

UNMASKING BEAUTY

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Need a hack to avoid foggy glasses while wearing a mask?
We don't have it.

As @jillboard (May 2020) remarks, ears can carry a lot of weight (think facemask, glasses and headphones); thus they resemble some functionality of a purse - interesting. We're not investigating weight carrying capacity of ears either.

Twitter user @amorrcito (May 2020) has the right idea. She wonders how the world will see her blush with a mask on.

We wonder will she blush more or less seeing other people wearing masks? In essence: do people appear more attractive while wearing a face mask?

METHODS

From 19 volunteers we collected two face-photos with neutral facial expression. One photo wearing a mask and one without; 12 volunteers were female.

From these photographs we derived two experimental conditions and a between-subjects design. A participant was exposed to all collected pictures either with or without mask.

Participants were instructed to rate the attractiveness of photographs on a labelled scale from 1 (very unattractive) to 7 (very attractive); response times, participants' gender and sexual orientation were also collected.

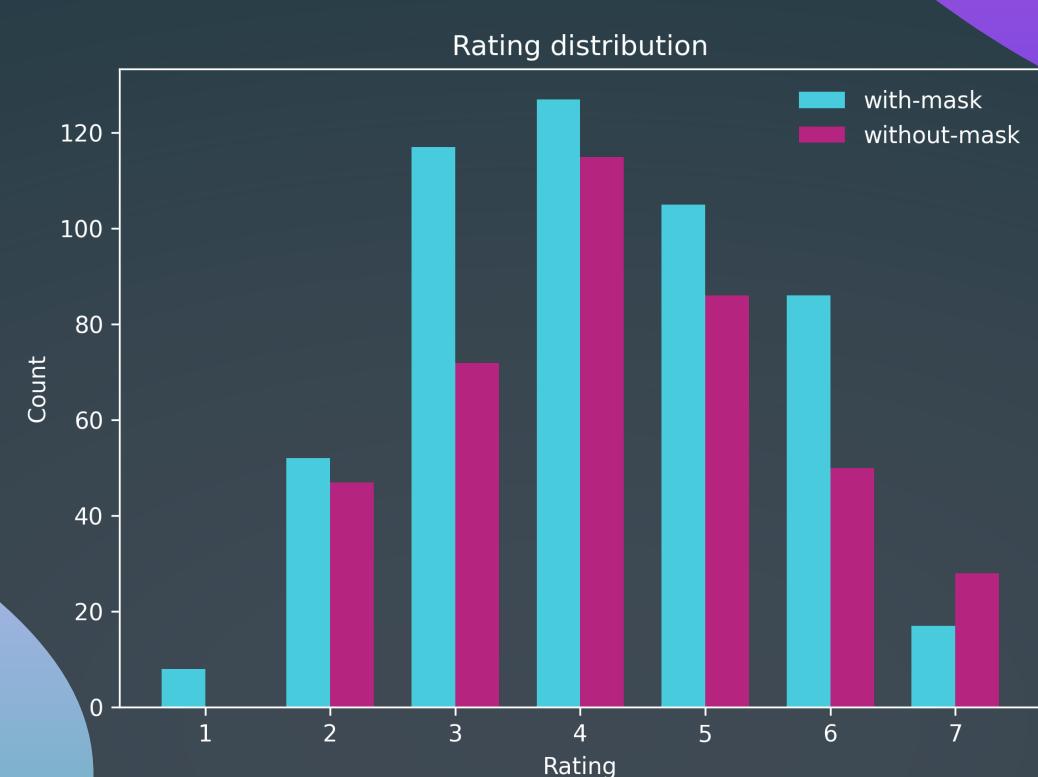
21 results were obtained for the 'with mask' condition, and 27 results for 'without mask'. The distributions of ratings for each group can be seen below.

Love at second sight

Response time was found to be a significant ($p = .006$) predictor for the rating. Namely, for each second someone took longer to rate a picture, the rating increased by about 0.036 (see the plot on the right). Are people quick at dismissing faces they consider less attractive? Are people enjoying faces before they rate them? Or does the brain take longer to process some characteristics that are related to beauty? YOU tell us!

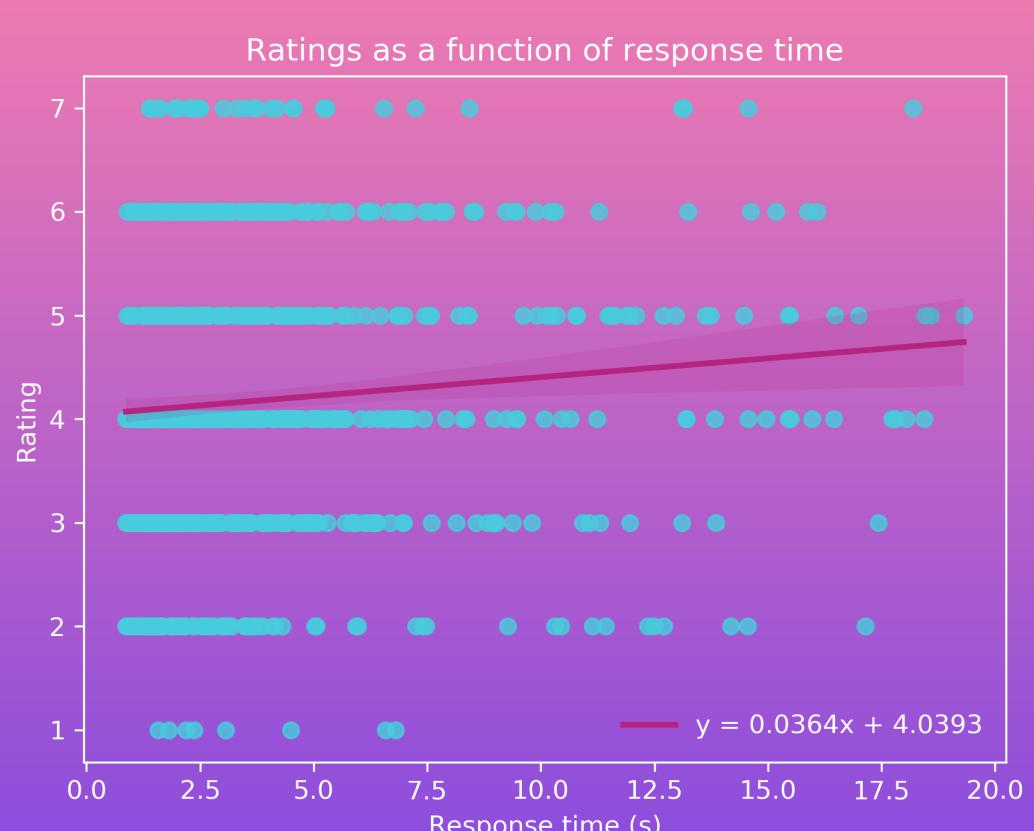
Interesting

Robert Geary wrote in 1947, "... normality is a myth; there never was, and never will be, a normal distribution". Normal distributions usually result from sums of independent effects. If there are many of them and none varies significantly from the sum of the rest, the distribution starts to emerge (e.g. height in a population, weight, and life span). If there's lots of commonalities in your data for a given feature, the bell-curve is probably going to emerge!



Results

So, does wearing masks change our attractiveness? This does not seem to be the case! For each picture, the average rating was calculated. To test whether the pictures with masks were significantly rated differently from the corresponding pictures without masks, we performed a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. This is a paired test, which means that we look at the difference in average rating for pictures of the same person. The p-value of .284 implies that the differences in averaged ratings are probably not different from 0.



CONCLUSION

We conclude that wearing a mask doesn't change attractiveness. However we find that participants looking longer at photographs correlates with a higher attractiveness rating, especially when no masks are worn in the photos.