the control and experimental groups. The analysis yielded a t -value of -0.625 with 34 degrees of freedom and a p -value of .536, which is greater than the .05 level of significance. Additionally, the computed Cohen's d value of -0.208 suggests a small effect size, meaning that the magnitude of difference between the control and experimental groups is minimal.

The results of the Independent Samples T-Test indicate that there was no significant difference in the overall favorability ratings between participants who viewed symmetrical faces (experimental group) and those who viewed asymmetrical faces (control group). The p -value of .536 exceeds the .05 threshold, suggesting that the level of facial symmetry did not have a statistically meaningful impact on how participants rated favorability when all responses were considered together. Furthermore, the small effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.208$) implies that the variation between the two groups' mean ratings was minimal. This outcome suggests that while facial symmetry may influence attractiveness to some degree, it may not be the sole determinant of favorability perceptions among participants. Other factors—such as facial expression, familiarity, or individual preference—could also have influenced participants' ratings.

The findings of the Independent Samples T-Test indicate that the difference in perceived favorability between perfectly symmetrical faces and those with varying levels of symmetry was not statistically significant, suggesting that facial symmetry alone may not strongly determine attractiveness judgments. This aligns with recent research showing that symmetry contributes to facial appeal but is often overshadowed by other perceptual cues such as distinctiveness, averageness, and emotional expression^[4]. It was also found that the effect of symmetry on attractiveness depends on whether it enhances the perceived "normality" of a face, implying that excessive or artificial symmetry may not increase favorability^[24]. It was noted that people's preferences for symmetry vary depending on how it is presented—faces that appear naturally balanced tend to be rated as more appealing than those that look overly precise^[18]. Researchers further observed that individuals have perceptual limits when judging facial symmetry,

This means that the variability of scores in each group is statistically similar, and there is no significant difference in the spread or dispersion of the data. Therefore, the assumption required for conducting an independent sample t -test was satisfied, allowing the analysis to proceed using the standard test that assumes equal variances.

meaning that small asymmetries often go unnoticed and have little impact on perceived attractiveness. In line with these findings, a study revealed that while symmetry can influence social perception in structured contexts, its overall effect size tends to be small, consistent with the minimal difference reflected in the present study's Cohen's d value of -0.208 ^[20]. Altogether, these studies suggest that while facial symmetry remains a relevant cue, it functions within a broader interplay of features—such as emotional expression, familiarity, and cultural standards—that jointly shape favorability judgments.

The findings imply that facial symmetry alone may not be a strong predictor of perceived favorability, especially when other subtle features or social cues are present. This highlights the complexity of human perception and suggests that judgments of attractiveness and likability are influenced by multiple interacting factors rather than a single visual characteristic. From a psychological standpoint, the result encourages a broader understanding of how individuals form impressions of others, emphasizing that favorability is a multifaceted construct shaped by both physical and non-physical attributes.

Moreover, while the experimental group exposed to faces with varying degrees of facial symmetry consistently achieved slightly higher mean favorability ratings than the control group viewing perfectly symmetrical faces, the independent samples t -test revealed no statistically significant difference ($t(34) = -0.625$, $p = .536$; Cohen's $d = -0.208$). This supports the hypothesis while aligning with contemporary theories that frame symmetry's role as conditional and context-dependent. Specifically, the results corroborate that facial normality principle—where excessive symmetry can appear unnatural—and are reinforced by recent evidence prioritizing averageness, femininity, and observer-specific thresholds over absolute symmetry. The findings of this study do not fully conform to the predictions of the Halo Effect Theory, as facial symmetry alone does not reliably trigger a generalized positive bias in favorability. These findings advance evolutionary psychology and impression formation theory while calling for future studies to examine how facial cues, culture, and cognitive biases interact in holistic favorability judgments.

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test as a Whole

	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
Control vs Exp	-0.625	34	.536	-0.208	0.335

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated whether facial symmetry influences perceived favorability using two independent groups exposed to symmetrical and varying levels of asymmetrical faces. Results from the data collected indicated no significant difference in perceived favorability between the two conditions. This suggests that facial symmetry, while often regarded as a hallmark of attractiveness, may not independently determine how favorably a face is perceived. Other variables—such as expressions, emotional cues, and individual or cultural preferences—may also play a more substantial role in shaping how appealing a person is deemed to be. Overall, the findings of this study highlight the complex nature of human perception, and emphasize the need to move beyond symmetry as a singular determining factor of facial favorability.

6. Limitations of the Findings

The research was confined to a small number of respondents from a higher education institution in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. It focused only on students from various college departments and used an experimental method as the sole approach. The findings are limited by the small sample size of thirty-six participants (36), which offers limited generalizability and increases vulnerability to bias. Besides, participants belonged to a limited range of cultural and social entities, which may affect their view of facial symmetry, for facial symmetry will differ among or within groups. Even though simple random sampling is used to reduce selection bias, the number of participants is still small, thus affecting the reliability and solidity of the results. Further, self-reporting through Likert-type questionnaires may introduce response bias and subjectivity, since participants might respond according to their personal perception.

7. Practical Value of the Paper

The findings of the study provide rich insights for different stakeholders in the academic community. First, teachers can use the topic of facial favorability to help students understand how attractiveness of the face influences the way people treat one another. From here, professionals within the mental health field will be using the results of this study to learn about the link that exists between human behaviors and their social interactions, especially in the way facial favorability determines these attributes. This supports students by helping them understand how they base changes in treatment on perceptions of facial attractiveness. More broadly, it helps detailed differences in regular social experiences shaped by prejudices against appearance. Based on this result, a future researcher will consider using this study as the foundation for deeper analysis of the relationship between facial attractiveness and social interactions. Further, such studies may investigate what interventions are effective and also provide a comparison across different populations and contexts.

8. Directions for Future Research

Future studies may further explore how facial symmetry influences the impressions formed or judgments made of others. This can be achieved by applying different procedures or by a greater and even more diverse sample of participants to allow the results to become stronger and more generalizable. In addition, involving students from other colleges outside Bacolod City would help in generalizing

findings across regions. An examination of other facial features that work in conjunction with symmetry might be taken into consideration, like expression, averageness, or distinctiveness. It would also be appropriate to take note of personal factors concerning age, gender, or background, as these may affect how one views attractiveness or favorability. In addition, the experiment should be conducted in a face-to-face encounter to make the responses more natural, reduce bias, and allow more students to participate in the study.

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10. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, writing, or publication of this work.

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