Hatfied and sperecher

Hatfied and Sperecher once wrote that " people believe good looking people possess almost all the virtues known to mankind". This depicts the link between the existence of a stereotype whereby physically attractive people are believed to possess a variety of personal qualities. The vast research in this area has elevated the theory of 'What is beautiful is good' as well as linking these " good" personality traits to life outcomes such as marital happiness and career success (Eagly et al., 1991). Perceived attractiveness enlists the benefits of the 'halo' effect (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972) and also activates the " what is good stereotype". However, it has been argued that this relationship is not just stereotypical. There appears to be a strong reciprocal relationship between attractiveness and skill such that attractive individuals possess better social skills than less attractive people (Chaiken, 1979). An experimental paradigm introduced by Dion et al (1972) suggested that the beauty is good effect was strongest for measures of social competence and interpersonal ease. Social competence in this case was concerned with interpersonal skills and traits such as extraversion which is concerned with sociability. In two meta-analysis reviews (Eagly et al, 1991; Feingold, 1992) of what is beautiful is good hypothesis results were consistent. Physical attractiveness had its strongest impact on social competence yet little effect on integrity and concern for others (Eagly et al., 1991). Physically attractive people from both genders were also perceived as more sociable, dominant, sexually warm, mentally healthy and socially skilled (Feingold, 1992). Yet on the flip side of this research it has been found that a desire for some personality traits influences judgements of facial attractiveness, calling it " What is good is beautiful" hypotheses. The desires of and individual reflects their views of what is 'good' and in turn find faces

of reflecting these desired traits attractive (Little et al., 2006). Moreover as this study is concerned with female perceptions of attractiveness and social competence in males it is important to note the findings that exist. Research has found that women's perceptions of men's faces track actual characteristics of men that are theoretically important for mate choice (Roney et al., 2006). Although masculine features might signal male intrasexual competitive ability, they do not signal all traits valued in a male mate. Women rate men higher with faces that posses certain characteristics as more cooperative and honest and as good parents (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999). In the interest of this study two facial characteristics will be discussed which have been continuously related to attractiveness; symmetry and sexual dimorphism. Facial symmetry is one aspect that has been extensively studied by many researchers in relation to attractiveness. Studies have reported a preference for symmetrical faces in facial attractiveness judgements of both male and female faces (Koehler, Rhodes & Simmons, 2002; Perrett et al., 1999). Equally, others have stated that the effect of facial symmetry is not an essential cause of attractiveness (Rubenstein, Langlois & Roggman, 2002). However a theory of apparent health was developed, indicating that the relationship between facial symmetry and attractiveness was arbitrated by perceived health (Jones, Little, Penton-Voak, Tiddeman, Burt & Perret, 2001). Research has also offered an explanation of which the apparent health of symmetric faces could in fact reflect an " attractiveness halo" where positive characteristics such as extraversion, stability and good health are credited to good looking symmetrical individuals (Penton-Voak et al., 2001). Symmetrical individuals of both genders are reported to have greater emotional and psychological

health and also better physiological health was found in symmetrical men than their asymmetrical counterparts (Manning, 1995). Although symmetry was also found to act as marker of phenotypic and genetic quality and also preferred during mate selection, studies have found that manipulation of human faces report a preference for asymmetry (Perrett et al., 1999). This also offers an explanation to the findings of Little et al (2007), which provided evidence that preference for women for symmetry in male faces varies in relation to their menstrual cycle phase. Women at high conception risk preferred more symmetric faces than those at low conception risk. A possibility arises here that some women may choose a long term partner whose asymmetric appearance suggests co-operation and extended paternal care. Similarly these findings are also related to cyclic preferences for facial masculinity (Penton-Voak et al., 1999). Testosterone has been shown to affect a number of facial features that determine perceived masculinity (lateral growth of the cheekbones, jawbone and chin). Much has been written on facial attractiveness and masculinity and femininity. In support of the above research, Berry and Wero (1993) found feminised faces were perceived to promise willingness to invest exclusively in a mate. Conversely, studies have shown female preference for masculine traits in male faces is equivocal. In a study by Cunningham, Barbee & Pike (1990) ratings of attractiveness were found to positively correlate with masculinity. Perret et al., (1998) investigated the effects of manipulating the masculinity-femininity of male and female faces on judgements of their attractiveness. Interestingly, results demonstrated that both male and female participants preferred the feminised face to the masculinised face. However, this speculation is not consistent as other studies have found that women find

masculine faces more attractive (Johnston et al., 2001) or that women neither prefer masculinised nor feminised faces over average faces (Swaddle & Reirson, 2002). From the literature presented it is clear that a range of evidence exists in the context of facial attractiveness and social competence. Nonetheless, it is also clear that in the context of the above the results are not all confounding in relation to certain facial characteristics. This study will only look at two (of many) facial characteristics being symmetry and sexual dimorphism. It will also take a deeper look at female perceptions of these characteristics in relation to social competence. Thus, our hypothesis is that females will perceive male faces that are more symmetrical and feminised as being more socially competent.