

Topic 3.

Are attractive faces only average?

Galton's composites



In the 1800s, Sir Francis Galton created composite images of faces by projecting face photographs of many different individuals onto a single piece of photographic film.

Galton's composites



By doing this Galton was trying to visualise the characteristics that were shared by a given group of faces (i.e. the average of those faces)

Galton's composites



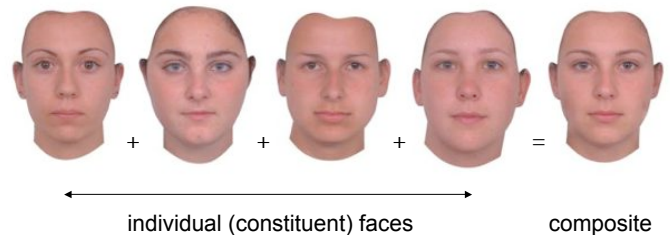
Many of Galton's colleagues noted that the composites tended to be more attractive than the individual faces

Composites & computer graphics



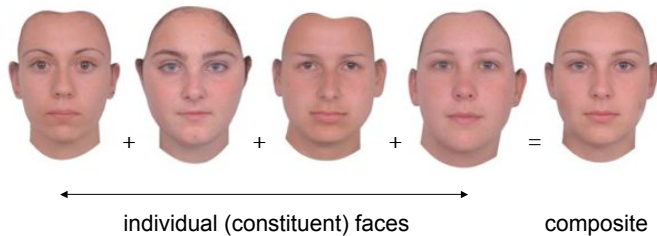
To manufacture a composite with the average shape and colour of a set of individual faces, the individual faces are first warped into the average shape (bottom row) and then blended together

Averageness & attractiveness



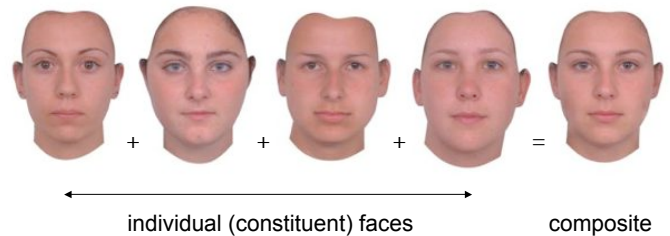
Composite faces made using computer graphic methods also tend to be judged more attractive than individual faces - in other words, 'averageness' appears to be attractive

Why are average faces attractive?



The attractiveness of average faces might be due to the greater ease with which our visual system can process faces that most closely resemble our mental representation of a face

The 'Averageness Hypothesis'



Because composite faces are attractive, some researchers have suggested that averageness is the most important determinant of facial attractiveness. This is called the 'Averageness Hypothesis'.

Testing the 'Averageness Hypothesis' (Perrett et al. 1994)

The averageness hypothesis suggests that 'attractive faces are only average'

Under this hypothesis, the most important determinant of facial attractiveness is thought to be averageness

Perrett et al. tested this 'Averageness Hypothesis' in a classic facial attractiveness experiment

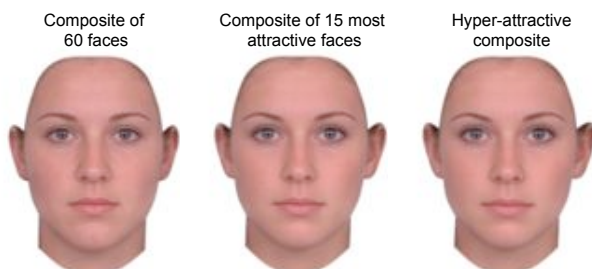
They did this by caricaturing attractive faces (exaggerating the physical differences between attractive and average faces) to test if this increased or decreased their attractiveness

Caricaturing faces



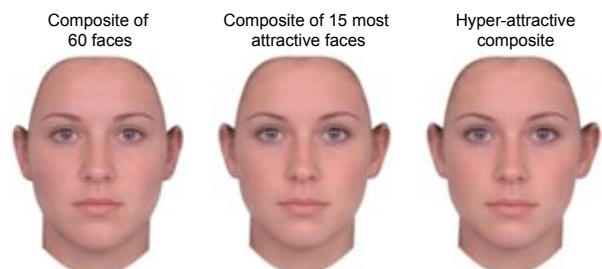
Faces can be caricatured by exaggerating the physical differences between an individual faces and an average face. This will caricature what is distinctive about an individual face.

Average, Attractive & 'Hyper-attractive' composite faces



Perrett et al. manufactured an average face (a composite of 60 female faces), an attractive composite (a composite of the most attractive 15 faces) & a 'hyper-attractive' composite (a caricatured version of the composite of the most attractive 15 faces)

Average, Attractive & 'Hyper-attractive' composite faces



Because the hyper-attractive face was judged by participants to be the most attractive face, but was also the least average of the 3 faces, Perrett et al. showed that highly attractive faces were not average but deviated systematically from average

Key points from Topic 3

Galton and modern psychologists have found that composite faces are more attractive than most individual faces

The 'Averageness Hypothesis' proposes that attractive faces 'are only average'

(i.e. the most important facial characteristics for attractiveness is how average the face is)

Perrett et al. (1994) showed that highly attractive faces are not average but deviate systematically from average

(i.e. exaggerating the features of attractive faces increases their attractiveness)