

COMPARING SELF-PERCEPTION OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND OVERALL LIFE
SATISFACTION: THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

COMPARING SELF-PERCEPTION OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION: THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

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This study examined differences in self-perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction. The participants included 190 college students (108 females and 62 males). It was hypothesized that a positive correlation between perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction would exist; sex differences on attractiveness would exist with men rating themselves as more attractive than women rating themselves; attractiveness is a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males; and sex differences on partners' level of attractiveness will exist, with men rating their partners as more attractive than women rating their partners. Participants completed the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale, the Satisfaction With Scale, and a demographics form.

A positive correlation between self-perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction was found for both males and females. However, this correlation was weak. In addition, self-perceived attractiveness was not found to be a better predictor of life satisfaction for women than for men. Men and women's ratings of self-perception of attractiveness did not significantly differ. In addition, both men and women rated their partner as more attractive than themselves, but men rated their partners as more physically attractive than women rated their partners. Exploratory analyses revealed that high levels of partner

perceived attractiveness were found to be related to high levels of self-perceived attractiveness and low levels of partner perceived attractiveness were related to low levels of self-perceived attractiveness. These analyses also revealed that males and females did not significantly differ in their self-perception of attractiveness on the following domains: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. Males and females did not significantly differ in their perception of their partner's attractiveness on the following domains: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Physical attractiveness is how an individual's physical appearance is evaluated in terms of beauty or aesthetic qualities. This evaluation can be based on self perception, others' perceptions or a combination of both. Attractiveness was once thought to be valued more in Western society but recent research has shown that attractiveness is valued in all societies, regardless of sex, age, or ethnicity (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002). Further, research suggests that attractiveness and beauty standards are cross-cultural and that common attractiveness standards exist, implying that attractiveness is not bound by culture but is universal (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002).

Self-perceived attractiveness and others' perceptions of an individual's physical attractiveness are important in a number of aspects of an individual's life. It has been linked to an individual's happiness, life satisfaction, success, and overall subjective well being (Umberson & Hughes, 1987). Physical attractiveness has become so sought after in America in recent years, that Americans are now spending more on beauty products a year than on education (Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008). Research has shown that attractive individuals are happier and more successful than unattractive individuals (Anderson et. al 2008). Individuals whom others perceive as having attractive faces are better liked and thought to possess more positive personality traits than unattractive individuals (Freeman, 1985). Attractive individuals have also been found to engage in more social interaction, receive more help from others, and have higher levels of occupational success than unattractive individuals (Anderson et. al, 2008). It has even been theorized that attractive individuals have fewer mental health related impairments

than unattractive individuals (Anderson et. al 2008). It is imperative to study self-perceived attractiveness and the impact it has on individuals as it is a major predictor of happiness and life satisfaction.

Since many studies have shown that attractiveness, as rated by others, is a major predictor of peoples' happiness and life satisfaction, it is important that the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction be studied more thoroughly. This study will focus on how self-perception of attractiveness impacts life satisfaction with a particular emphasis on sex differences. The literature review will include a discussion of: (1) definitions of attractiveness, (2) methods for measuring attractiveness (3) a socio-cultural explanation of attractiveness, (4) the relationship between life satisfaction and attractiveness, (5) sex differences in attractiveness, and (6) the relationship between sex, attractiveness, and life satisfaction.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions & Effects of Attractiveness

The term attractiveness most commonly refers to the aesthetically pleasing physical attributes or traits of an individual. This typically includes both face and body. Attractiveness is often defined in terms of sexual attractiveness (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002). Physical attractiveness has been shown to be dependent upon three factors which include universal perceptions common to all human cultures, cultural and social aspects, and individual subjective preferences (Wikipedia, retrieved November 10, 2010). Additionally, physical attractiveness is not “singularly constructed” as an individual may have an attractive physique but an unattractive face (Swami, Furnham, Georgiades, & Pang, 2007, p. 97).

Attractive people are thought to be better liked and possess more “desirable personality traits” than unattractive people (Sparacino & Hansell, 1979, p.450). Attractive individual’s are generally viewed as good and are not blamed for “bad outcomes,” whereas unattractive individuals are often blamed for “bad outcomes” (Sparacino & Hansell, 1979, p.450). The “What Is Beautiful Is Good” phenomenon continues to remain embedded in society. This phenomenon affects individuals’ perceptions of others regarding positive personality traits and competence. Attractive individuals continue to be perceived more favorably and accurately. (Lorenzo, L. G., Biesanz, C. J., & Human, J. L., 2010).

In contemporary American society first impressions of people are based primarily on their physical appearance. An individual’s physical appearance is one of the first

things other people notice about him or her. If an individual is found to be attractive, positive stereotypes are usually associated with that individual; and if a person is found unattractive, then, negative stereotypes are often associated with the individual (Chia, Allred, Grossnickle, & Lee, 1998).

Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) conducted a study with 30 male and 30 female students at the University of Minnesota. Participants were given 3 envelopes: one containing a photo of an attractive individual, one containing a photo of an unattractive individual, and the final containing a photo of an individual of average attractiveness. Males and females only received photographs of same sex persons. After the participants opened their envelopes they were then instructed to rate the individuals in the photos on 27 different personality traits. After participants completed this task they were then asked to rate the individuals in the photos on five additional personality traits. Dion et al. found that attractive individuals were indeed viewed as more likeable and found to possess more socially desirable personality traits than unattractive individuals. Participants in this study reported that attractive individuals were more likely to have happy social and professional lives as well as to marry compared to unattractive individuals.

Aim of Study

The aim of this study was to determine if the, “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype truly exists (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Dion and colleagues also explored the notion that individuals perceived as attractive by others are thought to possess more positive personality traits and socially desirable behavior than unattractive individuals. Finally, the study examined if attractive individuals were viewed to be more successful and if they ultimately lead a better life than unattractive individuals. The

results of this study indicate that a “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype does exist and that attractive individuals are better liked than unattractive individuals and are believed to be good.

Dermer and Thiel (1975) replicated Dion and colleagues’ study “What Is Beautiful Is Good.” However, unlike the previously mentioned study, Dermer and Thiel only included female participants. They also included photographs of exceptionally attractive individuals unlike the prior study. Similar to the earlier study, Dermer and Thiel also found that individuals perceived to be attractive by others are thought to possess more positive personality traits and are expected to be better spouses, as well as to experience greater social satisfaction and happiness than unattractive individuals. However, they found that attractive individuals were also thought to be more vain, egotistical, unsympathetic, and arrogant. Attractive individuals were also believed to have higher rates of divorce than unattractive individuals.

A similar study conducted by Freeman (1985) did not support the, “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype. Rather, Freeman’s study found that individuals perceived to extremely attractive by others were found to possess the most male-valued characteristics as well as the least female-valued characteristics on the Sex-Role Stereotypes Questionnaire (Freeman, 1985). Freeman examined the “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype by defining “attractiveness” in terms of physique and “good” in terms of sex-role characteristics. Additionally, the aim of this study was to determine if physically attractive males and females were more likely to possess desired sex- role characteristics as well as if attractive individuals lead happier lives. Freeman’s study revealed that it is perhaps best to be moderately attractive rather than extremely attractive

or unattractive; moderately attractive individuals were found to experience more life happiness than extremely attractive and unattractive individuals (Freeman, 1985). Current research in the area of physical attractiveness has not investigated Freeman's claim that moderately attractive individuals are happier than extremely attractive individuals.

Participants in this study completed the Sex-Role Stereotype Questionnaire (Freeman, 1985). After completing this questionnaire participants then rated 6 sketches of stimulus persons on somatic attractiveness. They were then asked to rate them using a 42 item questionnaire. Like Dion's previous study participants in this study were also asked to indicate which stimulus person possessed the "most" and "least" of each socially valued trait. Lastly, participants rated the stimulus person in terms of "most" and "least" likely to experience marital happiness, parental happiness, social happiness, and occupational happiness.

Attractiveness Measures

Historically physical attractiveness has been difficult to measure as physical attractiveness is subjective in nature (Schmid, Marx, & Samal, 2008). However, attractiveness has been measured using facial symmetry as well as rating scales.

Facial Symmetry. The term facial symmetry refers to how symmetrical an individual's facial features are with one another on the vertical axis (each side of the face). Facial symmetry has been used in a number of studies measuring individuals' attractiveness as perceived by others. In such studies it has become common practice for researchers to use computers to morph and alter facial features (Schmid, et. al, 2008). Facial features of individuals have been altered in order to make faces appear more average (no extreme facial features) (Grammer & Thornhill, 1994).

A large body of research has shown that facial symmetry is a good measure of attractiveness, as there exists a preference for symmetrical faces (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002). Physical attractiveness has been measured using facial symmetry, which implies that the more symmetrical an individual's facial features are the more attractive the perception of the individual. From an evolutionary perspective facial symmetry, averageness, and non-average sexually dimorphic features (hormone markers) are related to human health. Evolutionary psychologists have long theorized there is a genetic basis for beauty as it relates to mate selection (Tassinary & Hansen, 1998). Additionally, individuals with such attractive features are believed to be healthy and therefore are found to be more desirable as mates and carry on "attractive" genes, thus leading evolutionary psychologists to theorize there is a biological basis for what is deemed attractive.

Measures of facial symmetry have been somewhat controversial as researchers have been unable to come to a consensus as to what is attractive. For example, Grammer and Thornhill (1994) found that there exists a controversy in research about what facial features determine an individual's level of attractiveness, as a result establishing inter-rater reliability has been difficult. Rating others' facial attractiveness is subjective. For example, Grammer and Thornhill's study included 52 females and 44 males who rated computerized faces on a scale ranging from 1 (least) to 7 (most) attractive (Gammer & Thornhill, 1994). While an average rating was obtained this rating was based solely on the rater's opinion, rather than on any objective measure.

Additionally, Grammer and Thornhill also point out that the majority of other studies measuring facial attractiveness standardize facial size by measuring the full length

of the face from the hairline to chin. Grammer and Thornhill argue that this is not an objective measure because individuals may determine the hair line starting at different points (Grammer and Thornhill, 1994). Other research has also identified mixed results when using facial symmetry to evaluate attractiveness (Noor & Evans, 2003). These past studies have found individual's with symmetrical faces to be perceived as more attractive, less attractive, and equally attractive as individuals with less symmetrical faces (Noor & Evans, 2003).

Waist-to-Hip Ratio. A less common measure of physical attractiveness used is the waist-to-hip-ratio. The waist-to-hip-ratio refers to the difference between a woman's waist measurement in inches to her hip measurement in inches. Tassianry and Hansen found that the waist-to-hip-ratio is a predictor of women's attractiveness. They found that both men and women find women with a moderate body size with a hip-to-waist ratio of .07 to be the most attractive. However, unlike evolutionary psychologists they found that physical attractiveness is not necessarily a predictor of mate value.

Evolutionary psychologists have suggested that the waist-to-hip-ratio is a good predictor of female attractiveness. Previous research has found that variations in woman's body size, body shape, and proportions significantly affect how others perceive and rate their attractiveness (Tassinary & Hansen, 1998). Taken from an evolutionary perspective attractiveness is determined by reproductive ability, thus leading to the theory that women who exhibit certain waist-to-hip ratios are found more attractive than other women (Singh, 1993). Tassinary and Hansen found that a waist-to-hip-ratio of .07 was deemed most attractive by others' ratings. Singh also found that a waist-to-hip-ratio of .07 was found to be most attractive. Singh's study was later replicated by Furnham, Dias,

and McClelland. Furnham and associates (1998) found that both men and women find a low WHR more attractive than a large WHR.

WHR has been shown to be a reliable measure. For example, this measure was used in Singh's study. In Singh's study no significant differences or systematic age effects in rankings of various attributes for body weight categories were found. However, this study did not include any female raters to rate the ideal female body type (Singh, 1993).

As previously discussed research on attractiveness primarily focuses on others' ratings rather than self-ratings of attractiveness. However, it is important to also examine how individuals rate their own attractiveness. Research has shown that women are more accurate than men at rating their attractiveness in line with how others' rate their attractiveness. A number of researchers believe this is due to the numerous cultural beauty standards and stereotypes placed on women.

Ratings of Attractiveness

Research on attractiveness has indicated that overall facial attractiveness, overall body shape and size, and height and weight greatly influence the judgments individuals make about others' attractiveness. Most of the research on ratings of attractiveness involve rating others' level of attractiveness as it relates to specific personality traits or psychological construct. Perceivers rate other individuals based upon their impressions of the targets' attributes and overall physical attractiveness (Holtzman & Strube, 2010).

When evaluating others' attractiveness, judgments are made most often by reviewing photographs of individuals and rating these individuals on some scale related to attractiveness. Researchers use head and shoulder photographs of participants and had

another group of participants rate their attractiveness on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (very unattractive) to 10 (very attractive) (Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008).

Ratings of physical attractiveness have been used to evaluate an individuals' own level of physical attractiveness as well as his or her partner's level of physical attractiveness. Primarily these types of ratings are used in studies that aim to either prove or dispel the, "Love-Is-Blind-Bias." The "Love-Is-Blind-Bias," refers to the notion that when in an intimate relationship an individual rates his or her partner's attractiveness as higher than one's own. Swami and associates conducted a study in which they examined the Love-Is-Blind- Bias. They compared ratings of partner physical attractiveness with one's self-ratings of attractiveness using the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (EPA). Swami and associates found that both male and female participants rated their partners' physical attractiveness significantly higher than their own. This phenomenon has become to be known as the "Love-Is-Blind- Bias" (Swami, et. al, 2007).

This phenomenon is believed to exist in part because positive illusions act as self-esteem builders, promote relationship investment, and nourish more stable romantic relationships (Swami, Stieger, Haubner, Voracek, & Furnahm, 2009; Swami, Waters, & Furnham, 2010). Research has also shown that positive illusions about one's partner have been shown to increase relationship satisfaction (Swami et al., 2009).

Swami and associates conducted a similar study in 2009 in order to further explore the "Love-Is-Blind-Bias". Like their previous study this study also used the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale to obtain both self-ratings and partner-ratings of attractiveness. Results of this study were consistent with their previous research. Swami and associates found that individuals rate their partners' attractiveness as significantly

higher than their own. This was true for both male and female participants. Additionally, this finding helps to confirm the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” (Swami et al., 2009). They also found that both men and women rated their partner’s physical attractiveness much higher than they rated themselves. Additionally, the impact of the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” differed significantly depending upon love styles, the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” was found to be more prominent in romantic love than it was with playful love relationships (Swami et al., 2009). This study also examined the interaction between the “Love-Is-Blind –Bias” and the Big Five Personality Factors. The Big Five Personality factors model is a hierarchical model of various personality traits including Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness, and Extraversion. It was found that individuals who possessed the personality trait of extroversion were more likely to attend to the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” (Swami et al., 2009).

In addition to the previous two studies discussed above Swami, Waters, and Furnham (2010) conducted a study using self-ratings of attractiveness, partner-ratings of attractiveness, and meta-perceptions of attractiveness. The Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale was also used in this study to obtain attractiveness ratings. Meta-perceptions of attractiveness were included in this study to evaluate how attractive participants thought their partners found them. Both male and female participants believed their partners would rate their attractiveness significantly lower than his or her self-ratings. However, the results of this study found that participants rated their partners’ attractiveness much higher than themselves. Additionally, this study also found that positive illusions held about one’s partner were impacted by the type of romantic relationship (love style) as well as specific personality traits. For example, it was found

that couples in romantic love were more likely to hold positive illusions about his or partner than couples in play love. In addition, it was also found that individuals with the personality trait of extroversion were more likely to hold positive illusions of his or her partner. Overall, this study found that there is support for the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” as participants have been shown to rate their partners attractiveness much higher than their own (Swami, et al. 2010).

Self Assessment

Self-ratings of attractiveness can be obtained using surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. In a study conducted by Haavio-Mannila and Purhonen (2001) participants rated their own attractiveness by completing surveys. For example, they answered questions regarding how sexually attractive they found themselves on a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement) to the following statement, “I am sexually attractive.” Ratings of sexual attractiveness were related to ratings of physical attractiveness.

Self-report instruments include the Body Esteem Scale (BES), State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES), and the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (EPA). The BES is a 35 item questionnaire that assesses an individual’s body esteem. This instrument has been divided into three subscales for men and women. The subscales for men include Physical Attractiveness, Upper Arm Strength, and Physical Condition. The subscales for women include Sexual Attractiveness, Weight Concerns, and Physical Condition. Individuals rate items assessing these areas on a 1 (have strong negative feelings) to 5 (have strong positive feelings) (Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, & Peugh, 2007). The SSES is a 20 item questionnaire that measures “momentary” self-esteem. Items are rated from 1 (not at all)

to 5 (extremely). This measure consists of three individual subscales including Social, Appearance, and Performance (Hobza, et. al 2007). The EPA is a questionnaire which asks participants questions regarding their overall physical attractiveness, facial attractiveness, body weight and size, and height using the bell curve with anchors attached to specific numbers. For example, respondents completing the instrument are told that a rating of 55 indicates very unattractive, 70 unattractive, 85 low average, 100 average, 115 high average, 130 attractive, 145 very attractive. Respondents were instructed to use this scale as a when evaluating their own attractiveness as well as their partner's attractiveness (Swami et. al 2010; Swami et al., 2007).

A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Attractiveness

Research on attractiveness based on others' perceptions has also lead to what is known as physical attractiveness stereotyping (PAS) effect, " the tendency to evaluate physically attractive people more positively than unattractive people, especially for traits associated with social skills" (Anderson et. al, 2008 p.352). Theories and stereotypes identified in past research continue to influence current and future research on physical attractiveness and its impact on individual's everyday life. A number of current studies on physical attractiveness using others' ratings are replications of previous studies; these current studies aim to either prove or dispel previous beliefs about the role physical attractiveness plays in people's lives.

Researching physical attractiveness and its relationship with happiness and life satisfaction is difficult. A large number of previously conducted studies focused solely on first impression formation, rather than the long term effects attractiveness has on relationship formation and an individual's overall happiness (Reis, Wheeler, Spigel,

Kernis, Nezlek, & Perri, 1982). For example, the popular, “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype was developed from research including only first impressions. The lack of depth in such studies provides little, if any detail about the importance of physical attractiveness in an individual’s everyday life.

Research has shown that cultural stereotypes regarding attractiveness have an adverse affect on an individual’s self- concept. Unfortunately, stereotypes exist in all cultures and societies and are often reinforced through the media (McCreary & Sadava, 1983). These next paragraphs will review some of the specific studies that have demonstrated the adverse affect the media has on both women and men’s self perceptions.

In a study designed to examine the effects of media images and self- esteem a high correlation was found between exposure to media and low self-concept. Research has shown that the media significantly affects women’s self-evaluations. The more exposure women have to media sources such as television and magazines the lower they rate their own physical attractiveness, as they begin to compare themselves to the “ideal female” (Hobza et. al, 2007). After exposure to media, North American women report higher rates of body dissatisfaction, with weight as the greatest area of concern. Additionally, a large body of research has shown that women refer to media sources to assess their attractiveness (Evans, 2003).

Evan’s study (2003) not only examined the negative effect the media has on women’s body satisfaction but also examined the effect it has on the perceptions of thin women. She hypothesized it is not only the “ thin-media ideals” that women strive to live

up to but also the life style of thin women portrayed by the media, thin women are portrayed as happy, successful, well liked, and desirable by the media.

While the media has been shown to greatly affect women's self-perception little research has been done to study the affect the media has on male's self-perception. The "ideal male" is described as muscular, wealthy, and successful. Past research has shown that females find more muscular males with defined chest and abs more attractive than less muscular and less lean males (Hobza et al, 2007). Over the years the "ideal man" has changed; the ideal man is now more muscular than in years past. The media has since taken this image and marketed it heavily to men. For example men's health and fitness magazines now feature men with very muscular physiques (Hobza et al., 2007).

Hobza et al. (2007) conducted a study to determine how the media affects men's self-perception and self-esteem. Hobza's study consisted of 94 undergraduate males. Participants viewed magazine slides and commercials depicting neutral images, ideal physical images of other men, and images depicting wealth; following viewing they completed the Body Esteem Scale (BES) and the State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES). Results are consistent with previous research that suggests the media does affect men. Men who viewed slides and commercials depicting "ideal" physical images of other men were more dissatisfied with their physique.

Additionally, attractiveness has been explored in status generalization theory and implicit personality theory. Status generalization theory describes the relationship between different attributes and how they combine "to influence generalized expectation state, specific expectation states, and (ultimately) interaction patterns" (Jackson, Hunter, & Hodge, 1995, p.109). Implicit personality theory refers to the notion that "hypothetical

cognitive structures whose primary components are personal attributes in inferential relations; these relations specify the degree to which attribute covary” (Jackson et al., 1995, p. 110). Jackson, Hunter, and Hodge explored this notion in their study involving physical attractiveness and intellectual competence. This study used others’ ratings of individuals to evaluate participants’ perceived attractiveness as well as perceived competence. The findings of this study follow principles from both the status generalization theory and implicit personality theory. Jackson, Hunter, and Hodge found that attractive individuals were thought to be more intellectually competent than unattractive individuals by raters (1995).

Correlates of Attractiveness

Personality. Attractive individuals and unattractive individuals have few dispositional differences. For example, attractive and unattractive individuals as perceived by others do not significantly differ on sociability, dominance, self-absorption or manipulateness (Feingold, 1992). However, the attractiveness stereotype which states that attractive individuals are better liked and more sociable, only perpetuates the false belief that large personality differences do exist between attractive and unattractive individuals (Feingold, 1992).

Adams conducted a study exploring the relationship between physical attractiveness, personality, and peer pressure. Both peer and self-ratings of attractiveness were collected on the following domains: facial attractiveness, body form, and general appearance. Adams found that physically attractive individuals were more likely than unattractive individuals to resist peer pressure. No significant differences between

attractive and unattractive individuals were found with regard to personality traits (Adams, 1977).

Research conducted by Noor and Evans (2003) explored the relationship between attractiveness and personality. They found that facial symmetry did not correlate highly with attractiveness. However, facial symmetry was found to impact personality ratings in particular neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Individuals with asymmetrical faces were rated as more neurotic than individuals with more symmetrical faces (Noor and Evans, 2003).

Depression. Self-perceived attractiveness has been linked to depression and lower self-esteem as unattractive individuals have been found to have higher rates of depression and poor life-satisfaction than attractive individuals. One model that helps to explain this finding is the Self-Esteem model. This model refers to the notion that self-perceptions of attractiveness are largely determined by an individual's global self-esteem. Individuals who have higher levels of self-esteem rate themselves as more attractive than individual's with low self-esteem (Feingold, 1992). Noels, Cash, and Winstead also found a link between attractiveness and depression. Their study found that individuals who reported lower levels of satisfaction with his or her body and saw themselves as less physically attractive reported higher levels of depression than individuals with higher levels of body satisfaction (Noels, Cash, & Winstead, 1985).

Anxiety. Appearance anxiety has been linked to self-perceived attractiveness. Appearance anxiety refers to the degree to which an individual feels anxious about his or her appearance in a variety of settings (Stella, 1998). Additionally, research has also

identified a link between social anxiety and self-perceived physical attractiveness (Zakahi, Adkins, & Duran, 1994).

Life Satisfaction and Attractiveness

Life satisfaction is a multifaceted concept, as it is determined by many aspects of our lives. Life satisfaction “refers to a cognitive judgmental process”, and it is during this process that an individual compares his or her situation to what is thought to be the ideal or standard situation (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985, p. 71). It is through this comparison process that an individual determines how satisfied he or she is with his or her life.

Physical attractiveness affects an individual’s perception of himself or herself as well as how she or he is perceived by others. Research suggests that physical attractiveness can be linked to an individual’s level of achievement, status, and life satisfaction (Umberson & Hughes, 1987).

Life satisfaction has been found to strongly correlate with an individual’s level of self-perceived attractiveness. Individuals perceived to be as attractive by others were found to have more life satisfaction than unattractive people (Mathes & Kahn, 1975). It has been theorized that attractive people are better liked, have more opportunities, and are more successful than unattractive people. Individuals who are perceived as attractive by others are viewed more positively by others and receive more empathy from others than unattractive individuals. They are also more likely to marry “high status spouses.” Attractive people are also respected more in positions of authority than unattractive individuals. All of these factors interact to increase the life satisfaction of attractive individuals (Mathes & Kahn, 1975).

Mathes and Kahn (1975) investigated the relationship between attractiveness as perceived by others, happiness, psychological health, and self-esteem. They conducted a study with 110 and 101 women all of which were from Iowa State University. They divided the participants into groups of 35 and had them fill out questionnaires to assess their happiness, neuroticism, and self-esteem. Participant's physical attractiveness was also secretly rated by two male and two female judges. The ratings ranged from "very unattractive" to "very attractive." The reliability of the judges' ratings was .81. Mathes and Kahn found that for women physical attractiveness correlated with happiness, psychological health, neuroticism, and self-esteem. However, this correlation was not found for men.

Individuals who are perceived as attractive by others have also been found to engage in more social interactions than unattractive individuals (Reis et. al, 1982). Reis and colleagues constructed a study to determine the role an individual's perceived physical attractiveness has on his or her social interaction as well as "social traits responsible for this association" (p. 985). They found that perceived physical attractiveness impacted the quantity of social interactions more so for males than for females. They also found that males perceived to be physically attractive engaged in more social interactions than males who perceived as unattractive, but no differences in rates of social interactions were found for females. Perceived attractiveness was also found to relate positively with the quality of social interactions for both male and female participants. For example, attractive males' social interactions were more intimate than unattractive males' and attractive females' social interactions were more pleasant than unattractive females' social interactions. Reis and colleagues further found that the more

attractive an individual is perceived the more assertive he or she was; a positive correlation between assertiveness and quality and quantity of social interactions was found for both sexes.

Research on the importance of physical attractiveness has elicited numerous theories. One of the most popular theories associated with this research is the theory that attractive people are good. Diener and colleagues (1995) popularized this theory; their study found that attractive individuals are believed to possess more positive attributions than unattractive individuals leading to the “What Is Beautiful Is Good” stereotype.

Diener, Wolsic, and Fujita conducted three studies in 1995 to examine the effect others perceptions of attractiveness has on an individual’s subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, positive affect, and lack of negative affect. In their first study 221 students from the University of Illinois were included, 112 women and 109 men. The aim of this study was to determine if a correlation between physical attractiveness and subjective well-being exist. Participants in this study completed three questionnaires including the, *The Satisfaction With Life Scale*, *The Fordyce Sixty-Second Measure of Happiness*, and an “affect adjective scale.” *The Satisfaction With Life Scale* and the *Fordyce Sixty-Second Measure of Happiness* assesses an individual’s overall or global happiness. The affect adjective scale assesses an individual’s fear, anger, sadness, guilt, joy and affection. Several measures of physical attractiveness were used in this study. First participants rated their own physical attractiveness on a scale ranging from 1 to 10. They were also photographed and videotaped. Participant’s photographs were rated on a 10-point scale by 10 raters. Their videotapes were also rated based upon how they interacted with one another. Lastly, participants had at least three family members rate

their attractiveness on a seven point scale (1 much below average- 7 much above average). Diener et al. found a low correlation between subjective well-being and physical attractiveness; therefore, they conducted two additional studies to determine if the low correlations could be replicated.

In their second, study attractiveness ratings were made in more extreme conditions including a natural state, adorned versus unadorned state, and a smiling versus neutral expression (Deiner, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995). In the natural state participants were in the “come-as-you-are” condition. The adorned state was similar to the natural state with the exception that facial expressions were manipulated. In the unadorned state participants were instructed to cover their hair and clothing and remove all jewelry and cosmetics. This study also found a low correlation between subjective well-being and physical attractiveness.

The third study was similar to the second study with the exception that full body photographs were used as well as poster board was used to conceal participants hair and clothing rather than caps and laboratory coats (Diener et. al, 1995). Low correlations between subjective well-being and physical attractiveness were also found in this study.

Dion et al. found that there is little to no correlation between physical attractiveness and subjective-well being among college students. Their results indicate that physical attractiveness has little to do with an individual’s life satisfaction and happiness. Overall, all three studies found that individuals perceived as attractive by others do not lead happier lives than individuals perceived to be unattractive by others.

Gender and Attractiveness

Research has shown that the affect self-perceived physical attractiveness has on an individual's self perception is different depending upon the sex of the individual. Men and women have been shown to hold different ideal about what is physically attractive. These differing views are due in part to societal stereotypes defining what is attractive for men and women. These stereotypes suggest that large muscular masculine males are physically attractive and that thin "waif" like women is physically attractive (McCreary & Sadava, 2001). These stereotypes are reinforced on a regular basis through various means such as television, magazines, and celebrities (McCreary & Sadava, 2001).

McCreary and Sadva (2001) conducted a study using a sample of 813 men and women ranging in age from 19-39. This study explored the relationship between weight, self-perceived attractiveness, and life satisfaction. Participants in this study reported their height and weight. The Body Mass Index (BMI) scale was used to classify participants in weight categories such as underweight, normal weight, and overweight. Participants also indicated the weight category with which they identified with as well as reported their perceptions of their own physical attractiveness, life satisfaction, and health. McCreary and Sadava found that significant gender differences existed between relative and perceived weight. They found that men who are classified in the normal weight range as determined by their BMI thought of themselves as underweight while women in this category thought of themselves as overweight. They also found gender differences between relative weight and its effect on psychosocial factors. For example, underweight women viewed themselves as more attractive while underweight men viewed themselves as less attractive. Overweight men viewed themselves as significantly more attractive than did overweight women. McCreary and Sadava also discovered that both men and

women who thought of themselves as overweight rated themselves as less attractive than did individuals who classified themselves as normal weight. Additionally, life satisfaction ratings were higher for individuals who perceived themselves to be of normal weight. One of the most significant findings of this study is that when participants had misconceptions about their BMI category these misconceptions reflected cultural stereotypes.

Research conducted by Schmid et al. (2008), suggests that when it comes to facial attractiveness males and females rate faces similarly. Males rated faces slightly higher than females, but both men and women rated women's faces higher than they did men. Men and women rated famous faces more closely than they did non-famous faces. Both men and women have similar opinions of what facial features are attractive (Schmid, 2008).

However, when it comes to rating their own level of attractiveness males and females' accuracy differs. A study conducted by Rand and Hall (1983) found that women are more accurate at assessing their attractiveness than males. Rand and Hall's study consisted of fifty-five participants from John Hopkins University, 24 females and 31 males. Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of 6 items to assess his or her physical attractiveness, perceived attractiveness, facial attractiveness, body, voice, and personality. All participants were photographed and their photos were given to judges to rate their attractiveness. After the photographs were rated participants' ratings were then compared with the judges' ratings to determine their accuracy. Men's self ratings of attractiveness indicate they were less aware of how physically attractive others perceive them, while women's ratings indicate they were much more accurate.

Rand and Hall (1983), attribute these differences to the possibility that women may have more defined beauty and attractive standards than do men. They also theorize that our culture places greater emphasis on women's physical appearance than men and more stereotypes exist for women than for men. For example, Rand and Hall suggest that one's physical appearance is more important to women than men; they also theorize that based upon our culture women learn from an early age what is attractive and how to assess their attractiveness in order to follow cultural beauty standards. According to Rand and Hall the "physical attractiveness stereotype" does not place as much emphasis on men's attractiveness as women therefore men may be less attune with evaluating their attractiveness and they have less practice doing so.

Grammer and Thorhill (1994) conducted a study to test their hypothesis that men and women both prefer averageness and facial symmetry in a mate. Their study was aided by the use of computers to create composite faces (multiple individual's faces morphed together to create an "average" symmetrical face) of individuals to determine the affect averageness and symmetry have on others' attractiveness ratings. Facial symmetry was determined using both overall facial symmetry (focuses on entire face) and central facial symmetry (focuses on the difference between midpoints of adjacent lines, especially in the center of the face). Averageness was later determined using the means of both facial and central facial symmetry. The results of their study indicate that men find composite female faces more attractive than non composite female faces, while females find non composite faces of males more attractive than composite faces of males.

Schmid, Marx, and Samal (2008), conducted a study using facial symmetry, neoclassical cannons, and golden ratio to determine what defines facial attractiveness.

Neoclassical cannons measure the proportions of facial features using “defined ratios”. For example, nose length should be equal to the ear length. Their study focused on the shape and geometry of “real” faces rather than morphed computer images of faces. They found that men and women generally agree on what features are considered attractive, however men were found to rate others’ attractiveness higher than women. Schimid and colleagues also found that facial symmetry does relate to attractiveness but not to the same degree as “proportions defined by the neoclassical cannons and golden rations” (Schimid et al. p. 2716, 2008).

Gender, Attractiveness, and Life Satisfaction

Specific research has not been conducted exploring the relationship between gender, self- perceived attractiveness, and life satisfaction. Research that has been conducted has primarily focused on the relationship between others’ perceptions of attractiveness and individual’s quality of life.

Summary

Attractiveness, life satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being have been found to be highly correlated (Umberson & Hughes, 1987). Attractive individuals have reported higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness in a number of aspects of life including work, friendships, and intimate relationships (Anderson e. al, 2008). Research has shown that physically attractive individuals engage in social interactions more often than less attractive individuals. However, the rate of social interaction was greater for attractive males than for attractive females (Reis et.al, 1982). Attractiveness has also been found to correlate highly with achievement. Attractive individuals have been found to achieve higher levels of occupational success than unattractive individuals (Anderson

et. al, 2008). Previous research on attractiveness has been limited as only others' ratings rather than self-ratings were used to obtain attractiveness levels.

Researching physical attractiveness and its relationship with happiness and life satisfaction is difficult. A large number of previously conducted studies focused solely on first impression formation, rather than the long term effects attractiveness has on relationship formation and an individual's overall happiness (Reis et.al, 1982). For example, the popular, "What Is Beautiful Is Good" stereotype was developed from research including only first impressions. The lack of depth in such studies provides little if any detail about the importance of physical attractiveness in an individual's everyday life.

While research on physical attractiveness and life satisfaction has shown that a positive correlation exists between these variables, this research has been limited to others' ratings and perceptions of attractiveness rather than self-rated measures of attractiveness. This narrowed focus has limited the extent to which this research can be generalized, as it is also important to consider self-ratings of attractiveness. Another problem with past and current research is the fact that the research is primarily correlational in nature which implies that attractiveness is related to certain variables but it cannot prove that a causal relationship exists.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have been conducted exploring the relationship between attractiveness and life satisfaction. Research has found that females are more likely to place greater emphasis on their appearance than males (Rand & Hall, 1983). Research has also found that more beauty stereotypes exist for women than do for men (Rand &

Hall, 1983). Men were found to have higher rates of life satisfaction regardless of physical attractiveness when compared with women (Mathes & Kahn, 1975).

The current study will examine the relationship between physical attractiveness and overall life satisfaction; specifically, it will examine how an individual's self assessment of his or her perceived attractiveness correlates with his or her life satisfaction. This study will also examine possible sex differences on participants' self ratings of attractiveness compared to their ratings on life satisfaction. The following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis #1. A positive correlation between perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction will exist.

Hypothesis #2 Sex differences on ratings of attractiveness will exist, with men rating themselves as more attractive than women rating themselves.

Hypothesis #3 Attractiveness is a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males.

Exploratory

Sex difference on partners' level of attractiveness will exist, with men rating their partners as more attractive than women rating their partners.

Relationship between perception of partner attractiveness and self-perception of attractiveness.

Sex differences in perception self-attractiveness in specific domains.

Sex differences in perception partner attractiveness in specific domains.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Participants

One hundred and ninety college students (108 females and 62 males) participated in this study. The mean age was 18.74 (SD=1.52). The mean age for males was 19.01 (SD=1.71). The mean for females was 18.59 (SD=1.39). Participants were divided into groups based on their self-reported relationship status as Single/Never Married, Married/Engaged, and currently in a relationship. Of the 136 participants classified as Single/Never Married 20 were excluded from the study on partner attractiveness as they reported, "Never been in a relationship." The sample included 84.7% first year undergraduate, 10.5% second year undergraduate, 5% third year undergraduate, 2% fourth year undergraduate, and 2% fifth year or higher undergraduate. The sample was predominately white (85.3%), with 7.4% African American, 2.1% Hispanic/Latino, 2.6% Asian Pacific Islander, .5% Native American/Alaskan, and 2.1% other.

Materials

Participants were asked to complete a demographics form, a measure to assess self-perceived attractiveness and other-perceived attractiveness, and a measure of overall life satisfaction. The Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale, (Swami, 2007) was used as measure of self-perceived attractiveness. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to assess the level of overall life satisfaction of participants.

Demographics Form. The demographics form (see Appendix C) was to determine participants' gender, age, class rank, and GPA.

The Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale. The Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (See Appendix E) is an instrument used to assess how attractive an individual perceives himself or herself to be. This instrument has a normal distribution of scores. This instrument instructs participants to rate their overall physical attractiveness, facial attractiveness, body weight or size, body shape or figure, and height (Swami et. al, 2010). In addition, this instrument provides respondents with a guide to rate their attractiveness as well as others' attractiveness. Each score on this instrument is compared to the normal distribution which has a Mean (M) of 100 and a Standard Deviation (SD) of 15. Based on this guide a rating of 55 is considered very unattractive, 70 unattractive, 85 low average, 100 average, 115 high average, 130 attractive, and 145 as very attractive (Swami et.al, 2007).

Since this is a fairly new instrument, little reliability and validity information exist. This instrument has been used in a number of studies since its development and has proven to be a good measure of physical attractiveness (Swami et. al, 2007). A majority of the research using the EPA is on the "Love-Is-Blind-Bias." The EPA may be used to obtain self-ratings of attractiveness as well as others' ratings. Unlike, many instruments measuring attractiveness such as the BES, the EPA uses the same scale for both men and women. This is beneficial because this study will be comparing men's and women's attractiveness ratings with their life satisfaction ratings. Therefore, it is important that the scale used the same measures for men and women for comparison purposes.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Appendix C)* is an instrument used to assess individuals' global life-satisfaction (Diener et. al, 1985). This instrument defines life satisfaction as a cognitive judgmental process and is based on

an individual's perception of his or her quality of life compared with his or her circumstances (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). However, the SWLS does not assess satisfaction with life on domains such as health or finances.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale developed by Ed Diener is a 5 item self-report, 7 point Likert-style instrument that measures an individual's global happiness or life satisfaction. Options range from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" to assess an individual's satisfaction with his or her life. Scores on the SWLS are determined by adding the total number of points assigned to each question based upon an individual's response. After points are totaled scores may then be compared to categories describing life satisfaction including: "5-9 Extremely dissatisfied," "10-14 Dissatisfied," "15-19 Slightly dissatisfied," "20 Neutral," "21-25 Slightly satisfied," "26-30 Satisfied," and "31-35 Extremely satisfied."

Each of the 5 questions gives participants seven choices for their response, which are "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Slightly disagree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Slightly agree", "Agree", and "Strongly agree". Some items are: "In most ways my life is close to my ideal", "The conditions of my life are excellent", and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life." As demonstrated through these examples, items are worded only positively.

The SWLS provides normative data that was based upon a diverse sample including older adults, prisoners, individuals under inpatient care for alcohol abuse, abused women, psychotherapy clients, elderly caregivers or demented spouses, and persons with physical disabilities, as well as college student samples (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The SWLS has strong internal reliability, Diener and colleagues reported a

coefficient of .87. Test-retest reliability found no significant changes over 2-month period on measures of life satisfaction; a coefficient of .82 was reported at this time (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Procedure

The Institutional Review Board at Western Carolina University approved this study. All participants participated in person and signed an informed consent form (See Appendix B). Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to explore attraction and that they would be rating their attractiveness as well as their partner's attractiveness on a specific scale. All participants were administered two questionnaires at a University classroom location using the Qualtrics data collection and analysis programs. The questionnaires used in this study were not counterbalanced.

Questionnaires were not counterbalanced because it was not believed that the order of the questionnaires would affect the responses of the participants. Participants first completed the demographics form followed by the life satisfaction scale, attractiveness scale, and partner attractiveness scale if applicable.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

To examine hypothesis one, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between life satisfaction and perception of self-attractiveness. To test hypothesis two, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine sex differences in self-perception of attraction.

An ANCOVA was used to examine the nature of the relationship between sex, attractiveness, and life-satisfaction. The ANCOVA allows for an understanding of the interaction effect between sex of participant and attractiveness on life satisfaction. It allows for us to look at sex differences while controlling for perceived attractiveness. As part of this analysis, a correlation coefficient between attractiveness and life-satisfaction was also obtained. Additional exploratory analyses were conducted to further examine relationships between the variables in the study.

Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant, positive correlation between scores on a life satisfaction scale (SWLS) and scores on self-perception of attractiveness (EPA). Therefore, high scores on the SWLS would be related to high scores on the EPA and low scores on the SWLS would be related to low scores on the EPA. To determine the relationship between life satisfaction and perception of self-attractiveness, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated.

Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a significant, small correlation between the two variables, $r = .23, p = .001$.

This means that high levels of life satisfaction are related to high levels of perceived attractiveness and low levels of life satisfaction are related to low levels of perceived self-attractiveness. Self-perception helps to explain nearly 5.3% of the variance in participants' life satisfaction. Therefore, the results of this study provide some support for the first hypothesis, though self-perception accounts for only a small portion of variance in life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between males and females on rating of self-perception of attractiveness. It was expected that males would rate themselves higher on attractiveness than females. To examine sex differences in self-perception of attraction, an independent-samples t-test was conducted.

Preliminary analysis was performed to ensure no violation of the assumption of equal variances. There was no significant difference between males and females self-perceived attractiveness, $t(188) = .40, p = .69$. The mean score obtained by males, 103.54 (SD = 15.34) did not differ from the mean score obtained by females, 102.56 (SD = 16.39).

Hypothesis 3

It was hypothesized that attractiveness is a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males. It was expected that differences would not be observed on life satisfaction when controlling for perceived attractiveness. An ANCOVA was conducted to examine differences in life satisfaction between males and females when controlling for perceived attractiveness. The independent variable was sex of participant and the dependent variable was life satisfaction. The covariate was self-perception of attraction.

There was not a significant difference [$F(1,189) = 2.79, p = .097$] between males and females. The mean score for males on life satisfaction was 24.88 ($SD = 6.21$), while the mean score for females was 26.23 ($SD = 5.56$).

The covariate of self-perception of attractiveness was significant [$F(1, 189) = 10.93, p = .001$]. This suggests that when you control for self-perception of attractiveness, males and females do not differ on life satisfaction. While the covariate of self-perception of attractiveness was significant, earlier analysis ($t = .40$) did not suggest sex differences between males and females on self-perception of attractiveness.

Exploratory Analyses

Sex differences in perception of partner's attractiveness. To examine sex differences in perception of partner attractiveness, an independent-samples t-test was conducted.

Preliminary analysis was performed to ensure no violation of the assumption of equal variances. There was a significant difference between males and females perception of their partner's attractiveness, $t(168) = 3.03, p = .003$. The mean score obtained by males, 122.46 ($SD = 17.83$) was significantly higher than the mean score obtained by females, 114.20 ($SD = 16.64$).

Relationship between perception of partner attractiveness and self-perception of attractiveness. To determine the relationship between perception of partner attractiveness and perception of self-attractiveness, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated.

Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a significant, large correlation between the two variables, $r = .52, p < .001$.

This means that high levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to high levels of self-perceived attractiveness and low levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to low levels of self-perceived self-attractiveness. Self-perception helps to explain nearly 27.35% of the variance in participants' self-perception of attractiveness.

Further analysis revealed that self-perception of attractiveness could be used to predict perception of partner attractiveness. A linear regression was significant [$R^2 = .273, F(1,168) = 63.16, p < .001$]. This model accounts for 27.3% of the variance in perception of partner attractiveness.

Sex differences in perception of self-attractiveness in specific domains. To examine differences between males and females on specific domains of self-perception of attractiveness, a MANOVA was run. The dependent variables were overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. The independent variable was sex of participant.

The results of a MANOVA were not statistically significant [$F(5,184) = .725, p = .605$]. Males and females did not significantly differ in their self-perception of the attractiveness of the various domains. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations by sex.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Males and Females: Self-Attraction

Dependent Variable	Male	Female
Overall physical attractiveness	106.91(2.37)	106.07(1.77)
Overall facial attractiveness	104.21(2.41)	104.45(1.80)
Overall bodyweight or size	104.93(2.97)	100.12(2.22)
Overall body shape or figure	102.88(2.95)	100.88(2.20)
Overall height	108.37(2.83)	106.74(2.11)

Sex differences in perception partner attractiveness in specific domains. To examine differences between males and females on specific domains of perceived partner attractiveness, a MANOVA was run. The dependent variables were overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. The independent variable was sex of participant.

The results revealed an overall MANOVA that was not statistically significant [$F(5,164) = 1.18, p = .32$]. Males and females did not significantly differ in their perception of their partner's attractiveness across the various domains. See Table 2 for means and standard deviations by sex.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Males and Females: Partner Attraction

Dependent Variable	Male	Female
Overall physical attractiveness	124.32(2.42)	120.64(1.83)
Overall facial attractiveness	121.95(2.65)	116.61(2.00)
Overall bodyweight or size	124.44(2.73)	118.43(2.07)
Overall body shape or figure	124.60(2.78)	117.32(2.11)
Overall height	123.89(2.85)	120.94(2.16)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Physical attractiveness has been shown to permeate many aspects of an individual's life. It has been linked to life satisfaction as attractive individuals have been found to have higher rates of life satisfaction than unattractive individuals (Umberson & Hughes, 1987). Attractive individuals have also been found to have higher levels of success and report higher levels of overall subjective well being (Umberson & Hughes, 1987).

Research has also found that positive stereotypes are associated with attractive individuals while negative stereotypes are associated with unattractive individuals (Chia, Allred, Grossnickle, & Lee, 1998). This finding has been supported by additional research conducted by Dion, Bershied, and Walster. Dion and colleagues found that the, "What Is Beautiful Is Good" stereotype exists and that attractive individuals are perceived to possess more positive personality traits (Dion, Bershied, & Walster, 1972). Cultural and societal stereotypes have been found to greatly influence individuals' perception of what is attractive. These stereotypes exist in all cultures and societies and have been found to have an adverse effect on individuals' self-concept (McCreary & Sadava, 1983).

Research on attractiveness has speculated that attractiveness significantly influences an individual's personality. However, this claim has been disputed as current research has found attractive and unattractive individuals do not differ significantly on sociability, dominance, self-absorption or manipulateness (Feingold, 1992). However,

attractiveness has been linked to depression. Unattractive individuals have been found to have higher rates of depression than attractive individuals (Feingold, 1992).

While previous research on attractiveness has been limited to others' ratings of attractiveness rather than self-ratings of attractiveness, this study used participants' self-ratings of attractiveness. First, the study used the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (EPA) to obtain self-ratings of attractiveness, as well as, ratings of partners' attractiveness. Second, this study used the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) to obtain participants overall satisfaction with his or her life. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and overall life satisfaction.

According to previous research, it was expected that attractive individuals would experience higher levels of life satisfaction than unattractive individuals (Deiner et. al, 1995). It was also expected that the "Love-is-Blind-Bias" which suggest that both males and females hold positive illusions about their partners (Swami et. al, 2009), would be supported.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that a positive correlation between scores on perceived self-attractiveness and scores on life satisfaction will exist. The current study found that self-perceived attractiveness is significantly correlated with life satisfaction. The current study confirms previous research in this area (Mathes & Kahn, 1975, Diener et. al, 1995) that attractive individuals are happier and experience higher levels of overall subjective well being. While there was a significant relationship between the variables, the

correlation was relatively weak. The self-perceived attractiveness accounted for only 5.3% of the variance in life satisfaction.

The scores obtained on both the life satisfaction scale and the self-perception of attractiveness scale were generally in the satisfied or average range. It is possible that there may be a stronger relationship between life satisfaction and self-perception of attractiveness for individuals scoring at the extremes on self-perception of attractiveness. In other words, it is possible that for individuals that score well below average on and individuals that score well above average on self-perception of attractiveness that there is a stronger relationship to life satisfaction. This would be an interesting hypothesis to test with a sample that does not have a restricted range of scores.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that a significant difference between males and females on ratings of self-perception of attractiveness would exist, with men rating themselves as more attractive than women. The current study did not support this hypothesis. No significant difference between the sex of the individual and ratings of attractiveness was found. This differed from previous research (McCreary & Sadava, 2001), which found that overweight men perceived themselves as normal weight while normal weight females perceived themselves as overweight. Gender differences were also found between relative weight and its effect on psychosocial factors. This study suggests that men have a tendency to rate themselves as more attractive than women despite being overweight.

Previous research has found that females are more self critical than males when it comes to rating their attractiveness. Females of average weight have been found to

classify themselves as overweight while average weight men classify themselves as underweight (McCreary & Sadava, 2001). The current study did not support these findings. It is again, important to note that the scores for this sample were primarily in the average range. This suggests that the males and females that completed the self-perception of attractiveness were generally individuals that perceive their attractiveness to be normative. The standard deviation for both males and females was consistent with the normal curve, suggesting that majority of the sample was within one standard deviation. It would be interesting to use a sample that had more variability in scores to look for discrepancies between males and females.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis stated that attractiveness is a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males. To test this hypothesis, scores on life satisfaction between males and females were compared while controlling for self-perception of attractiveness. The results revealed that self-perception of attractiveness was a significant covariate (as expected given the results of hypothesis one), but that there were not sex differences. This differed from previous research (Mathes & Khan, 1975, Rand & Hall, 1983), which found females place more importance on their physical attractiveness than males. It was hypothesized that attractiveness is a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males.

The relationship between life satisfaction and self-perception of attractiveness did not strongly correlate. This suggests that while there is a relationship between life satisfaction and self-perception that it is weak. An individual's self-perceived attractiveness does not greatly influence his or her life satisfaction. It is important to note

that the scores for this sample were limited. Scores on life satisfaction were primarily in the average range. This suggests that the males and females who completed the life satisfaction scale were generally individuals that perceive their life satisfaction to be in the normative range.

Exploratory Analyses

Sex differences in perception of partner's attractiveness. Sex differences on perception of partners' level of attractiveness was examined. As expected, men were found to rate their partners as more attractive than women rated their partners.

Research has shown that males value physical attractiveness in a partner more than females (Singh, 1993). According to evolutionary psychologist both men and women chose a mate based on reproductive ability. Women most often choose men who can provide financial resources while men choose partners based on their physical attractiveness (Singh, 1993). Feingold's research has supported evolutionary psychologists' theories as he has also found that men value physical attractiveness more in a romantic partner than women (1992).

Relationship between perception of partner attractiveness and self-perception of attractiveness. High levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to high levels of self-perceived attractiveness and low levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to low levels of self-perceived self-attractiveness. Self-perception helps to explain nearly 27.35% of the variance in participants' self-perception of attractiveness. This finding suggest that the more attractive an individual the more attractive his or her partner will be.

An interesting finding in the current study was that the mean scores obtained on the partner perceived attractiveness scale were generally higher than mean scores for self-perception of attractiveness. However, this was not tested statistically but the trend appeared to exist. While this finding is not consistent with previous research it did provide support for the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias” (Swami et. al, 2007). Swami and colleagues found that both men and women rate their partner as more attractive than themselves. This phenomenon is referred to as the “Love-Is-Blind-Bias,” which is the tendency for individuals to hold positive illusions about their romantic partner (Swami, 2007).

Sex differences in perception self-attractiveness in specific domains. Males and females did not significantly differ in their self-perception of attractiveness on the following domains: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. Both males and females rated their attractiveness on the various domains in the average range.

Sex differences in perception partner attractiveness in specific domains. Males and females did not significantly differ in their perception of their partner’s attractiveness across the domains of: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. Both males and females rated their partner’s attractiveness in the high average range on all domains. So, while males rate their partner’s as more attractive than females rate their partners, there were not identifiable differences on specific domains.

Summary

Research has found that others’ perceptions of an individual’s physical attractiveness are important in a number of aspects of his or her life. It has been linked to

an individual's happiness, life satisfaction, success, and overall subjective well being (Umberson & Hughes, 1987). Previous research has also found that individuals who are perceived to as attractive by others consider themselves attractive are better liked and thought to possess more positive personality traits than unattractive individuals (Freeman, 1985). Moreover, attractive individuals have also been found to have higher levels of occupational success than unattractive individuals (Anderson et. al, 2008). In addition, the Love-is-Blind Bias", which refers to the notion that when in a romantic relationship individuals tend to hold positive illusions about his or her partner, has also been supported (Swami, et. al, 2009). Research on this phenomenon has found that individuals rate their partners' attractiveness as significantly higher than their own, and this is true for both males and females (Swami, et. al, 2009). It was expected that the results of the current study would support the previous findings on attractiveness and life satisfaction, as well as, provide support for the, "Love-is-Blind-Bias."

The current study found that gender was not a significant influence upon self-perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction. A significant difference was not found for the second hypothesis of this study, which stated that sex differences on attractiveness would exist, with men rating themselves as more attractive than women. This differed from previous research (McCreary & Sadava, 2001) which found that men generally rate themselves as more physically attractive than women. In addition, attractiveness was not found to be a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males. Results revealed that sex differences on partners' level of attractiveness exist, with men rating their partners as more attractive than women rating their partners. Additionally, both men and women who perceived themselves to be physically attractive were found to have

higher rates of life satisfaction than individuals who considered themselves as unattractive. This confirms previous research that suggested physical attractiveness strongly correlated with life satisfaction (Diener, Wolsie, & Fujita, 1995).

In summary, a positive correlation between perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction was found. Both males and females who rated themselves as physically attractive had higher self-reported rates of life satisfaction than males and females who rated themselves as unattractive. However, the relationship between perceived attractiveness and life satisfaction is weak. An individual's perceived attractiveness does not greatly influence their overall life satisfaction. In addition, no sex differences were found with regards to men's and women's ratings of self-perceived attractiveness. Attractiveness was not found to be a better predictor of life satisfaction for females than for males as suggested by previous research. Significant difference between males and females perception of their partner's attractiveness was found. Men rated their partner's as more physically attractive than women rated their partner. This finding was not consistent with previous research. This study also found that high levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to high levels of self-perceived attractiveness and low levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to low levels of self-perceived attractiveness. Further analysis revealed that self-perception of attractiveness could be used to predict perception of partner attractiveness. These findings were not cited in previous research. Males and females did not significantly differ in their self-perception of their attractiveness on the following domains: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height. It was also found that males and females did not significantly differ in

their perception of their partner's attractiveness across the following domains: overall physical attractiveness, overall facial attractiveness, overall body weight or size, overall body shape or figure, and overall height.

Limitations of the Study

The current study holds several limitations. The overall small sample size is a notable limitation of this study. The small sample size may not be representative of the general population. In addition, all participants in this study were recruited from the same university, and results may vary by different populations. Majority of participants in this study were Caucasian first-year college students, thus this study may not be representative of a diverse population. It is possible that a more urban population may have different results. Additionally, a larger sample size may have provided more representative data. Therefore, the results of this study may be difficult to generalize to different populations. In addition, this study did not examine the extent the "Love-is-Blind-Bias" plays in the relationships between same sex couples. Therefore, based on the small and limited sample results it may be difficult to generalize to the general population.

The scores obtained from this sample were restricted. Scores obtained on both the life satisfaction and the self-perception of attractiveness scale were generally in the satisfied or average range. If these scores were not restricted the results may have differed. For example, if some scores were at the extremes on life satisfaction and self-perceived attractiveness a stronger relationship between the variables may have been found.

All surveys used in this study were administered using an online survey program

(Qualtrics), which presented all surveys in the same order to participants; therefore, order effects were unable to be controlled. In addition, the participants' were not asked to report their sexual orientation or the duration of their past or current relationship status. According to the literature, the degree of love in a relationship, romantic love versus puppy love impacts the positive illusions one has of his or her partner (Swami et. al, 2010). Couples in romantic love are more likely to hold positive illusions of his or her partner than couples in puppy love (Swami et. al, 2010). Moreover, the sex differences between partner ratings of attractiveness can not be attributed to sex only. The sexual orientation of the participant as well the duration of his or her relationship is also likely to impact ratings of partners' attractiveness.

Implications for Future Research

Based upon the results of this study, several implications for further study can be suggested in the areas of attractiveness, gender, and life satisfaction. Further research on the relationship between attractiveness and life satisfaction may need to be determined using different measures. It would be beneficial to use a more current life satisfaction scale that explores multiple dimensions of life satisfaction. In addition, the use of multiple measures of physical attractiveness may be beneficial. Specifically, using others' ratings of physical attractiveness compared to self-ratings of attractiveness to check for accuracy.

Gender was not an area indicated in the research reviewed for this study as having a significant difference on ratings of partners' attractiveness, yet, in this study, this area was found to have significant differences. This is an area that should receive attention in future research, as results may be meaningful. In addition, sexual orientation was not

indicated in the research reviewed for this study as a having a significant impact on ratings of attractiveness, life satisfaction, or ratings of partners' attractiveness. This area needs to be explored in more depth as little research has been conducted on sexual orientation, attractiveness, and life satisfaction.

Also, it may interesting to examine how additional factors such as social economic status, ethnic group, and sexual orientation impact ratings of life satisfaction when compared to self-ratings of physical attractiveness. The current study found that high levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to high levels of self-perceived attractiveness and low levels of partner perceived attractiveness are related to low levels of self- perceived self-attractiveness. Therefore, it is important to further explore the relationship between partner perceived attractiveness and self-perceived attractiveness.

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Appendix A

Demographics Information

Gender: (circle one) Male Female

Age: _____

Class Rank: _____

GPA: _____

Major: _____

Relationship Status: _____

Appendix B

Consent Form

I _____ consent to participate in the research entitled “Life Satisfaction and Attractiveness”, which is being conducted by Traci Talbot, a graduate student in psychology at Western Carolina University. Questions regarding this research may be directed to Ms. Talbot, Dr. Lori Unruh, Director of the School Psychology Training Program.

I understand that participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I may withdraw consent at any time without penalty. If I choose to withdraw consent, the results of the participation, to the extent to which I may be identified, will be removed from the research records or destroyed.

I understand the following points:

1. The reason for this research is to examine the differences in self-rated physical attractiveness and life satisfaction amongst males and females.
2. I will participate in the research by completing two questionnaires. The completion of these questionnaires will take approximately 30 minutes.
3. There are no foreseen discomforts, stresses, or risks associated with my participation in this research.
4. The results of my participation in this research will be confidential. These results will not be released in any individually identifying identifiable format without parental consent unless otherwise required by law.
5. Any further questions about the research should be directed to the investigator at the phone number listed above.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix C

The Satisfaction with Life Scale

By Ed Diener, Ph.D.

DIRECTIONS: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

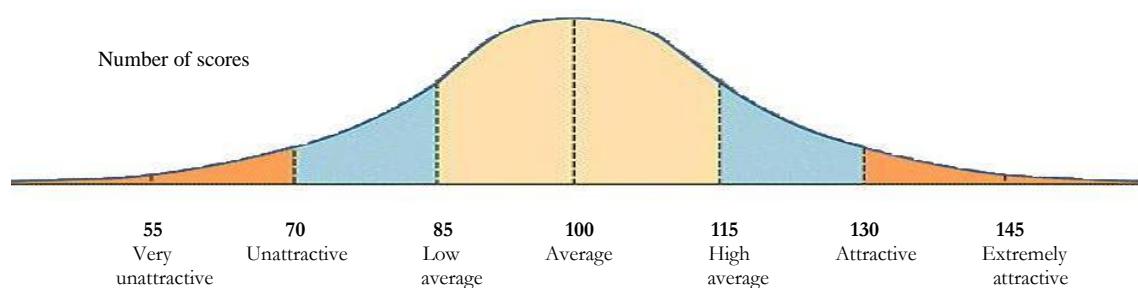
- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Slightly Disagree
- 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree
- 5 = Slightly Agree
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- _____ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- _____ 3. I am satisfied with life.
- _____ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- _____ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Appendix D

The Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale

SECTION 1: Many studies of physical attractiveness suggest that there are some very attractive individuals, but that most people are of average attractiveness. The following figure shows the typical (normal or bell-shaped) distribution of attractiveness scores.



Based on the above figure, we would like you to estimate as honestly as possible your physical attractiveness. First, estimate your *overall* physical attractiveness, then the attractiveness of specific body parts. You can choose any number between 55 and 145 that you feel best reflects your attractiveness score. So, for instance, if you think you have an unattractive nose, you might give yourself a score of 68; or if you believe you have an average-looking face, you might give yourself a score of 100. Once you have done this for yourself, we would like you to do the same for your current romantic partner. If you are currently single (not in a romantic relationship), please complete this section for your last romantic partner. If you have never been in a relationship, please leave the final column blank.

	YOU	YOUR PARTNER
1. Overall physical attractiveness		
2. Overall facial attractiveness		
3. Overall body weight or size		
4. Overall body shape or figure		
5. Overall height		
6. Breasts/chest		
7. Eyes		
8. Mouth and lips		
9. Cheeks		
10. Voice		
11. Nose		
12. Teeth		
13. Waist		
14. Hips		
15. Stomach		
16. Hands		
17. Buttocks		
18. Legs		
19. Feet		
20. Skin		