

### 3 Physical Attraction

A thing of beauty is a joy forever.

—John Keats, “Endymion”

All the carnall beauty of my wife is but skin deep.

—Sir Thomas Overbury, “A Wife”

The two opposing views depicted at the start of this chapter illustrate both our absorption with beauty and our simultaneous misgivings with this predilection. Is it any surprise, then, that much of the early literature on intimate relationships was devoted to exploring the physical basis of attraction? That such issues can be investigated with relative ease did not hurt either. They are highly conducive to being studied in the context of tightly controlled laboratory experiments in which the physical attractiveness of another can be varied while everything else can be held constant. Any differences that are obtained on a dependent measure can therefore be attributed to the variations in attractiveness employed in the experiment. And even though there were reports as far back as the early 1970s indicating that understanding (initial) attraction between two people may tell us little about what happens in their (ongoing) relationships (Levinger, Senn, & Jorgensen, 1970; Levinger & Snoek, 1972), the field was relatively slow to shift its attention to issues going beyond attraction. Furthermore, despite the fact that many of the towering figures in research on physical attraction were women (i.e., Karen Dion, Ellen Berscheid, Elaine Hatfield), much of the early attraction research focused almost exclusively on heterosexual men’s perceptions of women’s attractiveness. And although more recent research has freed itself from its early **androcentric bias**, most of the current work is limited to cross-gender perceptions of attractiveness by heterosexual men and women.

These shortcomings aside, there is a second, and perhaps more compelling reason for starting this book by discussing physical attractiveness, and it has to do with its importance for the initiation of close relationships. Simply put, we are more likely to initiate relationships with people who have physically attractive characteristics. This could be due to a number of reasons. It could be that physically attractive individuals are simply more noticeable. In the course of any given day, we tend to encounter a large number of people—on the train, in school, at work or the grocery store, and at our favorite coffee shop. The vast majority of the people whom we encounter in these ways are quickly forgotten. It may be that attractive people catch our attention more than others—we look at them longer, think about them more—and therefore they have an edge over others when

we feel inclined to form a relationship of any kind. Of course, there is a problem with this kind of reasoning. If relationship initiation were solely dependent on the salience of another, unattractive people should have a similar edge, because standing out in context often requires little more than that a person is different from the rest (e.g., Taylor, Fiske, Close, Anderson, & Ruderman, 1977)!

Moreover, our predilection to seek relationships with attractive others is still present when their noteworthiness or salience is held constant, especially in dating relationships. In other words, given a choice among several possible dates, we tend to prefer those whom we perceive to be most attractive. This chapter addresses the importance of physical attractiveness in dating and beyond and discusses some of the explanations social scientists have advanced to account for it.

### Physical Attractiveness and Dating Choices

If you look at the profiles of your Facebook friends you may well find that many of your opposite-sex friends are fairly good looking. This speculation is suggested by a recent study (Wang, Moon, Kwon, Evans, & Stefanone, 2010) that showed we are more likely to initiate such virtual relationships with others whose profiles include highly attractive photos. This same study also found that no profile picture is better than one with an unattractive photo.

This finding is not surprising in light of what we learned from a field experiment conducted at the University of Minnesota (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966) more than half a century ago. It was the first study to look specifically at the role of physical attractiveness in the context of dating choices. More than 700 freshmen participated in a “Computer Dance” held the week before classes started. Presumably heterosexual research participants were told that if they chose to participate, they would be assigned a date by a computer. Tickets could be obtained only by appearing in person at the Student Union. When students came to pick up their tickets, they were asked to show their photo ID to one person, sign for their tickets with a second person, and pick up their tickets from yet a third person. As it turns out, the people handling the ticket distribution were employed by the experimenters to rate independently the physical attractiveness of research participants who were about to participate in the Computer Dance. Participants were then randomly assigned a date of the opposite sex with whom they spent the evening at the Computer Dance a few days later. During intermissions, all research participants were asked to rate their dates on a number of dimensions, including how attractive they thought their dates were, how comfortable they were with their dates during the dance, and whether they would like to date their partners again.

As anyone looking for a date to the senior prom might have guessed, the only predictor for participants’ answers to these questions was the attractiveness of their dates. How much the students liked their dates, how comfortable they felt during the date, and how much they wanted to date the person in the future was solely determined by their dates’ physical attractiveness. This finding was somewhat surprising, especially in light of the observation that research participants’ responses were not at all influenced by such variables as their own level of attractiveness, self-esteem, and general level of aspiration.

Thus began psychology’s quest to shed light on the importance of beauty. To date, two separate approaches suggest that, contrary to popular belief, beauty is more than skin

deep because it signals the presence of other important qualities. According to evolutionary psychology, beauty is an important and reliable indicator of health and reproductive success. According to research on the attractiveness stereotype, beauty is important because it conveys the presence of good dispositions and personalities, at least in the eye of the beholder. Because both approaches are to some degree informed by the physical features that comprise beauty, we first consider the standards for attractiveness.

## Standards of Attractiveness: Bodies and Faces

### *Mirror, Mirror . . .*

An early study that looked at the extent to which bodily features shape perceptions of attractiveness (Ford & Beach, 1951) looked at the value that 100 “primitive” cultures placed on body build for female beauty and found considerable cultural variation. A slim body was considered to be beautiful in 5 cultures, a medium body was considered beautiful in another 5, and a plump body was considered beautiful in 18 cultures. However, the vast majority of cultures did not consider body build to be particularly important. Results from a more recent comparison of 26 countries in 10 world regions suggest that although thinness is universally desired, it is considered especially important among those high in socioeconomic status with access and exposure to Western media and culture (Swami et al., 2010).

In addition to body *build*, cultural variation has been found for what *parts* of the body are important and how they should look. In the United States, for example, women’s breasts, buttocks, and legs (large, firm, and long respectively) are regarded as the key (and most universally accepted) erogenous zones. For ancient Chinese, the emphasis was on small feet for women, while Japanese found the exposed nape of a woman’s neck especially arousing (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a).

One need not journey across cultures to observe variability in standards for beautiful bodies. We can find as much variability over time within a single culture. The beauty ideals exemplified by the voluptuous women portrayed in Baroque paintings have little in common with the busty yet slim-waist ideals exemplified by Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in the 1950s and the tall and slender ideals exemplified by current supermodels, like Naomi Campbell, Candice Swanepoel, and Gigi Hadid. If there are any universals for bodily attractiveness, perhaps they lie not in absolute types but in relative features.

In terms of universal features of body types, men tend to value a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of 0.7 in women (Singh, 1993). Thus, body shape is more significant than absolute body size (e.g., thin, plump, buff): A plump body with a WHR of 0.7 (e.g., 70 inch waist, 100 inch hips) would be more attractive than a thin apple-shaped body (e.g., 35 inch waist, 30 inch hips). These preferences appear to be culturally universal, perhaps because WHR provides a reliable indicator of a woman’s health and fertility (Singh, Dixon, Jessop, Morgan, & Dixon, 2010). Considering these implications it is perhaps not surprising that even blind men prefer women with a WHR of around 0.7 (Karremans, Frankenhuys, & Arons, 2010). WHR is also important in men: Women tend to value a waist-to-hip ratio of 0.9 (Singh, 1995), and, by and large, like men with a muscular upper body (Franzoi & Herzog, 1987), although they favor moderately broad shoulders over more exaggerated features (Lavrakas, 1975).

Cross-cultural variations are less evident in evaluations of facial attractiveness. It appears that facial beauty, if not in the eye of the individual beholder, is in the eye of the

collective beholder. For both sexes, facial features and facial expressions appear to be important in determining another's attractiveness. For instance, one study (i.e., Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu, 1995) that looked at judgments of women's facial attractiveness across three cultures found that Asians, Latinos, and Whites favored many similar features. Further, regardless of whether the face in question was that of an Asian, Latina, or White woman, participants rated as more attractive those with large eyes, a small nose, and a small chin. Narrow cheeks, high eyebrows, and smiles were also important for men's judgments of women's facial attractiveness (Cunningham, 1986; Mueser, Grau, Sussman, & Rosen, 1984; Raines, Hechtman, & Rosenthal, 1990). In general, men and women alike rely on facial cues more than bodily cues when judging the attractiveness of a member of the opposite sex. However, the presence of an attractive body appears to be of heightened importance for men seeking a short-term relationship (Currie & Little, 2009). In the absence of specific dating goals, the presence of an unattractive body can decrease overall ratings of attractiveness even in the presence of an attractive face (Alicke, Smith, & Klotz, 1986). Women find large eyes, *prominent* cheekbones and chin, along with high-status clothing and indications of good grooming habits, characteristic of male physical attractiveness (Cunningham, Barbee, & Pike, 1990).

In addition to these gender specific features, men's and women's perceptions of an attractive face are influenced by averageness and symmetry. In a series of computer-assisted studies, Langlois, Roggman, and Musselman (1994) created "average" faces by mathematically blending, pixel by pixel, the images of 32 or more individual faces to create a single, composite face. In trial after trial, research participants found the composite or "average" face the most attractive—even more attractive than any of the individual faces from which the composite was constructed. One way to interpret this finding is that the averaging process created faces that approximated **prototypes** of human faces, representing their modal features. Participants responded favorably to these prototypes because they exemplify the most idealized forms of human facial configurations.

Facial averageness overlaps to some degree with facial symmetry. Average faces are more likely to be symmetrical for the obvious reason that the process of creating them is likely to yield a symmetrical figure (i.e., features that are evenly proportioned about the mean). Thus, it is not surprising to learn that symmetrical faces are perceived as more attractive than non-symmetrical or somewhat asymmetrical faces (Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Gangestad, Haselton, & Buss, 2006; Langlois & Roggman, 1990; Langlois et al., 1994). As we shall see, there is good reason to believe that facial symmetry has unique effects, despite its overlap with facial averageness.

What about same-sex attraction? Intuition would seem to suggest that gays and lesbians should be attracted to sex-typical features. Specifically, gay men should be attracted to men with masculine characteristics and lesbian women should be attracted to women with feminine characteristics. One study that examined gay and lesbian preferences as expressed in personal ads as well as by direct responses from a Chicago sample finds this to be the case, with some qualifications (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeyer, 1997). Gay men consistently searched for men who look and act masculine. In fact, masculine looking and straight acting were among the most common descriptors in the personals of gay men. Lesbian women consistently searched for feminine-looking partners and rejected potential partners with masculine characteristics, such as short hair, muscular build, and high waist-to-hip ratio. A look at male-to-male personal ads further suggests that gay men place a premium on physical appearance (Bartholome, Tewksbury, & Bruzzone, 2000).



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Women prefer men with a muscular upper body, but they prefer moderately large shoulders over very large ones. How could you explain this?
- Some experiments found that the participants considered faces mathematically averaged by a computer program more attractive than any of the individual faces from which they were constructed. Does this mean that an average-looking person will be preferred over an unusually beautiful one?

### Evolution and Attractiveness

Evolutionary perspectives on human behavior look at psychological processes in terms of their adaptive value, especially when it comes to **inclusive fitness** (Hamilton, 1964), that is, the desire to pass one's genes on to the next generation by way of reproduction or through ensuring the genetic survival of kin. Evolution has a way of selecting against maladaptive processes, selecting instead for those that aid in the survival of the species (Darwin, 1871). As it turns out, humans are not so much concerned with collective survival as they are with the survival of their own genes (Wilson, 1975). From an evolutionary perspective, dating is considered to be a precursor to mating. In other words, dating is a process of sexual selection with the ultimate goal of reproduction. Further, the nature of men's and women's **parental investment** (Trivers, 1972) is such that they play the dating game according to different rules. For reproduction to occur, males need to find females who are likely to produce viable offspring. Thus, men tend to look for cues indicative of women's fertility (how likely she is to produce offspring) and reproductive potential (how long she will be able to produce offspring). These cues can be found in a woman's physical appearance, specifically in those aspects that convey health and youth. Thus, men place a premium on physical features that signal the presence of both. These features include smooth skin, good muscle tone, lustrous hair, and full lips (Symons, 1979) along with the neonatal features of large eyes, small nose, and small chin (Cunningham et al., 1990).

Among other things, this perspective helps explain why men generally place a higher premium on physical attractiveness in their mates than do women. Because men can produce offspring until they reach a fairly old age, physical indicators of youth are of diminished importance. What is important instead is men's ability to provide resources related to parental investment, such as food, shelter, territory, and protection. Among modern-day humans, resources typically translate into earning potential. As a result, women should be attracted to men with prominent cheekbones who have good grooming habits and wear high-status clothing. High cheekbones convey dominance; the high-status clothing in combination with the good grooming habits indicates that they are ambitious and industrious and otherwise conveys possession or acquisition of resources (Cunningham et al., 1990).

Speculations about the differential importance of youth and good looks versus ambition/industriousness were confirmed in a study that assessed the importance of these characteristics for men and women in 37 cultures from Belgium to Zambia (Buss, 1989). Men in all cultures preferred spouses who were younger than they, at an average of 2.66 years.

The preferred discrepancy was as low as 0.38 year in the Netherlands and as high as 7.38 years in Zambia. Women, on the other hand, preferred men who were on average 3.42 years older than they. In all but three cultures (i.e., India, Poland, and Sweden), men more so than women rated good looks as important. In all cultures, with the exception of Spain, women rated earning potential as significantly more important than did men. The highest ratings were obtained in the Netherlands and Great Britain and among South African Zulus. Analogous results were found for the evaluation of ambition and industriousness. On this variable, sex differences were obtained for 29 of the 37 cultures (in case you are wondering about the “deviant” cultures, they are Iran, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Colombia).

Of course, knowing that people find certain physical characteristics important falls short of telling us about the choices they would make. Eastwick and Finkel (2008) have argued that responses to paper-and-pencil surveys and ratings of photographs primarily capture people’s *theories* of what they *think* makes for a good romantic partner. When the researchers asked participants to list qualities of their ideal partner and then looked at the choices they made in a speed-dating setting, they found little correspondence between the two, especially in the choices women made. Moreover, physical attractiveness is strongly associated with relationship satisfaction for men and women alike (Eastwick, Neff, Finkel, Luchies, & Hunt, 2014), although some have argued that this is primarily the case for more short-term relationships (Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson, & Karney, 2014). It appears that women pursue a more complex mating strategy that includes *both* the pursuit of a good provider and the best genetic material possible (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006). And what are the indices of “good genes?” As we shall see, physical attractiveness might be one barometer for good genes.

### *The Importance of Averageness and Symmetry*

As we saw earlier, average and symmetrical faces are perceived to be more attractive than their individual component faces. But they are not just more pleasing to the eye. Instead, we find averageness and symmetry beautiful because both are indications of overall phenotypic quality. As facial averageness and symmetry increase, the organism’s health, fitness, and quality increases as well (e.g., Jones et al., 2001; Simmons, Rhodes, Peers, & Koehler, 2004).

Although averageness and symmetry are not one and the same, both mediate what we consider beautiful as well as why physical attractiveness is so important. Even slight deviations from bilateral symmetry can indicate developmental instability brought on by assaults to development from environmental stress and poor health (e.g., Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002; Hönekopp, Bartholomé, & Jansen, 2004).

In addition to indicating a healthy developmental environment and good pre- and post-natal nutrition, facial symmetry also signals good “genetic health” and quality. Researchers suggest that the greater an organism’s **heterozygosity** (or protein diversity), the greater its ability to resist parasitic infection (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1993). Theoretically, heterozygosity has several outcomes, including better health (i.e., immunity to illness) and a concurrent alignment of organism features that is closer to the population average. That is, the more genetically diverse the organism, the more likely it will resemble the population average as well as be able to resist a larger number of parasitic infections. Thus, being able to detect and appreciate a quality that reveals overall health and well-being confers important advantages for one’s inclusive fitness. From



Table 3.1 Evolutionary Principles Guiding Perceptions of Attractiveness

Elliot and Niesta (2008) Elliot, Tracy, Pazda, and Beall (2013) Schwarz and Singer (2013)	The color red amplifies men's perceptions of women's attractiveness and sexual desirability. Although culturally universal, it is primarily evident in perceptions of young women's attractiveness.
Durante, Li, and Haselton (2008)	Women prefer sexy clothing during high-fertility periods (i.e., ovulation). Effect was strongest for women who had an unrestricted sexual orientation, those who were sexually experienced, single women, and partnered women who were most satisfied with their relationships.
Gangestad, Garver-Apgar, Simpson, and Cousins (2007) Gangestad, Thornhill, and Garver-Apgar (2010)	Menstrual cycle: women prefer masculine men—i.e., men with deep voices and masculine faces—when they are ovulating (i.e., during the fertile phase of their menstrual cycle) and show a greater willingness to engage in sex with attractive men, including ones they don't know well (sexual opportunism).
Apicella, Feinberg, and Marlow (2007)	Hazda women find men with deep voices more attractive (furthermore, deep-voiced men have an average of two more children than their high-pitched counterparts).
Roney, Hanson, Durante, and Maestripieri (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women viewing photos of men's faces can accurately detect men's testosterone level, which influences short-term attractiveness judgments.</li> <li>• They can also detect men's liking for children and judge men who like children more attractive as long-term mates.</li> </ul>
Feinberg et al. (2005)	High-pitched female voices paired with feminine faces are more attractive than low-pitched female voices paired with either highly feminine or less feminine faces.
Gangestad and Scheyd (2005)	Feminine female faces are perceived as more attractive because they may act as indicators of reproductive value.
Gangestad, Simpson, Cousins, Apgar, Christensen, and Niels (2004)	Women, when ovulating, prefer the scent of symmetrical men.

this perspective, beauty is not something we enjoy for aesthetic reasons alone. Rather, it serves an important role in signaling the fitness and health of a potential mate. Take a look at Table 3.1 for another set of evolutionary principles guiding perceptions of attractiveness.

There is good empirical support for the idea that people use attractiveness to gauge another's health and fitness. Research participants evaluating photos of attractive and unattractive people equate attractiveness with better health (Jones et al., 2001; Kalick, Zebrowitz, Langlois, & Johnson, 1998) and greater intelligence (Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002). But how accurate are our perceptions of the health of attractive others? Kalick and colleagues (1998) collected data from a longitudinal study in which

they had independent judges rate the attractiveness of participants' faces. These ratings were then paired with actual health evaluations. No significant relationship was found between facial beauty and actual health. In fact, attractiveness actually interfered with participants' ability to make accurate health assessments. At the same time, however, there is evidence to suggest that attractiveness is associated with intelligence (Kanazawa, 2010). This association might explain why women tend to find intelligent men appealing (Prokosch, Coss, Scheib, & Blozis, 2009).

Although high physical attractiveness may not be a reliable indicator of good health and genes, low attractiveness is associated with bad health and bad genes. Zebrowitz and Rhodes (2004) found a significant link between low levels of attractiveness and poorer health and lower intelligence but found no significant association between high levels of attractiveness and intelligence or health. Consequently, being able to detect and ultimately avoid bad genes and health may be even more adaptive than being able to detect and pursue good genes and health.

### *Cognitive Mechanisms*

Given its importance for genetic survival, it is perhaps not surprising that evolution has provided us with a set of mechanisms that help us gravitate toward facial attractiveness. Specifically, symmetrical and prototypical stimuli are more easily processed than those that are asymmetrical and non-prototypical (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). Consequently, prototypical faces *feel* more familiar. And because familiarity leads to liking (Zajonc, 1968) in general, prototypical faces are liked better than faces that deviate from the prototype (Halberstadt & Rhodes, 2000).

Although prototypical faces may elicit liking because of their familiarity, a somewhat different causal sequence is equally possible. Monin (2003) suggested that familiarity leads perceivers to adopt a “warm glow” heuristic by which prototypicality leads to liking and liking leads to perceptions of familiarity. In other words, instead of proposing that *prototype*→*familiarity*→*liking*, the “warm glow” heuristic proposes that *prototype*→*liking*→*familiarity*: Good is familiar. That is, prototypes generate a positive affective response (Halberstadt & Rhodes, 2000), and this affect is used as information to assess familiarity (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The good feelings generated by symmetrical (and therefore beautiful) objects and people become information that the objects or people must be familiar. It's safe to say that beauty works in many and seemingly mysterious ways.

Evolutionary psychology provides a compelling account of why and how beauty matters for interpersonal choices. Yet it is not without its critics. For example, Eagly and Wood (1999) have argued that men's preference for attractive, relatively younger women and women's preference for older men with economic resources may reflect societal arrangements characterized by a division of labor rendering men as breadwinners and women as domestic workers. Compared to older women, *young women* often lack independent resources, making it more likely that they find the domestic role acceptable. Compared to younger men, *older men* are more likely to have acquired the economic resources to be optimal providers (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Support for this alternative explanation of the importance of female youth and attractiveness comes from a reanalysis of the Buss (1989) data. Across cultures, the value men place on physical attractiveness is equaled by the value they place on a woman's ability to be a good cook and housekeeper (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Although this **sociocultural view** provides a plausible alternative explanation for



sex differences in the importance of features conveying youth, fertility, and economic resources, it has a more difficult time accounting for the importance of facial averageness and symmetry (Gangestad et al., 2006).



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- According to evolutionary theory, women should be attracted to men whose physical appearance suggests he is a good prospect. But women are also attracted to men whose physical appearance suggests the presence of good genes. What does this imply about women's mating strategies?
- Research found that physical attractiveness is not a reliable indicator of good health and genes but low attractiveness is associated with bad health and genes. This suggests an evolved mechanism toward avoiding the unattractive. If that's the case, how does our proclivity to look for beauty in others contribute to our inclusive fitness?
- At least two explanations are possible for our tendency to like average, or prototypical, faces. These possibilities are expressed in the following sequences: prototype → familiarity → liking and, alternatively, prototype → liking → familiarity. Think of the evolutionary needs and pressures that would generate these sequences. Which sequence makes more sense to you?

### The Physical Attractiveness Stereotype: Beauty Is as Beauty Does

One of the reasons we seem so drawn to people high in attractiveness may be related to our propensity to make inferences about what physically attractive and unattractive people might be like. It appears that our perceptions of physically attractive others are to some extent shaped by a stereotype suggesting that attractive people are better people in terms of their personality. It is through this process that we judge a book by its cover: If it looks good on the outside, it must be good on the inside as well.

#### *The “What Is Beautiful Is Good” Stereotype*

The “what is beautiful is good” stereotype was discovered in a classic study in which male and female research participants looked at photographs of men and women of varying levels of attractiveness (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Research participants evaluated the personalities and quality of life of the men and women in the photographs. As one might expect, attractive people were perceived to be warmer and more sensitive, kind, interesting, strong, poised, modest, sociable, and outgoing than people who were merely average or low in physical attractiveness. Attractive people were also perceived to have happier marriages, better jobs, and more fulfilling lives. Subsequent decades of research have provided additional support for this set of findings (Langlois et al., 2000), and there is evidence that it extends to online dating profiles as well (Brand, Bonatsos, D’Orazio, & DeShong, 2012). No surprise here! There is reason to believe that “what is beautiful is

good” is a stereotype with a twist. All stereotypes involve associating categories with specific features and characteristics. The attractiveness stereotype may additionally contain an element of projection. That is, we desire to form and maintain close relationships with attractive others and then project those motivations onto them (Lemay, Clark, & Greenberg, 2010). Moreover, attractive people prompt us to give a closer look at their personalities, leading to impressions that are as positive as they are accurate (Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010).

Given the positive characteristics with which we imbue physically attractive people, it is not surprising that they receive preferential treatment when it comes to dating. Additionally, simply being associated with a physically attractive person appears to turn us into better people in the eyes of others, although this is primarily true for men with attractive partners (Sigall & Landy, 1973). But discrimination on the basis of physical attractiveness is not limited to dating situations: Good-looking people enjoy a number of other advantages in how we perceive them. For example, we tend to think of attractive people as higher in status, especially those aspects that are inherited (Kalick, 1988). We tend also to evaluate the work of attractive people better than that of less attractive people, especially when that work is objectively poor (Landy & Sigall, 1974). This, along with the finding that we often think attractiveness is indicative of intelligence (e.g., Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004; Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002), may be some of the reasons why attractive people often have an edge in promotion decisions (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson, 1990).

### *Cute Boys and Girls Are Better People, Too*

The attractiveness stereotype is by no means limited to adults’ perceptions of other adults. Adults also discriminate in favor of attractive children. Clifford and Walster (1973) showed research participants academic records that ostensibly belonged to an attractive or a plain-looking fifth grader. Cute boys and girls were perceived to be more intelligent and more likely to pursue and receive advanced degrees. Furthermore, research participants thought that the parents of attractive children were more interested in their children’s education than parents of plain-looking children. Not surprisingly, teachers are not exempt from this bias (Lerner & Lerner, 1977). In one particularly illustrative study (Ross & Salvia, 1975), elementary school teachers looked at files of an attractive or an unattractive 8-year-old boy or girl with an alleged IQ of 78. They were asked to make recommendations as to whether the child should be placed in a class for children with mental retardation. As one would expect, the unattractive child, as opposed to the attractive one, was more likely to be recommended for the special program, despite their identical records.

Differences in physical attractiveness also play a role in how punitive adults are toward children who make mistakes. Dion (1972) had male and female research participants observe an experimenter interact with a child who was made to appear either physically attractive or unattractive. Subsequently, research participants administered penalties to the child for incorrect responses on a picture-matching task (i.e., taking away one to five pennies for each error). Results indicated that the punitiveness of men was not influenced by the attractiveness of the child. Women, on the other hand, penalized the unattractive child more severely than the attractive child. A somewhat different pattern emerges in grocery stores.

In a recent news report, sociologist Andrew Harrell and his associates observed 426 parents interacting with their children in Canadian grocery stores to determine what factors

influence shopping cart mishaps. Their findings were consistent with Dion's (1972) work: Parents of unattractive children were more likely to let their children wander farther away from them and were less likely to buckle them into their shopping carts. However, unlike parents in Dion's (1972) picture-masking task described prior, preferential treatment of attractive children was more noticeable in fathers than mothers. None of the fathers buckled in their unattractive children, while 15 percent of fathers buckled in their good-looking youngsters. On the other hand, mothers buckled up 2 to 4 percent of their unattractive children, while 12 percent secured their attractive children. It seems few parents observed basic shopping cart safety guidelines; however, unattractive children were left in even greater peril than their attractive counterparts.

### *Infants Prefer Beautiful Faces*

Not only do parents fall prey to beauty, but children also exhibit attractiveness biases—even before they are out of their diapers. Early research found that preschoolers as young as age 3 preferred to look at pictures of attractive *children* (Dion, 1977). However, not only did they prefer attractive faces, but they also indicated that attractive children were nicer, were more likely to own desirable toys, and would be more fun to play with. Further, preschoolers said that unattractive children were mean. The issue is twofold: What are the origins of both our standards of beauty and the attendant stereotype? Are humans born with the “golden rule” imprinted on our DNA, or is it learned? If learned, how quickly does the development of the physical attractiveness stereotype follow on the heels of our ability to perceive and distinguish attractiveness?

This is a difficult question to answer, in part because of the difficulty of testing infants and newborns. Researchers have found a preference for attractive faces in infants as young as 6 months old (Ramsey, Langlois, Hoss, Rubenstein, & Griffin, 2004) and perhaps even as young as 72 hours old (Slater et al., 1998). But even 3-day-old infants have had ample opportunity to see many faces and therefore to both categorize them and form prototypes, perhaps by way of averaging (Hoss & Langlois, 2003). Thus, the question of nature and nurture has yet to be fully answered. The latest word, however, is that there is tentative evidence that infants roughly 15 minutes old show no preference for beautiful faces (Hoss & Langlois, 2003), giving us at least one piece of evidence that infants are not born with the golden rule, but are equipped with the cognitive tools to quickly develop it.

### *Socialization*

The cognitive tools available to us as we enter the world become sharpened through the process of socialization. Our ability to distinguish attractive others from less attractive others may translate into vastly different expectations and may further contribute to the attractiveness stereotype. It may be that attractive people become better people by living up to our raised expectations, leading to real differences between those who are attractive and those who aren't.

People also react toward attractive and unattractive others in very different ways and thus create a qualitatively superior reality for those who are good looking. For example, when attractive people need help, they are more likely to receive it than are unattractive people (Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976), especially when the emergency is perceived to be severe (West & Brown, 1975). It was perhaps for this reason that a special insert into

the owner's manual of a 1964 Studebaker contained the following instruction for women who found themselves faced with a flat tire: "Put on some fresh lipstick, fluff up your hairdo, stand in a safe spot off the road, wave and look helpless and feminine." Thus, the social reality we create for attractive people through our behavior manifests itself in many ways—some even more subtle than receiving help.

Reis and his colleagues (Reis, Nezlek, & Wheeler, 1980; Reis et al., 1982) asked male and female college seniors to keep track of their everyday social interactions over 15 days by completing the Rochester Interaction Record (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). Among other things, this measure asks participants to indicate the frequency, level of intimacy, and pleasantness of their interactions with members of the same and opposite sex. Participants' own physical attractiveness had been independently assessed based on photographs. The analyses of participants' records showed that physical attractiveness and gender strongly influenced many aspects of their social lives. For both men and women, physical attractiveness was positively related to the affective quality of their social experience. In other words, attractive participants perceived same-sex interactions as well as opposite-sex interactions as more intimate and pleasant than did unattractive participants. Attractive males, more so than unattractive males, tended to have more interactions with females and fewer interactions with males. No such effect was observed for females. Attractive males were more assertive in their interactions and lower in fear of rejection by the other sex than were unattractive males. Interestingly, attractive females, to a greater degree than their unattractive counterparts, were less assertive and less trusting of the opposite sex.

### *Is the Attractiveness Stereotype Culturally Universal?*

Finding similar processes and mechanisms for behaviors across cultures is one way of inferring not only universality, but also a common origin for the phenomena in question. Thus, confirming the existence of the physical attractiveness stereotype across cultures would provide converging evidence that its origins evolved from common, adaptive processes that were somehow important to human mating success. Until recently, the attractiveness stereotype has been almost exclusively demonstrated in Western cultures. Some (e.g., Dion, 1986) have argued that its prevalence is due to the individualistic nature of the cultures in which it has been studied. In individualistic cultures such as the United States, identity is primarily based on personal attributes. On the other hand, in more collectivistic cultures, such as Korea and China, identity is based more on family and group ties (Triandis, 1994). This raises the theoretical possibility that in cultures in which identity is based on something other than personal attributes (such as appearance), the attractiveness stereotype may be less pronounced or absent entirely.

The evidence for this speculation is mixed. One study comparing Chinese and North American college students at a Canadian university found that Chinese students were less influenced by physical attractiveness in making inferences about the presence or absence of socially desirable personality traits (Dion, Pak, & Dion, 1990). However, when it came to speculating about desirable life outcomes, such as getting a good job, the judgments of both Chinese and North American participants were equally influenced by the attractiveness stereotype. Other studies (Wheeler & Kim, 1997; Zebrowitz, Montepare, & Lee, 1993) found that the attractiveness stereotype is just as prevalent in Asian (i.e., collective) cultures, although its content is somewhat different. It appears that in each culture

attractiveness is related to culturally ascribed and valued characteristics. For example, Western participants perceive attractive targets as stronger, more assertive, and more dominant; Korean participants perceive them as more honest and higher in concern for others (Wheeler & Kim, 1997). Thus, the attractiveness stereotype is, to some extent, culturally universal *as well as* culturally variable.



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The “what is beautiful is good” stereotype accounts for our proclivity to attribute positive characteristics to physically attractive people. How would you account for our tendency to judge a person more favorably simply because of an association with someone attractive?
- Some research suggests that infants as young as 72 hours old prefer to look at attractive faces. How would you explain this from an evolutionary perspective? Which explanation do you find more likely—one based on the evolutionary perspective, or one based on the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype?
- Attractive males have been found to be more assertive and lower in fear of rejection than their more plain-looking counterparts, while attractive females were less assertive and less trusting of men than the less attractive ones. How would you explain these differences?

### “Don’t Hate Me Because I’m Beautiful”: Some Ugly Truths About Attractiveness

The pervasiveness of the physical attractiveness stereotype could be taken to suggest that there is little hope for those of us with less-than-perfect physical appearances. However, consider the following.

To some extent, the advantages attractive people enjoy are not so much an outcome of a stereotype for beauty but may stem from a complementary stereotype for low attractiveness. Simply put, what is beautiful is good and what is ugly is bad. A number of research findings support the existence of a stereotype about ugliness. In one study (O’Grady, 1982), research participants’ risk assessments of mental illness were strongly influenced by the attractiveness of the person whom they rated: As the likelihood of risk increased, attractiveness decreased. This bias occurred regardless of whether research participants were told that the targets, all of whom were diagnosed by a psychiatrist, either had or did not have the illness. Furthermore, even when research participants were explicitly instructed that attractiveness was irrelevant to their “diagnosis,” they continued to attribute psychological disturbances differentially to unattractive targets (Jones, Hanson, & Phillips, 1978). This latter finding is of special importance as it suggests that the attractiveness stereotype is so ingrained that even conscious attempts to control it may fail to eradicate its application.

In real life, however, diagnoses about mental illness are usually made by trained professionals. Unfortunately, a study of incarcerated mental patients (Farina et al., 1977)

showed that unattractive patients received more severe diagnoses and remained hospitalized longer than physically attractive patients. The results of studies on the relationship between attractiveness and perceived risk for mental illness are mirrored by analogous findings in the legal domain. Research participants generally found attractive defendants less culpable and assigned them lighter sentences (Efran, 1974; Esses & Webster, 1988; Solomon & Schopler, 1978). Congruent findings were also obtained from real juries: Attractive defendants are acquitted more frequently than unattractive ones (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a).

Despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence for a pervasive bias toward attractive people, there are indications that the underlying stereotype is perhaps not as strong as one would expect. Two meta-analyses of virtually all published studies on the attractiveness stereotype (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992) found the phenomenon to be most pronounced when investigators asked research participants to judge attractive people on dimensions related to their social competence (such as social skills). Judgments of intelligence and adjustment were less influenced by physical attractiveness, and there was no difference between attractive and unattractive targets on judgments of their honesty and concern for others. On the other hand, attractive targets are generally perceived to be less modest and more vain than their less attractive counterparts. These findings suggest that whether or not experimental investigations of research participants' perceptions of attractiveness uncover differences depends to some extent on the nature of the questions that are asked. Along these lines, Dermer and Thiel (1975) showed participants pictures of people of varying levels of attractiveness, just as Dion et al. (1972) had done. However, this time, they asked participants to judge the targets in terms of how materialistic, vain, and snobbish they were, along with questions about their commitment to their marriage and level of sympathy toward oppressed people. As it turns out, research participants rated attractive targets less favorably on all of these dimensions. An anti-attractiveness bias is often present in organizational contexts involving evaluations. That is, when the person being evaluated is of the same sex as the evaluator, attractiveness hurts, rather than helps (Agthe, Spoerle, & Maner, 2010, 2011).

Even if one were willing to look at these findings as the exception to the rule, being physically attractive can sometimes be more a curse than a blessing. Just like everybody else, attractive people are aware of the prevailing stereotype and the corresponding reactions they receive from others. One consequence is that they have a harder time dealing with praise. When they receive praise for their performance on a task, they often cannot tell whether the evaluator is sincere (Sigall & Michela, 1976) and thus frequently discount the praise they receive (Major, Carrington, & Carnevale, 1984). Furthermore, some of the advantages physically attractive people enjoy in dating relationships can be offset by several distinct disadvantages. They often have a harder time starting relationships because their attractiveness scares people away. They sometimes have trouble maintaining relationships because knowing that they have many alternative choices may elicit feelings of jealousy (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986b). Finally, although attractive people, and women especially, have an edge when it comes to dating, same-sex peers often reject them as friends (Krebs & Adinolfi, 1975). Of course, difficulties like these are not likely to trigger a massive outbreak of sympathy for the plight of those who are beautiful. All things considered, the advantages of physical attractiveness are many and the disadvantages few.



## Is Beauty Solely in the Eye of the Beholder?

While an ever-increasing volume of scientific research continues to confirm the advantages of possessing physical beauty, there is no need to rush out and schedule an appointment for plastic surgery or an extreme makeover. Other factors may also influence perceptions of attractiveness. Perceiving others does not take place in a psychological vacuum. Instead, our judgments of others' physical attractiveness are often profoundly shaped by the context in which our perceptions take place, as well as by our dispositions, such as our moods and whether we are currently in a romantic relationship.

### *Context Influences*

We are rarely alone. Do those around us influence how we are perceived? Research suggests that how attractive we perceive others to be depends importantly on the context in which we perceive them. For example, women rate men more desirable when they are shown surrounded by women than when shown alone or in the company of men. But men rate women less desirable when they are shown surrounded by men than when they are shown alone or in the company of other women (Hill & Buss, 2008).

More generally, attractiveness judgments also depend in part on the attractiveness of other people to whom we are exposed. Simply put, our perceptions of an average-looking person can be adversely affected if we had prior exposure to an extremely attractive person. Perceptual **contrast effects** of this nature are most pronounced when we are conscious of the prior stimulus (Martin, 1986) and when there is a large discrepancy between the prior stimulus and the one to be judged (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983). In the domain of attractiveness judgments, this effect has been demonstrated in a number of experiments. In one study (Kenrick & Gutierrez, 1980), male dormitory residents were asked to rate a photograph of an average-looking female. Half the participants made their ratings after watching an episode of *Charlie's Angels*, a TV show that ran from 1976 to 1981 and featured three strikingly attractive women, while the other half made their ratings after watching other TV programs. As it turns out, men who had watched *Charlie's Angels* rated the photograph as less attractive than men who had watched programs not featuring beautiful women. This contrast was subsequently replicated in more controlled laboratory settings as well (Kenrick & Gutierrez, 1980, Studies 2 and 3).

Prior exposure to relatively unattractive others sends this contrast effect in the opposite direction: Research participants rate the photographs of an average-looking female as more attractive when it is presented *after* a series of photographs depicting faces low in attractiveness. Note that timing seems to be essential for this contrast effect to occur. It is primarily obtained when attractive or unattractive stimuli *precede* the one to be judged. When the same moderately attractive picture is *embedded* in a series of pictures either low or high in attractiveness, exactly the opposite effect is observed. Under these circumstances, the perceived attractiveness of the average-looking person is assimilated to the context. It is perceived as less attractive when it is embedded in a series of pictures depicting people low in attractiveness and more attractive when embedded in a set of photographs depicting people high in attractiveness (Geiselman, Haight, & Kimata, 1984; Wedell, Parducci, & Geiselman, 1987).

The lessons from the work on perceptual contrast and assimilation are straightforward: Attractive people are a tough act to follow. Massive beauty not only affects how attractive others perceive us, but also decreases perceptions of our own desirability as a

mate (Gutierrez, Kenrick, & Partch, 1999). Consequently, if we are concerned with being perceived as attractive by others as well as ourselves, we are better off being surrounded by beautiful others.

Ironically, another way that context might help us amplify our attractiveness is to be involved in a relationship. The fact that a person is in a committed relationship marks them as a good romantic choice (Uller & Johansson, 2003). That is, being involved in a relationship provides information about a person's commitment worthiness. In other words, it indicates a person's relationship fitness, giving those outside the pair confirmation about the mated person's "invisible" positive qualities. The problem, though, is that we are now setting our sights on someone who is already "spoken for." Female mate-choice copying has been found in many animal species (e.g., Godin, Herdman, & Dugatkin, 2005; Höglund, Alatalo, Gibson, & Lundberg, 1995; White & Galef, 1999). Evidence for mate-choice copying (e.g., the "wedding ring effect") has begun to emerge (e.g., Rodeheffer, Proffitt Leyva, & Hill, 2016).

Social comparison explanations support the notion that context can influence perceptions of attractiveness—but in women only. In a set of clever studies, Graziano and colleagues (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Shebilske, & Lundgren, 1993) led male and female participants to believe that many other people had rated the attractiveness of several different people depicted in photographs. Women were most influenced by the feedback of others—especially by the negative ratings of other women who had viewed the stimulus photos before them. Thus, there are many ways that attractiveness may be influenced by elements of our context—not only by those who surround us, but by whether we are in a relationship and by the opinions of others.

### *Dispositional Influences*

Our perceptions and evaluations of other people are to some extent influenced by our transient moods. Generally speaking, we tend to look at others more favorably when we are in good moods and less favorably when we are in a bad mood (Erber, 1991; Forgas & Bower, 1987). This seems to include our perceptions of others' physical attractiveness. In one study (May & Hamilton, 1980), female research participants rated photographs of men varying in attractiveness. They rated the photos while listening to either pleasant rock music, unpleasant avant-garde music, or no music at all. As one might expect, all photographs were rated as more attractive by research participants in whom a positive mood had been induced and less attractive by those in a negative mood, regardless of how attractive the men in the photographs actually were. More specific affective states can influence attractiveness judgments as well. For example, and perhaps not surprisingly, feeling disgusted lowers our perceptions of others who are objectively high in physical attractiveness (Phelan & Edlund, 2016).

As we have already seen, being involved in a romantic relationship shapes how those outside the relationship view us. How we view *others* is also shaped by whether we are presently involved in a romantic relationship. Relative to those not involved in ongoing dating relationships, people who are dating someone tend to perceive opposite-sex persons as less attractive (Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990). This perceptual shift does not appear to be influenced by such extraneous factors such as self-esteem. Instead, it may be a powerful mechanism for the maintenance of relationships because it reduces our susceptibility to temptation. Interestingly, this effect can sometimes go in the opposite direction. Consistent with the findings on perceptual contrast, one study (Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994) reports that male research participants who

had been exposed to photographs of *extremely attractive* women evaluated their current relationship less favorably than participants who had been exposed to photos of average-looking women.

On the other hand, unattached people who desire a dating relationship seem to become less discriminating as they become progressively more desperate. For example, being on the receiving end of repeated left swipes on Tinder may result in an adjustment of standards. Supporting this idea is a classic study by Pennebaker and colleagues (1979). They had an experimenter approach patrons of bars in Charlottesville, Virginia, at 9:00 p.m., 10:30 p.m., and 12:00 a.m. and asked them to rate the collective attractiveness of the patrons of the opposite sex. As one might expect, men and women alike rated opposite-sex patrons as more attractive when the number of possible choices decreased as the closing time, 12:30 a.m., approached. Interestingly, this change in perceptions of attractiveness does not appear to be caused by increases in alcohol consumption or inebriation. Subsequent research suggests that these effects are not limited to Charlottesville, Virginia (Gladue & Delaney, 1990).

Although contextual and dispositional variables can often alter our perceptions of others' physical attractiveness, the fact remains that it is of paramount importance for the initiation, progress, and maintenance of romantic relationships. How, then, can the rest of us ever hope to get a date?

### Attractiveness and Dating: A Reprise

The idea that we base our dating choices solely on our dates' physical appearance is somewhat disheartening. After all, it seems to fly in the face of such admonitions as not to judge a book by its cover and that beauty is only skin deep. However, as we have seen, the phenomenon has shown to be robust (e.g., Sprecher, 1989a) and universal (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986b). One frequently heard argument against the seeming importance of physical attractiveness for dating is that its role changes as people get older and as couples continue dating. Under such circumstances, people may become more realistic in their choices. Instead of reaching for the fairest of them all, they may look for others who match their own level of attractiveness. This idea that romantic couples in ongoing relationships are matched in their levels of attractiveness has received some empirical support (Murstein, 1972; Price & Vandenberg, 1979). And while some studies found support for this **matching hypothesis** among long-term, committed couples (Murstein & Christy, 1976; White, 1980), other studies suggest that matching may be especially important during the early stages of relationships (Feingold, 1988). There is even evidence that matching is important for same-sex friendships (Cash & Derlega, 1978), although once again men are more likely to base same-sex friendship choices on attractiveness than are women (Feingold, 1988).

One of the earliest and most dramatic demonstrations for the veracity of the matching hypothesis in the initiation of romantic relationships comes from a study (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971) that used the same Computer Dance technique (that we reviewed earlier in the chapter) with one major difference. Rather than being assigned a date, research participants could choose from several possible dates who varied in their level of attractiveness. As it turns out, research participants chose dates that matched their own self-reported level of attractiveness. This occurred regardless of whether participants thought their potential date might accept or reject them.

At first glance, the findings of this second Computer Dance study seem to be at odds with Walster and colleagues' observation that the date's level of physical attractiveness was the only thing that mattered. After all, people can't very well seek the most attractive

dates and at the same time those who match them in attractiveness. However, a closer inspection of the results shows that the findings may be complementary rather than contradictory. Matching may most readily be observed in an initial dating choice when there is a range of potential partners, as was the case in the Berscheid and colleagues' study. In support of this idea, Gomez and Erber (2013) found that matching determines success in speed-dating. On the other hand, when fate or a computer arranges a date with a highly attractive person, as was the case in the Walster and colleagues' study, people tend to attempt to maintain that contact, especially after they already had some interactions with the date. In other words, matching may be a motive in achieving a date, whereas attractiveness may be a motive in holding on to that date.

Issues of timing and motivation aside, there appear to be few people who think of themselves as unattractive. In a survey of 2,000 men and women, Hatfield and Sprecher (1986b) found that most *adults* are quite happy with the way they look. Only 4 percent of men and 7 percent of women they surveyed indicated they were dissatisfied with their appearance. Similarly, the majority of people rate their partners as *attractive* or *very attractive* (e.g., Gagné & Lydon, 2004). From this perspective, the results of the two Computer Dance studies are quite compatible: People look for dating partners that match their own level of attractiveness, but since they think of themselves as pretty good looking, they tend to look for others who are similar on this dimension.

Alternatively, we can understand matching by considering people's sense of self-worth along with their objective and physical attractiveness (Taylor, Fiore, Mendelsohn, & Cheshire, 2011). Our *objective* physical attractiveness may provide a *lower limit* for the physical attractiveness of a potential date that allows us to define potentially unattractive dates as attractive and desirable. At the same time, our *subjective* physical attractiveness may provide an *upper limit* that prevents us from seeking dates that are too attractive, that is, out of our league. Thus, the two limits work in tandem to generate a range of dating choices that result in most people dating others of similar, or matching, physical attractiveness (Montoya, 2008).



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- A study of patients in a mental health institution revealed that unattractive patients received more severe diagnoses and remained hospitalized longer than attractive patients. This was interpreted as a bias in favor of the attractive patients based on the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype. Can you think of an alternative explanation? What would be the implications of this explanation?
- Some research shows that attractive people often have a hard time starting a relationship because their beauty scares other people away. But evolutionary theory predicts that we tend to seek the most attractive partner. How would you reconcile the two?
- Context plays a role in our perception of attractiveness. Men perceive women as less desirable when surrounded by men than when surrounded by women or by themselves. On the other hand, women perceive men as more desirable when surrounded by women than when surrounded by other men or by themselves. What do you suppose drives these gender differences?

**Summary**


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<b>Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards of physical attractiveness over time and across cultures</li> <li>The importance of physical attractiveness</li> <li>Defining the physical attractiveness stereotype and its origins</li> <li>Evolutionary explanations</li> <li>Cognitive processing of familiarity</li> <li>Social determinants of attractiveness perception</li> <li>The context of physical attractiveness: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?</li> </ul>
<b>Theories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socialization and cultural variation on what comprises a beautiful body</li> <li>Evolutionary theories that explain the universality of many attractiveness features such as attractive faces and the physical attractiveness stereotype</li> </ul>
<b>Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data from the “evolutionary files” show that beauty is universally important and perceived</li> <li>Average and symmetrical faces are perceived as more attractive and as honest indicators of reproductive health (Gangestad et al., 2006)</li> <li>Reproductive concerns, although important, are not the only motives in determining attraction</li> <li>Women pursue multiple motives in mate choice</li> <li>Being physically attractive has its benefits, such as being judged as having a better personality, doing better work, and being more deserving of promotions</li> <li>Being physically unattractive has its drawbacks, such as being judged by others to have poorer mental health, being more responsible for transgressions, and receiving harsher punishments</li> <li>Children as well as adults recognize and prefer attractive faces; both children and adults also discriminate in favor of physically attractive people (Ramsey et al., 2004)</li> </ul>

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**Key Terms**

*Androcentric bias*: considering the male experience as the norm, while the female experience is ignored or considered abnormal.

*Prototypes*: mental representations of categories, such as human faces, around their modal features.

*Inclusive fitness*: an organism’s desire to pass its genes on to the next generation through reproduction or ensuring the genetic survival of kin.

*Parental investment*: refers to the different reproductive goals of men and women.

*Heterozygosity*: an organism’s ability to resist parasitic infections; it is conveyed by facial symmetry.

“*Warm glow*” *heuristic*: a process by which prototypicality leads to liking and liking leads to perceptions of familiarity.

*Sociocultural view*: the theoretical claim that sex differences in physical attractiveness are best understood as stemming from the division of labor in industrialized societies.

*“What is beautiful is good” stereotype:* our proclivity to attribute a host of other positive qualities to physically attractive people.

*Contrast effects:* a perceptual phenomenon that explains why our perceptions of an average-looking person can be adversely affected if we had prior exposure to an extremely attractive person.

*Matching hypothesis:* a theoretical statement that explains why partners in established relationships are generally well-matched in terms of their physical attractiveness.