

Genders impact on the perception of physical attractiveness



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This study examines the impact of gender on the perception of physical attractiveness in mate selection. What do man and woman look for when selecting a partner? Past and present historical content suggest that men prioritise physical attractiveness when selecting a partner whereas women seek a partner that has socio economical stability and personality. This study uses the Interpersonal Attraction Scale by McCorskey and McCain (1975) to measure the physical attractiveness of a certain stimuli. Alongside this scale, participant's level of self esteem is measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. The hypothesis of this study are physical attractiveness of an individual is more important to men than to women and that women were more likely to seek other qualities in men such as personality and socio economic status for a relationship.

" Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it[1]". If Confucius, a great philosopher is able to see that everything has beauty, why men these days fail to understand that? Why are men only after superficial beauty when it comes to selecting their potential partner? Does it really satisfy them? Women do not really place great importance on beauty or looks when selecting a partner. Perhaps women realise that " beauty is an ecstasy; it is as simple as hunger. There is nothing to be said about it. It is like perfume of a rose, you can only smell it and that is all[2]".

Beauty is defined as a combination of qualities such as shape, colour or form that pleases the aesthetic senses especially the sight (Oxford English Dictionary).

This study aims to determine the impact of sex and self-esteem of perception of interpersonal attractiveness. It is said that men favour partners who are attractive. Outlined below are some studies that have provided an insight as to why a beautiful partner is favoured when it comes to mate selection. Also, unlike men, it is said women favour men who have other qualities such as personality and financial stability when it comes to selecting a potential partner. Historical and present studies below will examine the extent of truth this statement suggests.

A contributing factor as to why men would want a more attractive partner would be mass media. In television advertisements, shows and in magazines, the mass media does not project the actual representation of a healthy woman. Catwalk models are usually are a size zero and never above a size three. What some people fail to understand is advertisements and magazine shots are airbrushed. Pictures of models are 'shaped' to a smaller waist ratio, cropped, re-edited to create an image of flawless 'beauty' in order to aid and sell the products. Most men do not realise when they purchase magazines and view the images of the women portrayed by the mass media, they do not realise that they are subconsciously being conditioned to want extremely beautiful partners.

In a study, a team of researchers' finding indicate that after being exposed to exceptionally attractive female images, males have reported less satisfaction for a current relationship and rate average looking females as less attractive and express less affection for their significant other compared to those men exposed to control images (Yuko, 2007).

Beauty pageants such as Miss Universe and Miss World always incorporate a bikini section in their contest. The contestants will have to parade their body in these tiny bikinis and walk down the runway in front of thousands of audience. Is this really necessary? Is beauty judged based on a person's physique? Advertising image contribute in a way in creating a climate in which the marketing of women's bodies-the sexual sell and dismemberment, distorted body image deal and children sex-object is seen as acceptable (Jean, 2003).

Historic and present theories may determine what the other contributing factors are from biological perspective besides the contribution of mass media.

Male undergraduates rated female figures that were differing in body weight, waist-to-hip ratio and breast size for attractiveness, health and desirability for short and long term relationships. The researchers found that slender figures with low waist to hip ratio and large breast were rated as most attractive, feminine looking, healthy and desirable for romantic relationships. The researchers also found that females with larger size, high waist to hip ratio and larger hips make the female figure appear older, unattractive and less desirable (Devandra Singh and Robert Young, 1995).

Similarly, in a study to identify the universal dimensions of long term relationships which used archival database ratings that was kindly provided by about several thousands of participants from three dozen cultures (Buss D. M, 1999), the findings were quite similar to the previous finding outlined above. The team of researchers in this study found that women placed an

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important and a greater value on social status and men placed greater value in physical attractiveness.

In Taiwan, a study on the differences in mate selection preferences and sexual strategy found that there was a prominent sex difference between what males and female seek in selecting a potential partner. Males actually paid more attention to youth and physical attractiveness of a female mate (Yao-Chia, 2002).

In a research that was to examine initial attraction in a real-life setting-speed dating, Social Relations Model analyses demonstrated that the initial attraction was a function of the actor, the partner and the unique dyadic. The strongest predictor for both sexes is was partners' physical attractiveness (2009).

186 males and 186 female undergraduates indicated how attracted they were to an opposite gender stimulus person after being presented information about the person's physical attractiveness, earning potential and expressiveness. Of these 3 characteristics, physical attractiveness had the greatest effect on attraction. This study found that whilst women played a greater emphasis on earning potential and expressiveness, men placed greater emphasis on physical attractiveness (Susan, 1989).

A study mentioned that men tend to value physical attractiveness. This study used a budget allocation methodology to examine mate preferences in both United States and Singapore. The team of researchers found not only the usual sex differences but also evidence that men prioritise physical attractiveness (Li, Valentine and Patel, 2011)

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In a study that assessed the relative importance of the face and body judgements in human physical attractiveness, 100 men and one 133 women were shown images of 10 individuals of the opposite sex and were asked to rate the images for their attractiveness for either a short-term relationship or a long-term relationship. Images of the face and the body were rated independently before participants were shown and asked to rate the combined face and body images. This study found that females showed no difference in ratings between short-term and long-term conditions but male ratings of female bodies became relatively more important for a short-term relationship compared with a long-term relationship (Currie and Little, 2009).

Studies on physical attraction are not only conducted on humans, there were numerous studies conducted on animals. The numerous studies have shown that even an animal looks for an attractive partner! One study conducted by biologist on peacocks and deer's, found that there was a directional selection for extreme characteristics such as peacock feathers, large deer antlers and also vivid coloration (Thomas Alley and Michael Cunnigham, 1991). The researchers of this study then moved on to evaluate women's attractiveness. They found from a previous study, that the male species tends to prefer youthful, rather than average female characteristics (Buss, 1987; Symons, 1989).

Physical attractiveness was found to be most frequently sought after characteristic by males. Significantly lower and fewer females required this particular characteristic in a prospective partner. Males sought greater importance to physical attractiveness and thinness than did females when selecting a date (Jane, Ann and David, 1990)

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A study that which consisted of six hundred and eighty two participants from Malaysia and Britain found that Body Mass Index (BMI) is a primary determinant of female attractiveness (Swami and Tovee, 2005)

Across three different samples, sex differences in ideal partner preferences emerged such, that men placed more importance of physical attractiveness in an ideal partner (Paul, 2009).

However, why do men favour physical attractiveness and not other qualities in women? It is said that physical attractiveness is associated and a predictor of a higher reproductive rate in women. This study will have another look at historical and present contexts to determine whether the statement that men prioritise women's physical attractiveness as the main criteria when selecting a potential partner because beauty is contact to some biological aspects. The biological aspect as mentioned earlier on is high fertility rate. In order to determine whether there is credibility in implying that physical attractiveness is associated with high fertility, a number of studies explained below have the answer(s) to the statement. It is said that Physical attractiveness maybe

Men places and favour beauty as of a great importance when selecting a partner because beauty is associated with high fertility rate. Facial attractiveness exerted a significant influence on judgements of attractiveness, youthfulness and fertility and healthiness (Furnham, 2006).

In a study, the researchers found that beautiful faces are not just average, but vary from the average in the systematic manner and that female beauty can be best explained by a sexual selection viewpoint, whereby selection
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favours cues that are reliable indicators of fertility (Johnston, 2000). In industrialised societies in Thailand, a high body mass index is correlated with low health and fertility (Swami and Tovee, 2007).

Evolutionary psychologists suggest that a women's sexual attractiveness is based on cues of health and reproductive potential. A team of researchers found that a low waist-hip-ratio (WHR) such as a body with curves, is believed to correspond to the optimal fat distribution for high fertility and thus, this shape is highly attractive (Tovee, Maisey, Emery and Cornelissen, 1999).

In a study that used male participants to judge waist-to-hip-ratio of Miss America winners and Playboy playmates, the researchers found that college-age men find female figures with low waist-to-hip-ratio (WHR) to be more attractive, healthier and greater reproductive value than figures with higher waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). It is suggested that waist-to-hip-ratio represents an important bodily feature associated with physical attractiveness as well as health and reproductive potential (Singh, 1993).

Facial characteristics are known to influence human attractiveness judgments according to evolutionary psychologist as it suggests these characteristics all pertain to health, leading to conclusion that humans have evolved to view certain bodily features as attractive because the features were displayed by healthy others (Fink and Neave, 2005).

Recent studies are shaping a new reality of beauty, one founded on evolutionary and biological findings that link our fascination with beauty to our reproductive success (Peter, Galli and Suzanne, 2003).

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Evolutionary Psychology suggests men and women differ in their characteristics they value in partner. Men value physical attractiveness in women because a women's physical attractiveness is related to her fertility (Dijkstra and Buunk, 1998).

There is also evidence from developed Western society's claims that physical attractiveness judgements are substantially based on body size and shape, symmetry, sex-typical hormonal markers and other specific cues. Among the cues that were reviewed, only female waist-to-hip-ratio and weight appear to predict health and attractiveness. The authors found that there was some indication that attractiveness has an overall relationship with health among women (Weeden, Jason and Sabini, 2005).

Other studies have indicated that in addition to attractiveness, human secondary sexual characteristics provide cues to hormonal status and phenotypic quality consistent with the good genes model of sexual selection. Low waist-to= hip ratio is sexually attractive in women and indicate high oestrogen/testosterone ratio (which favours reproductive function). Facial attractiveness provides honest cues to health and mate value (Barber, 1995).

After extensive findings that supports the statement that men really do place an emphasis on finding a beautiful partner and their reasons for doing so, the focus will now be switched to look into women's criteria when it comes to selecting a potential partner. This literature review will now examine what women look for when selecting their potential partner. This study also suggests that women place importance on other qualities in men such as

financial standings and personality, an insight to past and present context will determine if there is any credibility to this assumption.

Females placed a greater emphasis than males on earning potential and expressiveness (Susan, 1989). The most sought after quality or characteristic by a woman when it comes to selecting a potential partner is interpersonal personality (Jane, Ann and David, 1990).

It is said that women expressed a greater preference than men for a wide array of socially desirable personality traits (Shackelford, Buss and Botwin, 2006). Although men placed greater importance on a woman's physical attractiveness, a study reported that women were less willing than men to marry someone with low earnings and unstable employment (Scott, 1991).

Men and women differ in desired characteristics when it comes to long term and short term relationship. Men have the tendency of selecting women who are physically attractive (because of reproductive factors) whereas women have the tendency to select partners who have 'resource acquisition ability' (earning capacity) (Stewart, Stinnett and Rosenfeld, 2000).

Across three different samples, sex differences in ideal partner preferences emerged such that whilst men placed greater importance on physical attractiveness as the main criteria in an ideal partner, women placed greater importance on earning prospects (Paul, 2009).

In Taiwan, a study on the sex differences in mate selection and sexual strategy, that there was a difference between males and females when it comes to what males and females seek in a potential partner. It was

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revealed that woman placed greater importance on earning potential of a potential spouse more than males (Yao-Chia, 2002).

In a study that examined the degree of various traits that are preferred in a short-term relationship, 561 participants expressed their preference for 23 traits or characteristics in short-term sexual or a long-term relationship. Across relationship types, female participants preferred internal qualities such as personality and intelligence to a greater degree than external qualities such as wealth and physical attractiveness (Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher and Cate, 2000).

Similarly, a study found that while men favour women who are beautiful because of reproductive values, women sought to ascertain a man's willingness to provide resources in the form of time, emotions, money and status in a relationship (Greenlees and McGrew, 1993).

Previous research has shown that males value a potential partner's physical attractiveness more than females do whereas females value a potential partner's socioeconomic status more than males do. Results from a study found that female participants in contracts preferred men with higher socioeconomic status (Greitemeyer, 2006)

In a study that examined mate preference in the United States of America and Singapore, findings of the study indicated that whilst men prioritised physical attractiveness and women, women on the other hand women prioritise social status and necessities in their long-term mates (Li, Valentine and Patel, 2011).

A study suggested that whilst men favoured physical attractiveness, women values dominance in men since dominance is related to a man's ability to provide resources (Dijkstra and Buunk, 1998).

With and extensive past and present theories, there is clear indication that men will favour women who are physically attractive, whilst women would favour men who are financially stable and have other qualities when selecting their partner. Based on the indication of the findings, two hypotheses are developed.

The hypotheses for this study comprises of two different theories:

H1: Physical attractiveness of an individual is more important to men then to women.

H2: Women are more likely to ensure their potential partners have other qualities such as financial stability and personality.

Method

The main aim of this study is to determine whether males were more likely than females to find physical attraction important and if women looked for other qualities in men such as personality and financial standings (socioeconomic status) and not physical attractiveness of men.

Design

This study used a multivariate factorial ANOVA to analyse the data. A multivariate factorial ANOVA was used because there were more than 2 Independent variables and more than 2 dependent variables. The

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independent variable(s) of this were sex, ethnicity and religion of participants. The dependent variables consisted of 5 items. These 5 items are social attraction, physical attraction, task attraction, the total for social attraction, physical and task attraction and the final dependent variable was participant's self esteem.

Participants

The sample of this study involved 80 participants. The participants of this study consisted of a mixture of 40 females and 40 males. These participants are students studying at the University of Bedfordshire. The subjects are between the ages of 18-35 years of age. Participants of this study were of 5 different ethnicity; White from United Kingdom and Ireland, White European, Asian, White-other, Black African and Caribbean. Participants were from 3 different religions; Christian, Muslims and Others.

Apparatus/Materials

The materials used in the study are a set of questionnaire which consisted of a measure of Interpersonal scale by (McCroskey and McCain, 1965) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (1965). The set(s) of questionnaire was divided into Set A and Set B. Set A was for female participants and consisted of a demographic section, a measure of interpersonal scale of ' David Beckham' and a Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965).

Set B of the questionnaire was for male participants and consisted of a demographic section, a measure of interpersonal scale of ' Jessica Alba' and a Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965). The Interpersonal Scale by (McCroskey and McCain, 1965) were divided into the following three

subscales; Socio Attraction (this subscale measures social attraction of the stimuli), Physical Attraction (this subscale measures physical attractiveness of the stimuli) and Task Attraction (this scale measure if the stimuli is able to accomplish certain tasks).

The method of scoring for the Interpersonal Attraction was 'reversed scored' and the new score is summed up to obtain overall attraction score. The original scale of scoring were as follows; Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree(2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5)

When reversed scored, all the scores above were changed to the following. Strongly Disagree (5), Disagree (4), Neutral (3), Agree (2) and Strongly Agree (1).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) is a four point scale. The method of calculating scored for Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965) was by reverse scoring. The score were calculated as follows:

For items 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 (all of these items are positive statements about an individual's self) were scored as follows: Strongly Agree (3), Agree (2), Disagree (1) and Strongly Disagree (0).

For items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 which are reversed in variance (because all of these items are negative statements about and individual's self) were scored as follows: Strongly Agree (0), Agree (1), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (3).

Sample for items 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 can be found at page number 26 of

Appendix a, and is highlighted in Yellow colour.

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Sample for items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 can be found in the last page of Appendix A and is highlighted in Orange colour.

A sample of the questionnaire that was used in this study is attached in Appendix a, page 23, for your perusal.

Procedure

All participants were directly approached and were asked if they were interested to partake in this study. Upon obtaining consent to participate, participants were given the set of questionnaire that contained a demographic section, an Interpersonal Attraction scale and a Rosenberg Self Esteem scale (1965). A consent form was attached to the questionnaire. Male participants were given questionnaire Set A, whereas females were given questionnaire Set B. There was no need to inform the participants the aim of the study as the consent form clearly stated the aims of this study and the length of time it will take for participants to complete the questionnaire.

The first section of the questionnaire was the Interpersonal Attraction scale. This questionnaire was divided into 3 small subscales; socio attraction, physical attraction and task attraction. All of these subscales were based on the attractiveness of the stimuli (David Beckham for females and Jessica Alba for males). Participants were also required to fill out the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965)

Results

Before the data was analysed, a Cronbach's alpha's reliability test was conducted to determine the reliability and validity of each subscale for the Interpersonal Attraction scale.

The Cronbach's alpha's reliability test was also conducted for the Rosenberg Self Esteem scale. It is essential for a reliability test to be conducted in order to ensure that the scale has consistency in measure. It is essential that for any reliability tests conducted, the Cronbach's alpha figure ideally should be above .60

Outlined below in Table 1 is the figures obtained for the subscales that were tested for their reliability

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha

N items

Social Attraction

.596

4

Physical Attraction

.847

4

Task Attraction

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. 431

4

Based on the table above, the results for the reliability tests conducted on the socio and physical scale suggests that these two subscales measurement of social attraction and physical attraction are reliable. Although the reliable for the task attraction subscale does not give a very indicator as reliable, the figures shown are still acceptable.

The Hypothesis of this study is:

H1: Physical attractiveness of an individual is more important to men than to women.

H2: Women were more likely to look for other qualities in men, such as financial stability and personality.

The mean for this study is shown in table 2 a, b and c (below)

Table 2 a displays the mean for self esteem and sex.

Table 2 a: Self Esteem and sex mean

Sex

Socio

Attraction

Physical

Attraction

Task

Attraction

Overall Attraction

Self Esteem

FEMALES

Mean

10. 8750

13. 9000

13. 3250

38. 1000

20. 0500

N

40

40

40

40

40

Std. Deviation

3. 22798

3. 95358

2. 15296

5. 56454

5. 47699

MALES

Mean

N

13. 1579

38

16. 0256

39

13. 1538

39

42. 4211

38

19. 3077

39

Std. Deviation

2. 78535

2. 72886

2. 25410

5. 20203

5. 80451

Total

Mean

11. 9872

14. 9494

13. 2405

40. 2051

19. 6835

N

78

79

79

78

79

Std. Deviation

3. 21318

3. 54784

2. 19098

5. 78030

5. 61715

The mean for attraction and self-esteem by Ethnicity is shown in Table 2 b, below:

Table 2 b: Descriptive Statistics for attraction and self-esteem by Ethnicity

Ethnicity

Socio

Attraction

Physical

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Attraction

Task

Attraction

Overall

Attraction

WHITE-UK/IRISH

Mean

12.0000

13.6757

13.6757

39.3514

N

37

37

37

37

Std. Deviation

3. 26599

3. 80098

2. 64632

6. 36927

WHITE EUROPEAN

Mean

11. 8750

17. 3750

12. 8750

42. 1250

N

8

8

8

8

Std. Deviation

2. 58775

1. 92261

2. 16712

4. 94072

ASIAN

Mean

11. 2727

15. 8182

13. 1818

40. 2727

N

11

11

11

11

Std. Deviation

3. 28910

3. 15652

1. 40130

4. 42924

WHITE-OTHER

Mean

13. 7500

16. 0000

12. 7500

42. 5000

N

4

4

4

4

Std. Deviation

1. 25831

1. 41421

2. 21736

3. 78594

BLACK-CARRIBEAN-ARICAN

Mean

12. 0909

15. 8182

12. 7273

40. 6364

N

11

11

11

11

Std. Deviation

4. 10986

3. 70994

1. 79393

7. 44678

OTHER GROUP

Mean

12. 0000

15. 5000

12. 6250

40. 4286

N

7

8

8

7

Std. Deviation

3. 26599

2. 97610

1. 06066

3. 35942

Total

Mean

11. 9872

14. 9494

13. 2405

40. 2051

N

78

79

79

78

Std. Deviation

3. 21318

3. 54784

2. 19098

5. 78030

The mean for attraction and self-esteem by religion is shown in Table 2 c, below.

Religion

Socio

Attraction

Physical

Attraction

Task

Attraction

Overall

Attraction

CHRISTIAN

Mean

11. 8611

15. 3056

13. 2222

40. 3889

N

36

36

36

36

Std. Deviation

3. 17268

3. 47908

2. 09913

5. 59223

MOSLEM

Mean

12. 8571

15. 8000

13. 0000

41. 8571

N

14

15

15

14

Std. Deviation

2. 90509

3. 42679

1. 55839

4. 76941

OTHER

Mean

11. 7143

14. 0357

13. 3929

39. 1429

N

28

28

28

28

Std. Deviation

3. 44111

3. 62586

2. 61533

6. 41592

Total

Mean

11. 9872

14. 9494

13. 2405

40. 2051

N

78

79

79

78

Std. Deviation

3. 21318

3. 54784

2. 19098

5. 78030

Table 2 c: Descriptive Statistics for attraction and self-esteem by religion

The results that were used to find any significance difference among the independent variable and dependent variable is shown below in Table 3

Table 3: Summary of Multivariate ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

Source Dependent Variable

df

F

Slg

Sex Socio Attraction

Physical Attraction

Task Attraction

Overall Attraction

Self Esteem

Ethnicity Socio Attraction

1

1

1

1

1

5

1. 414

3. 893

. 494

2. 415

1. 808

. 754

. 240

. 054

. 485

. 126

. 184

. 587

Physical Attraction

5

1. 446

. 223

Task Attraction

5

. 370

. 867

Overall Attraction

5

. 322

. 898

Self Esteem

5

. 676

. 644

Religion Socio Attraction

Physical Attraction

Task Attraction

Overall Attraction

Self Esteem

2

2

2

2

2

2. 114

. 270

. 170

. 833

. 676

. 131

. 764

. 844

. 440

. 709

Based on the shown above, interpretations of the data are explained below:

No significant differences were found with sex and overall attraction; $F(1, 1) = 2.415$: NS

No significant differences were found with ethnicity and overall attraction; $F(5, 5) = 3.222$: NS

No significant differences were found with religion and overall attraction; $F(2, 2) = 0.833$: NS

No significant differences were found with self esteem and overall attraction: $F(1, 1) = 1.808$: NS

The data also showed that there was no significant difference between sex, ethnicity and

religion; $F(1, 1) = 2.322$: NS

However, there was an almost a significant difference found with gender and physical attraction; $r = 0.697$, $N = 79$, $p < 0.001$

The analysed data therefore suggests that:

H1: Physical attractiveness of an individual is more important to men than to women.

This hypothesis is almost supported.

H2: Women were more likely to look for other qualities in men, such as financial stability and personality.

Socio

Attraction

Physical

Attraction

Task

Attraction

Overall

Attraction

Self

Esteem

Socio

Attraction

Pearson Correlation

1

.003

.488

78

.157

.085

78

.618**

.000

78