

Beauty lies in the eye
of the beholder



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McNulty, J. , Neff, L. , Karney, B. (2008). *Journal of Family Psychology*. Beyond Initial Attraction: Physical Attractiveness in Newlywed Marriage, 22(1), 135-143. “ Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder”. A famous statement that normally holds true. However, how long will this beauty last in the beholder’s eye? Will physical appearance affect a relationship over time as the relationship deepens and develops? A study was conducted by James K. McNulty, Lisa A. Neff, and Benjamin R. Karney attempting to answer how physical appearances continue to affect established relationship.

The study was published in the “ *Journal of Family Psychology*” in 2008 titled *Beyond Initial Attraction: Physical Attractiveness in Newlywed Marriage*. The primary reason for the study was to expand on prior studies of physical attractiveness which suggested that physical attractiveness should be connected with more positive outcomes in marriage. Apparently, many studies of physical attractiveness came about to support or over- throw two poets recognition on the period of physical attractiveness.

Poet John Keats believes that the benefits of beauty are everlasting while poet G. B. Shaw believes that beauty is destined to fade over time. Different theories were also taken into consideration. Equity and similarity theories predict that attractiveness should be connected with greater levels of satisfaction and vice versa. Evolutionary perspectives and normative resource theories suggest that the gender of the more attractive partner should play an important role in determining the effects of different attractiveness.

The author had cited clear review of literature and the problem was clearly visible to the average reader why the researchers felt this study needed to

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be done. With that said, this research tested hypothesis about whether physical attractiveness continues to influence relationships after marriage or fade with time and experience. The focus of the study was to obtain observer ratings of physical attractiveness, observer ratings of behavior, and self reports of satisfaction from a sample of recently married couples.

Relative levels of attractiveness were then analyzed in order to understand the impact of each spouse's attractiveness on how they compare with one another. Only newlyweds were selected for this particular study. The couples had to be recently married, were relatively around the same age, and were selected within the first 6 months of both partner's first marriage. The selected 82 eligible couples went through a formal laboratory session and questionnaires before any experiments were conducted.

To conduct the ratings of physical attractiveness, the researchers had to use the Quality Marriage Index, a six-item scale asking spouses to rate general statements about their marriage. Higher scores would reflect greater satisfaction with the relationship. To conduct ratings of behavior, trained raters had coded videotaped discussions of support topics based on The Social Support Interaction Coding System. Every behavior such as speaking, turning, and gestures were recorded and analyzed.

To conduct self reports of satisfaction, researchers rated the facial attractiveness of each spouse from the recorded videotapes. From a scale from 1 to 10, higher ratings indicated more attractive faces. The results of the study reflected the researchers' expectations in newlyweds. According to the tables and data, both husbands and wives had relatively high level of marital satisfaction, there were more positive behaviors during their social

support interactions, and their facial attractiveness were at the attractiveness scale.

Further analyses were conducted on levels of physical attractiveness connected with outcomes of established relationships. Regression models were drawn separately for husbands and wives and the results indicated that the absolute levels of attractiveness were associated with both satisfaction and behavior. Surprisingly, findings shows that more attractive husbands tended to behave more negatively in an established relationship but neither the husbands' nor wives' supportive behavior was related with their partners' attractiveness.

Results indicate that relative attractiveness was a better predictor of behavior; thus, the analyses were consistent with the predictions derived from evolutionary and normative recourse theories. Both husband and wives behave more positively when the wives are more attractive than the husband, but more negatively when the husbands were more attractive than wives. It is believed that physical attractiveness is less important to the wives; thus, attractiveness may only affect them through the effect on husbands.

The current study is consistent with Poet John Keats' view where the attractiveness that brings people together will continue to influence relationships even after marriage. However, the way physical appearances affects the relationship seems to change over time. The recommendations for the current study were to a call for additional research in the area. It is suggested to use larger samples with varying attractiveness. More variables

in other indicators of attractiveness are definitely recommended as well. This was a very in-depth research project.

For the most part it was well written and well organized. The methods use to gather the data for the study was clearly explained. The instruments and development were explained and all possible tests were given. The findings were well organized, sectioned, and reported objectively. The conclusions of the study were based on the findings and logically stated. The article did get a little complicated in the reporting of data due to the complicated statistical procedures used. Overall, it was a very interesting, significant contribution to the field of research in family psychology.