

Visual adaptation to masculine and feminine faces influences generalized preferences and perceptions of trustworthiness

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Background While studies have shown that feminine faces are perceived as both trustworthy and attractive¹, self-resemblance increases the perceived trustworthiness of faces while at the same time decreasing their sexual attractiveness². These latter findings call into question the extent to which perceptions of trustworthiness and attractiveness are necessarily correlated. Although previous studies of individual differences in preferences for masculine faces have typically emphasized factors such as menstrual cycle phase³, recent studies have demonstrated that adaptation to either masculine or feminine faces increases preferences for novel faces that are similar to those that were recently seen⁴. Although it is well established that adaptation to faces influences attraction^{4,5}, it is not known if these effects generalize to other judgments of faces that can be important for social interactions (e.g. perceptions of trustworthiness). In light of this, here we compared the effects of adaptation to faces varying in sexual dimorphism of shape on perceptions of the trustworthiness and attractiveness of masculine faces.

Hypothesis 1 If adaptation has equivalent effects on perceptions of trustworthiness and attractiveness, exposure to masculine or feminine faces will increase both the attractiveness and the perceived trustworthiness of the type of faces seen during the adaptation phase.

Hypothesis 2 If adaptation has different effects on perceptions of trustworthiness and attractiveness, the effect of exposure to masculine or feminine faces will interact with judgment type (trustworthiness or attractiveness).

Conclusions Exposure to masculine or feminine faces increased the perceived trustworthiness and attractiveness of the type of face seen during the adaptation phase. This replicates previously reported effects of adaptation to masculine or feminine faces on attraction⁴ and demonstrates that adaptation also influences the extent to which masculine faces are perceived as trustworthy. These adaptation effects support the proposal that visual exposure alone cannot explain the context-specificity of attitudes to self-resembling faces² and reveal a proximate mechanism for phenomena such as condition dependent and imprinting-like effects in face preferences⁶.

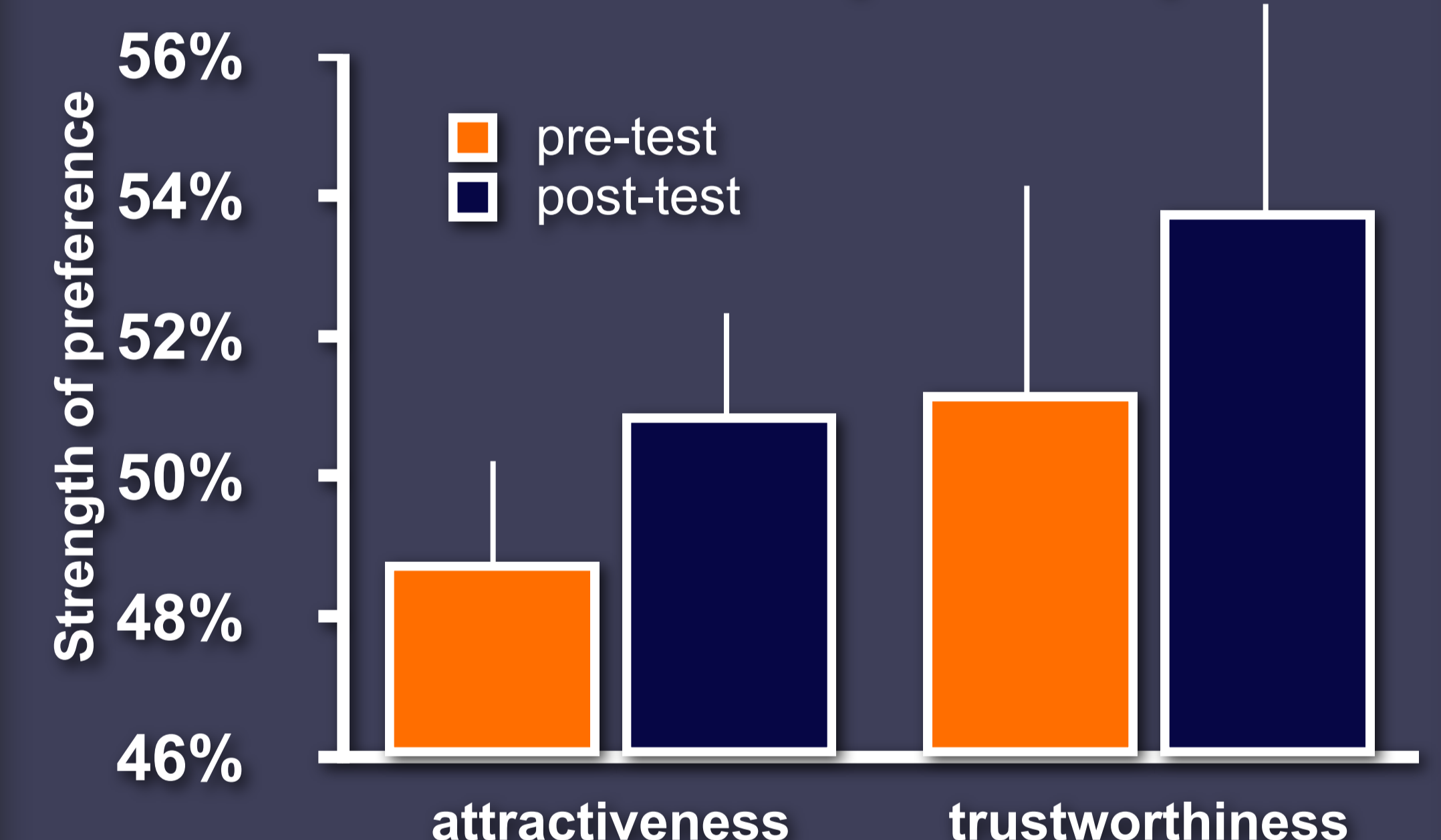
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Results

Responses were analyzed using a mixed-design ANOVA. The dependent variable was **strength of preference** for the type of face viewed in the adaptation phase (e.g. preference for the more feminine face if feminine faces were viewed in the adaptation phase). The within-subject factor was **phase** (pre-adaptation, post-adaptation) and the between-subjects factors were **sex of subject** (male, female), **judgment** made by subject (attractiveness, trustworthiness), and **adaptation type** (masculine, feminine).

Preference for the face type viewed in the adaptation phase



A main effect of phase ($F_{1,47}=5.52$, $p=.023$) confirmed that adaptation to masculinized or feminized faces increased attractiveness and trustworthiness judgments of novel, similar faces.

The effect of phase did not interact with judgment ($F_{1,47}=0.28$, $p=.602$), confirming that visual experience has similar effects on judgments of attractiveness and trustworthiness.

Methods

Masculinized



Feminized



Increased masculinity



Decreased masculinity



Pre- and Post- Adaptation Tests

Participants chose the more attractive ($n=26$) or trustworthy ($n=29$) face from 5 pairs that had been manipulated in sexual dimorphism of 2D shape using established methods^{1,3,4}

Adaptation

30 individual faces were presented for 2 seconds each. Half the participants viewed faces with increased masculinity, half viewed the same faces with decreased masculinity