

Effects of physical attractiveness on intimate relationships



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There is no exact definition of physical attractiveness. In general, physical attractiveness is a person's perception of physical traits that are attractive, appealing and beautiful. This could be applied to oneself and others. Each person has different understanding of attractiveness. What is attractive to a person might not be attractive to others. In other words, attractiveness is subjective. As an example, different genders have different preferences toward physical attractiveness. Based on a study done by Swami and colleagues (2009), participants were asked to rate the physical traits of their romantic partners. Eyes, buttocks, mouth and lips, hands, and voice were the highest ratings amongst female participants whereas male participants rate eyes, mouths and lips, breast/chest, buttocks, and cheeks as the highest. These results showed that male and female have different views on physical attractiveness. There is also a possible gender differences for preferences. Man emphasized more on physical appearance of romantic partner than woman. This is based on a study done by Pines (2001) showed that men were more attracted by physical appearance compared to women. So this raises a question, why physical attractiveness is important? Why people are always conscious about their appearances? There is evidence that shows as human beings, we have positive stereotypes toward attractive people (Dion et al., 1972). This is based on implicit personality theories which are beliefs about traits or characteristics that tend to go together (Baron et al., 2009). For example, people who are attractive also possessed other positive characteristics such as kind, intelligent and helpful. In general, intimate relationship refers to a close interpersonal relationship. People often describe intimate relationship as sources of emotional attachment, need fulfilment, social support, and self-esteem booster. Intimate relationships include <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-physical-attractiveness-on-intimate-relationships/>

friendship, dating relationship and marital relationship. The aim of this essay is to discuss the effects of physical attractiveness on intimate relationships (dating relationships and marital relationships).

Physical Attractiveness and Marital Satisfaction and Behaviour

According to equity and similarity theories, similarity in attractiveness is associated with high satisfaction whereas dissimilarity in attractiveness is associated with low satisfaction. These theories suggest that couples' behaviour would be less positive and they would feel less satisfied when their attractiveness is mismatched. These theories can be supported with a study done by McNulty and colleagues (2008) on newlywed couples. The results from the study showed spouses appeared to behave more positively when wives were more attractive than their husbands and behave negatively when husbands were more attractive than their wives. In this study also showed attractive wives were more supportive of their husbands during social support interactions while attractive husbands were less supportive during those interactions. It is also worth mentioned that attractive husbands have low satisfaction and low commitment toward their marriages. Through evolutionary perspectives, McNulty and colleagues provide the explanation on why men's attractiveness is more damaging than beneficial to marriage. Attractive men have temporary mating chances available to them which perhaps make them less satisfied and less committed to maintain their relationship with their partners. This explanation suggests that attractive men have high tendency to commit extramarital affairs due to their physical attractiveness (Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997; as cited in McNulty et al.,

2008). Other than that, there is another study that reported a positive relationship between physical attractiveness and relationship satisfaction. Swami and colleagues (2009) conducted a study of love-is-blind bias. Love-is-blind bias which is a specific type of positive illusion is defined as people's tendency to view their romantic partners as more physically attractive than themselves (Swami et al., 2007). From the study, results showed positive correlation between love-is-blind bias and relationship satisfaction. This suggests that by perceiving partner's physical attractiveness as more attractive than oneself could enhance one's satisfaction towards their relationship as well as create better relationship with their partners. Moreover, positive illusions have a beneficial effect on relationship in the long run such as extending feelings of love in oneself.

Intimate Relationship and Perception of Physical Attractiveness

How do people stay involved and maintain their relationship strength with their partners? It is reported that individuals who are involved in a relationship have a tendency to perceive the opposite-sex people as less physically attractive. A study done by Simpson and colleagues (1990) revealed both men and women who are involved in on-going relationships found the opposite-sex people to be less physically and sexually attractive. According to Festinger (1957; as cited in Simpson et al., 1990), individuals who were involved in exclusive relationships have motivations to devalue physical attractiveness of the opposite-sex people in order to stay involved in their current relationships. It is also some of their ways to protect themselves from being distracted or tempted with attractive people they

often meet. Moreover, by doing this it could help maintain the stabilities of their current relationships from any possible conflicts that could arise.

However, in the same study, those who were and those who were not involved in any relationships found the opposite-sex to be fairly attractive.

Physical Attractiveness and Love-Is-Blind Bias

Love-is-blind bias (a type of positive illusion) is a propensity to have perception of one's romantic partner as being more physically attractive than oneself (Swami et al., 2007). A study has been conducted by Swami and colleagues (2009) to investigate the relationship between love-is-blind bias and various variables such as relationship satisfaction, relationship length, love styles and self-esteem. From the study, it is found no gender differences in terms of the biasness. Both men and women have tendencies to evaluate their partner as more physically attractive than themselves. Other than that, there is also a positive correlation between love-is-blind bias and love styles. Results showed positive illusions were high when individuals were involved in a romantic love (i. e., intimate, passionate and full of affection toward one's partner) and low in playful love (i. e., little intimacy and less passionate). Perhaps the phrase "love is blind" is true since individuals who were involved in romantic love pay less attention towards their partner's weakness and instead focus more on partner's positive qualities. In terms of relationship strength, love-is-blind bias decreases when the relationships have progressed and when individuals know their partners better which could be due to the decreasing in satisfaction toward their relationships. However, the biasness is high during the early stages of relationship.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, physical attractiveness is positively related to all those findings such as relationship satisfaction, perception of others' physical attractiveness as well as love-is-blind bias. Lastly, although physical attractiveness is important toward establishing intimate relationships, it is not the main factor that helps maintain and enhances the stability of intimate relationships.