Synopsis of Original Research Paper

Shared brain activity for facial attractiveness and personality goodness: Implications for the Beauty-is-Good stereotype

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The Beauty-is-Good stereotype refers to the assumption that attractive people possess sociably desirable personalities and higher moral standards. Although this stereotype is often observed in human societies, its neural mechanisms are largely unknown. To investigate this issue, we scanned female participants with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) while they made attractiveness judgments about male faces and goodness judgments about hypothetical actions. Activity in the medial orbitofrontal cortex increased as a function of both attractiveness and goodness ratings, whereas activity in the insular cortex decreased with both attractiveness and goodness ratings. Within each of these regions, the activations elicited by attractiveness and goodness judgments were strongly correlated with each other, supporting the idea of similar contributions of each region to both judgments. Moreover, activations in orbitofrontal and insular cortices were negatively correlated with each other, suggesting an opposing relationship between these regions during attractiveness and goodness judgments. These findings have implications for understanding the neural mechanisms of the Beauty-is-Good stereotype.