

# It's a girl! Guess what that says about you and your looks

ALASTAIR GRANT / AP; LUCAS JACKSON / REUTERS



Proud parents: Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall with their daughters, Georgia and Elizabeth; far right, Madonna with Lourdes, her daughter with Carlos Leon

## Hannah Devlin

Attractive couples are more likely to have daughters than are plainer parents, according to a new study.

Satoshi Kanazawa, an evolutionary psychologist at the London School of Economics and author of *Ten Politically Incorrect Truths about Human Nature*, also argues that beauty is a stronger predictor of reproductive success for women than men.

His study, to be published in the journal *Reproductive Sciences*, is contentious. Parents such as David and Victoria Beckham, with three sons and no daughters, may be unimpressed.

The finding is based on data from a survey of 17,000 babies born in Britain in March 1958. The children were followed up during their lives, including at age 7, when they were rated as attractive or unattractive by their teachers, and at 45, when they were asked the ages and sexes of their children.

After taking into account social status and wealth, Dr Kanazawa found that while the children who were rated as attractive — 84 per cent of the sample — were equally likely to have a son or a daughter as their first child, the unattractive children were more likely

to have sons. The average “unattractive” child had a 56 per cent probability of becoming the parent of a boy.

However, Andrew Gelman, a statistician at Columbia University, said that because the trend was driven by the small portion of the cohort rated “un-

attractive”, there was a potential statistical flaw. To counter Dr Kanazawa’s claims, he trawled through *People* magazine’s 50 most beautiful people for 1995-2000, and found that the listed celebrities were on average slightly more likely to give birth to sons.

## David Spiegelhalter Commentary



**T**he science of attractiveness is a growing field, despite its lack of an agreed unit of measurement: the milli-Helen, the amount needed to launch one ship, is still disputed.

This study claims that children rated as “attractive” at age 7 have a higher chance of their first child being a girl than those rated “unattractive”. The paper appears in a reputable academic journal. So why am I doubtful?

For a start we only get the clever analysis and are not told the raw data — the actual proportions of girls born to the beautiful and the ugly. As a professor of statistical jiggery-pokery, I know odd things can happen

when adjusting for, say, social class, which could itself be influenced by pulchritude.

But maybe I’m just a sceptic: after all, I was not convinced Paul the Octopus was psychic, even though he predicted eight football results in a row. My problem is that the claimed effect of unsightliness is too big to be plausible. If other evidence points to a zero, then apparently impressive results should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Similarly, when a study turns out a positive result then the journals want to print it. What if Kanazawa had found that ugly people had more girls? I am sure he would have had sufficient integrity to write the paper, but would it have been published?

We end up with the conclusion that the fact you are reading this story means you should be sceptical.

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