



Is Beauty Essential to Making a Positive First Impression?

The painful truth is that beauty probably does matter somewhat in making a positive first encounter. Scientific evidence supports that physically attractive people gain social advantages in multiple situations including education, employment, medical care, legal proceedings and romantic encounters. Additionally, young children will preferentially select attractive facial features. But hold on--- before you quit your job, lock your self in your room and try to gain solace from the bottom of a box of bon bons, remember a few things: There is NO consistent evidence to identify a relationship between facial appearance and marital adjustment or academic performance. First impressions of beauty are neither long lasting nor permanent. Additionally, beauty has no effect on a sense of self-worth. That means beauty is subjective- in the eye of the beholder. Simply put, if you think you are beautiful--you are.



I recently experienced a situation that reminded me of this truth. Last week I met with a patient who was seeking surgery to improve the appearance of her nose. I did my best to listen to her desires and understand her wishes. However, in order to help me further understand her aesthetic vision, she professed, "Doctor I want a nice nose..... butnot like yours!" To which I thought, "Gee I didn't realize there was a problem with my nose." I never considered having it treated, and my wife doesn't seem to mind it but obviously this woman's perception of my leading facial feature was different from my own.

Despite our allure to the exotic and unique, the consensus among many studies is that the more average and symmetric a face is the more likely we are to consider it as attractive. So if you have always considered yourself average you should take pride in it.

But if you are not content with your physical image and want to improve your ability to make a positive first impression, is cosmetic surgery a viable option? Well, perhaps. There are uncontrolled studies to indicate that enhancing one's facial features improves their ability to make a positive first impression. Before and after photographs of patients who had undergone cosmetic facial surgery were given to unknowing observers to assess the photographed patients on many traits, including intelligence, life success, likeability, and self assertiveness, among others.

The analyses revealed that more positive judgments were drawn after the operation. However, although surgery may allow an advantage in making a first impression this pales in comparison to the amount that self worth adds to one's making of a quality first impression. And here in lies the true beauty of creating a positive first impression. Cosmetic surgery may help one's self -confidence, and hence one's beauty, but should not be considered a cure all for low self-esteem. More likely than not cosmetic surgery enhances the way one feels about them self and this then translate into a more confident and positive presentation. Which brings us back to if you think you are beautiful then you are.



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