

Health Consciousness and Disease Avoidance

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INTRODUCTION

Background

- People display cognitive and behavioral changes to help mitigate the threat of disease.
- Obesity is often perceived negatively. This negative perception is amplified when people have higher disease avoidance behaviors, often categorizing non-obese people as being obese. [1] [2] In addition, previous literature has shown that people with high health consciousness have more negative attitudes towards obesity.[3] This suggests a potential link between health consciousness and disease avoidance.
- People show a significant preference for symmetrical faces when exposed to disease cues. This suggests facial symmetry is associated with perceived pathogen danger, with the less symmetrical the face being, the more the potential pathogen danger. [4]

Purpose

- This study was designed to test if there is a relationship between health consciousness and disease avoidance.

Predictions

- We predicted that highly health conscious people would react more negatively to asymmetrical faces, and more positively to symmetrical faces in comparison to those with lower health consciousness.

METHOD

Subjects.

- 73 Psychology students participated in exchange for extra credit.

Method.

- Participants were shown photos of perfectly symmetrical faces and blatantly asymmetrical faces, after each of which they were required to answer five questions about their impression of the face they saw. The questions were as follows. 1: This person looks very approachable; 2: This person looks clean; 3: This person looks friendly; 4: I would feel comfortable shaking His/Her hand; 5: This person appears to have a negative attitude. Participants repeated this process eight times until they had completed all photos/faces. All questions were answered on a seven-point Likert scale.
- Once Participants were finished, they were given a questionnaire meant to help us evaluate their individual health consciousness level.
- This questionnaire consisted of five questions asking about weekly exercise, diet, and hygiene. An example of a question from this questionnaire is: I make an effort to exercise at least three times a week. All questions were answered on a seven-point Likert scale.

RESULTS

(results are based on partial data; data collection is ongoing)

We ran a 2 way mixed ANOVA

- There was no main effect for facial symmetry. $F(1,71)=1.558, p=.216$
- There was no main effect for Health Consciousness. $F(1,71)=1.130, p=.291$
- There was no interaction between health consciousness and facial symmetry. $F(1,71)=1.720, p=.194$

We also ran a Pearson correlation.

- There was no significant correlation between health consciousness and reactions to symmetrical and asymmetrical faces.
 - Health consciousness and facial symmetry: $r(71)=.178, p=.178$
 - Health consciousness and facial asymmetry: $r(71)=.054, p=.649$

CONCLUSIONS

While the correlations are not consistent with high health consciousness being correlated with more negative reactions to asymmetrical faces, the correlations are consistent with the idea that people with higher health consciousness would react more positively to symmetrical faces.

- *Implications*
- If health consciousness is directly correlated with disease avoidance, it implies that health consciousness has a role to play in all instances of disease avoidance, not just preference for facial symmetry.
- It would be helpful to measure health consciousness in future studies because it would help to strengthen our claim that health consciousness is positively correlated with disease avoidance, especially since our data was not sufficient enough to really support our claim statistically.

REFERENCES

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