

The Importance to Males and Females of Physical Attractiveness, Earning Potential, and Expressiveness in Initial Attraction¹

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In an experimental study, male and female university students were asked to indicate how attracted they were to an opposite gender stimulus person after being presented information about the person's physical attractiveness, earning potential, and expressiveness. As hypothesized, subjects were more attracted to a physically attractive person than to a physically unattractive person, more attracted to a person with high earning potential than to a person with low earning potential, and more attracted to a high-expressive person than to a low-expressive person. Of these three characteristics, physical attractiveness had the greatest effect on attraction. Contrary to sex role stereotypes, males and females were similarly affected by these partner characteristics. Gender differences, however, did emerge in the subjects' estimates of the effects of these characteristics on their attraction. Consistent with sex role stereotypes, males placed greater emphasis than females on physical attractiveness, and females placed greater emphasis than males on earning potential and expressiveness. The discrepancy between the experimental results and the subjects' perceptions of how the factors affected their attraction were interpreted to indicate that people may not be aware of what attracts them to another and may use "implicit causal theories" provided by the culture to explain their attraction responses.

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What do people desire in a romantic partner? And do men and women desire the same traits? One way of answering these questions is to assess what men and women *say* is important to them. This has been done in several ways.

The oldest and most common approach is to simply present participants with a list of characteristics and ask them to indicate how much they desire each in a partner (e.g., Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hill, 1945; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1987; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981; Hudson & Henze, 1969; McGinnis, 1959; Nevid, 1984). Another way is to see what people request in personal advertisements (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988; Lynn & Bolig, 1985). Videodating services have also been used as a setting to collect self-reports of the characteristics desired in a partner. For example, Woll (1986) had members of a videodating service express into a tape recorder why they were or were not going to further consider someone after studying his/her initial profile information. In all of these approaches, participants' own beliefs or theories are the focus.

The second way of answering the above questions is to examine how subjects' actual dating choices or expressed affection for a prospective date are related to the date's characteristics. In field studies, participants are matched with each other for a get-acquainted date and after the date is over are asked how much they like each other. The researchers examine how the liking scores are related to the partner's characteristics (e.g., Byrne, Ervin, & Lambert, 1970; Coombs & Kenkel, 1966; Walster, Aronson, Abrams, & Rottmann, 1966). The actual choices made by members of videodating services have also been examined to see what characteristics are associated with being chosen frequently (e.g., Green, Buchanan, & Heuer, 1984; Riggio & Woll, 1984). Finally, experiments, in which one or more traits about a "stimulus person" are manipulated and subjects' attraction toward the stimulus person is measured, is another way of examining what characteristics influence actual attraction (e.g., Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971).

The characteristic that has most often been examined in the previous research is physical attractiveness. In self-report studies, participants say that physical attractiveness is not as important as many of the other characteristics listed. For example, Howard et al. (1987) considered five general categories of characteristics preferred in a partner (identified through factor analysis of a large number of items) and found that the attractiveness dimension was fourth (out of five) in importance. Other survey investigations have found similar results (e.g., Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981). Studies conducted in more "real-world" settings, however, have found physical attractiveness to be more important than suggested by the self-report studies. For example, physical attractiveness was one of the most important factors that members of videodating services considered in their decisions about that members they wanted to meet (Woll, 1986).

Research on subjects' actual reactions to a prospective date also suggest that physical attractiveness may be more important than people say it is when responding to a list of characteristics. For example, in the classic field study conducted by Walster et al. (1966) with University of Minnesota freshmen randomly matched for a dance, the physical attractiveness of the dating partner was the only characteristic that determined whether the date was liked and asked out again (the date's social skills, intelligence, and personality were found not to matter). Furthermore, experiments that have compared the effect of the physical attractiveness of a potential date (stimulus person) with another characteristic (e.g., a personality trait) have found that physical attractiveness has a greater effect on attraction (generally only male subjects were included in these studies; e.g., Meredith, 1972; Stretch & Figley, 1980). An experiment by Snyder et al. (1985), however, indicated that this preference for a physically attractive partner may be affected by subjects' personality. In their study, males who were high self-monitors placed more importance on physical attractiveness than males who were low self-monitors.

Gender differences have also been found in the importance of physical attractiveness in attraction, although only in certain types of studies. In survey research conducted with investigator-provided lists, men have judged physical attractiveness to be more important than women. For example, Howard et al. (1987) found that the physical attractiveness dimension was the only general characteristic preferred significantly more by men. Hoyt and Hudson (1981) and Buss and Barnes (1986) also found that men preferred a physically attractive partner more than women. Laner (1977) found that 48% of college men but only 16% of college women rated "good looks" as important in a partner. In a study by Nevid (1984), men desired, to a greater degree than women, physical attractiveness in both sexual and long-term relationships, whereas women emphasized personal qualities (e.g., interpersonal warmth). Furthermore, research on personal advertisements indicates that men are more likely than women to request physical attractiveness in a partner (while women are more likely to offer it) (Cameron et al., 1977; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988).

Other research, however, suggests that men and women may respond very similarly to physical attractiveness in potential dating situations. Brehm (1985) summarized the research on gender differences in this area and concluded "when they are talking hypothetically about potential dates, men overestimate how important physical attractiveness will be in their actual interaction with women. Women, on the other hand, underestimate how much physical appearance will influence their attraction to a man" (p. 62). In support of this conclusion, she reports that Byrne et al. (1970) found, after subjects went on a brief date, there was no difference between men and women in the degree to which liking was affected by the date's physical appearance. She also cites the research of Coombs and Kenkel (1966), who found that before a date men rated physical attractiveness as more impor-

tant than women, but after the date, women were more dissatisfied with their date's appearance. Other field research, in which men and women have been randomly matched for a date, has also indicated that men and women are equally affected by the partner's physical attractiveness (e.g., Curran & Lipold, 1975; Walster et al., 1966). Furthermore, both male and female videodating members have been found to report that physical attractiveness is one of the most important factors in their decision to go beyond initial profile information (e.g., Woll, 1986). Most of the experiments that have manipulated the physical attractiveness of the partner have included only male subjects and thus gender comparisons have not been possible.

Whereas physical attractiveness has traditionally been assumed to be more important to men than to women (and some research supports this), earning potential or social status has been assumed to be more important to women. A status/exchange hypothesis has been proposed—a pattern in which men exchange status for a woman's attractiveness. In support of this hypothesis, women have judged earning potential (or a related characteristic, such as ambition) as more desirable in a partner than have men (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Howard et al., 1987). Furthermore, Woll (1986) found evidence that female members of a videodating organization were more likely than the males to say that occupation was a factor they considered in their decision about whether to request additional information about a prospective match. In personal advertisements, financial security has been found more likely to be requested by women but more likely to be offered by men (Cameron et al., 1977; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). There have been no experimental or field studies that have examined the effect of the earning potential of a potential dating partner on subjects' degree of attraction for him/her. Thus, whether this same gender difference would be found in subjects' reactions is unknown.

Both physical attractiveness and earning potential are external or extrinsic characteristics of an individual. Such characteristics can be contrasted to intrinsic personal qualities, such as expressiveness, interpersonal warmth, and personality. One intrinsic characteristic that has been considered in recent research is *expressiveness*, and it has been found to positively affect attraction. For example, Howard et al. (1987) found that "expressiveness" (which was the factor label given to the items "affectionate," "compassionate," "expresses feelings," and "romantic") was the general characteristic most preferred by the participants in their survey study. In a laboratory study, Freidman, Riggio, and Casella (1988) found that videotaped subjects who were emotionally expressive in a get-acquainted exercise were evaluated more favorably by other subjects than those who were not.

There is also some evidence to indicate that women prefer expressiveness more than men. Howard et al. (1987) found that women had stronger preferences than men for an expressive partner. Riggio and Woll (1984) found

that female members of a videodating organization preferred an expressive partner more than did males. Furthermore, in a content analysis of personal advertisements, Koestner and Wheeler (1988) found that women were more likely than men to request an expressive partner. Thus far, the effect of expressiveness on attraction has not been examined experimentally.

The present study is a person perception experiment designed to determine how subjects' attraction for an opposite-gender person is affected by three characteristics of this person: physical attractiveness, earning potential, and expressiveness. This is the first experiment on determinants of initial attraction to include earning potential and expressiveness, and thus also the first to compare the importance of these three characteristics as determinants of initial attraction and to examine for possible gender differences.

It is hypothesized that all three factors will positively influence the amount of attraction that is expressed for a prospective date, but that physical attractiveness will have the strongest effect. It is also hypothesized that males and females will be similarly affected by the characteristics of the partner. Although self-report studies have found gender differences along gender stereotypical lines (males weighing physical attractiveness more than females and females weighing earning potential and expressiveness more than males), experimental and field studies have found few gender differences.

The final purpose of this study is to test Brehm's (1985) notion that men overestimate and women underestimate how important physical attractiveness is to them. Also considered is whether the opposite occurs with earning potential and expressiveness—that men underestimate and women overestimate how important they are to them. This will be done by asking subjects to indicate, at the end of the experiment, how important each of the characteristics was in their decision of how attracted they were to the person. It is hypothesized that men will weigh physical attractiveness as more important than will women, and women will weigh earning potential and expressiveness as more important than will men. Thus, gender differences are expected to be more pronounced for subjects' subjective assessments about what characteristics affect their attraction for a prospective date than for objective inference made as to how expressed attraction for a prospective date is related to the date's characteristics.

METHOD

Overview of Design

Subjects were presented written information about an opposite-gender stimulus person and asked to evaluate him/her on several dimensions, including dating desirability. The stimulus person was presented as either (1)

physically attractive or physically unattractive, (2) high or low on earning potential, and (3) high or low in expressiveness. These three manipulated variables, combined with gender of subject, yielded a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design.

Subjects

Subjects were 372 undergraduate students (186 males and 186 females) from a large, public Midwestern university. The average age of the subjects was 20.46 ($SD = 3.48$). One hundred and twenty-six (33.9%) were freshmen, 99 (26.6%) were sophomores, 89 (23.9%) were juniors, 55 (14.8%) were seniors, and 3 (.8%) were in the "other" category.

Procedure

The data were collected in several small- to moderate-sized classes. The students were told that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, that males and females in the class were receiving a form appropriate for their own gender, and that they should not look at their classmates' forms.

A seven-page experimental booklet titled "Survey on Evaluating an Alternative Partner" was distributed to each student. Males received a form that presented a female stimulus person and females received a form that presented a male stimulus person. This experimental booklet (including the manipulations and dependent measures) was pretested with a small group of subjects before being used in this study.

Rationale Provided to Subjects

The first page of the experimental booklet contained a cover story, which was designed to be as realistic as possible. Subjects were told that the purpose of the study was to examine how satisfaction with a current or most recent partner affects how desirable a "potential available partner" is viewed.

The directions on the first page told the subjects what to expect in the questionnaire:

First you will be asked a few questions about your current relationship. If you are not in a current relationship, think about how you felt about your last relationship. Second, you will be asked to read carefully through a copy of an evaluation form that was completed by a college student of your sex after an interaction of 20 to 30 minutes with a person of the opposite sex. The college student was asked to judge the desirability of the person for a long-term relationship.

Subjects were further told that after they read through the evaluation form they would be asked to provide their own evaluations of this individual and indicate how desirable he/she would be as a dating partner.

Filler Questions

The first page after the directions contained six questions about the quality of the subject's current or most recent relationship. An example question was, "In general, to what extent are you (were you) satisfied with this relationship?" These questions were included for the purpose of the cover story and will not be analyzed here.

Manipulations of Stimulus Factors

Pages 3 and 4 of the experimental booklet contained the evaluation form, supposedly completed by a student of the participant's own gender after a 20–30 minute interaction with a person of the opposite gender. There were four questions that made up the evaluation form; each question had a 1 (*not at all desirable*) to 7 (*very desirable*) response scale and space for comments.

The first question was, "How desirable is this person in terms of *personality*?" The information provided to this question was held constant across subjects; that is, this was not one of the manipulated variables. Five was circled on the 7-point scale and the written comments were, "His (or her, depending on the version of the form) personality seems fine, although it was hard to tell in 20 minutes."

The second question was, "How desirable is this person in terms of *physical attractiveness* and general *physical appearance*?" The information provided presented the stimulus person as either attractive or unattractive. In the attractive condition, 7 on the 1–7 scale was circled and the written comments were, "He (she) is very attractive woman (man). He (she) is definitely above average." In the unattractive condition, 3 was circled and the comments were, "He (she) is not that attractive. He (she) is not ugly, but is definitely below average."

The third question was, "How desirable in this person in terms of *expressiveness* and *openness*?" The high condition had the 7 circled and the response was, "In the 20 minutes, he (she) revealed some significant information about him (her) self. I would guess that he (she) is probably expressive and open in a dating relationship." Three was checked in the low condition, and the comments were, "In the 20 minutes, he (she) didn't reveal

anything meaningful about him (her) self. I would guess that he (she) would probably not be that expressive or open in a dating relationship."

The final question asked on the bogus evaluation form was, "How desirable is this person in terms of *earning potential*, and future *career success*?" Once again, either 3 or 7 on the 7-point scale was circled. The corresponding comments were either one of the following: "He (she) talked about career goals and got very excited about them. The plans he (she) mentioned suggest that he'll (she'll) probably be successful and make considerable money while doing so." "He (she) talked about career goals but didn't seem that excited about them. The plans he (she) did mention suggest that he'll (she'll) probably not be that successful or make much money."

Dependent Measures

Following the bogus evaluation were two pages of measures of the dependent variables. More specifically, three types of questions were asked.

Personality Impressions. First, subjects were asked how intelligent, physically attractive, ambitious, friendly, interesting, and expressive the person probably is (response scale for each question ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*) and "How likely is it that this person will be successful in his/her career?" (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very likely*). Some of these measures serve as manipulation checks and the others are included to further explore the impressions formed of a person based on the three manipulated factors.

Attraction to the Other. Second, subjects were asked five questions about the desirability of this person as a relationship partner. These questions were as follows:

1. "If you were available, how desirable would this person be as a potential partner?" (1 = *not at all desirable* to 7 = *very desirable*).
2. "If you were available, how much would you want to date this person?" (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*).
3. "In general, to what degree do you think you would be attracted to this person if you had a chance to meet him/her?" (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal*).
4. "All things considered, to what extent do you think you would have a satisfying relationship with this person?" (1 = *not at all satisfying* to 7 = *very satisfying*).
5. "Considering everything (including your present relationship status), do you want to go on a date with this person? (1 = *definitely yes* to 7 = *definitely no*).

(Two filler questions were also included that asked how the person compared to the participant's current or most recent dating partner.)

Subjects' Estimates of What Affected Their Attraction. Finally, the subjects were asked how important each of the four factors referred to in the evaluation form about the stimulus individual were in their decision of how to evaluate him/her. These were the manipulated factors (physical attractiveness, earning potential, and expressiveness) and the one constant factor (personality). Each of the four factors were listed, followed by a (1) = *not at all important* to (7) = *very important* response scale.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks and Other Personality Impressions

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results indicated that the manipulations of the independent variables were successful. The stimulus person presented as physically attractive was perceived to be more physically attractive than the stimulus person presented as physically unattractive. The stimulus person presented as having high earning/career potential was perceived to be more ambitious and more likely to be successful in his/her career than the stimulus person presented as having low earning/career potential. Finally, the high expressive stimulus person was perceived to be more expressive than the low expressive person. The difference in means between the levels of these manipulated variables were significant and large. The means and *F* values for these main effects are presented in Table I.

In many previous studies, a physical attractiveness stereotype has been found, indicating that physically attractive people are perceived more desirable than physically unattractive people on several traits (for a review, see Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). Further evidence was found in this study for the "halo effect" of physical attractiveness. The physically attractive stimulus person was assumed to be significantly more friendly and interesting than the physically unattractive stimulus person. The other manipulated variables also created halo effects. The high earning/career potential person was seen as more intelligent and interesting than the low earning/career potential person, and the high expressive stimulus person was seen as more friendly and interesting.

Effects of the Manipulated Characteristics of the Stimulus Person on Attraction

The five questions measuring attraction for the stimulus person were first factor analyzed. Only one factor emerged, and thus it was decided to

Table 1. Main Effects for Physical Attractiveness, Earning Potential, and Expressiveness on Personality Impressions and Attraction

	Physical attractiveness			Earning potential			Expressiveness		
	High	Low	F	High	Low	F	High	Low	F
Personality characteristics									
Intelligent	4.85	4.80	.07	5.70	3.95	421.41 ^c	4.91	4.74	3.59
Physically attractive	6.27	3.13	1008.67 ^c	4.83	4.66	1.29	4.79	4.70	.48
Ambitious	4.78	4.75	.07	6.33	3.21	1124.65 ^c	4.79	4.75	.14
Likely to be successful	4.83	4.69	.86	6.09	3.42	692.06 ^c	4.70	4.82	1.61
Friendly	5.26	4.98	6.62 ^b	5.14	5.11	.03	5.96	4.29	259.20 ^c
Interesting	4.71	4.12	23.30 ^c	4.66	4.19	16.26 ^c	5.01	3.84	97.80 ^c
Expressive	4.60	4.51	.30	4.62	4.50	1.49	5.96	3.15	595.85 ^c
Attraction									
Total score	4.34	2.77	198.08 ^c	3.96	3.20	45.94 ^c	3.92	3.23	39.71 ^c
How desirable	4.72	2.95	184.38 ^c	4.36	3.37	57.73 ^c	4.36	3.36	59.09 ^c
If available, how much want to date	4.57	2.84	162.98 ^c	4.18	3.28	43.32 ^c	4.11	3.34	31.96 ^c
How attracted to	4.89	2.96	216.91 ^c	4.35	3.56	35.24 ^c	4.32	3.58	30.48 ^c
How satisfying would relationship be	4.29	2.91	118.83 ^c	4.03	3.22	41.63 ^c	3.99	3.24	36.70 ^c
Considering everything, how much want to date	3.26	2.28	29.49 ^c	2.97	2.60	4.38 ^c	2.93	2.63	2.97

^a $p < .05$.^b $p < .01$.^c $p < .001$.

use the mean of the five items for a total attraction score. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .92. A $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects ANOVA was conducted on this dependent variable. The independent variables were physical attractiveness of the stimulus person (attractive or unattractive), expressiveness of stimulus person (high or low), earning potential of stimulus person (high or low), and gender of subject (male or female).

As hypothesized, all of the manipulated variables had a significant main effect on total attraction for the stimulus person. More specifically, a person who was physically attractive was desired more than a person who was physically unattractive, a person with high earning/career potential was desired more than a person with low earning/career potential, and a person who was open and expressive was desired more than a person who was portrayed as less open and expressive. The F values for these main effects were large for the total attraction score, as indicated in Table I. This table also presents results from ANOVAs conducted for each of the specific questions. (Not shown in Table I is the significant main effect found for gender of subject; males were more attracted to the stimulus person than were females.)

The F value for the main effect of physical attractiveness was far larger than the F values for the main effects of earning potential and expressiveness, which supports the hypothesis that physical attractiveness has the strongest effect on attraction. Although the main effect F value for earning potential was larger than that for expressiveness, the difference was not large. To further explore the relative importance of these manipulated characteristics as determinants of attraction, a simultaneous multiple regression was conducted. The beta weight was $-.54$ for physical attractiveness, which was over twice the size of that for the other variables. The beta weight was $-.26$ for earning potential and $-.24$ for expressiveness.

Were the males and females affected in the same way by the information presented about the stimulus person, as predicted? The ANOVA two-way interactions of gender with each of the three manipulated factors were examined for the total attraction score. None of these two-way interactions was significant.

However, there were two significant three-way interactions that included gender of subject. First, the Gender of Subject \times Physical Attractiveness \times Expressiveness interaction was significant ($F = 8.94$; $p < .01$). The cell means, as displayed in Table II, indicate that males were more attracted to the high-expressive opposite-gender person than the low-expressive opposite-gender person only in the physically attractive condition. Post hoc t test comparisons indicated that the difference between the expressiveness conditions was significant in the physically attractive condition ($T = 4.29$; $p < .001$) but not in the unattractive condition ($t = .43$; $p = \text{ns}$). Females, on the other hand, were more attracted to the high-expressive person than to the low-

Table II. Two Three-Way Interactions for Total Attraction Scores

Gender of Subject \times Physical Attractiveness \times Expressiveness				
Sex of subject	Characteristics of partner			
	Physically attractive		Physically unattractive	
	Expressive	Unexpressive	Expressive	Unexpressive
Male	5.13	4.13	3.07	2.94
Female	4.35	3.78	3.09	2.00

Gender of Subject \times Physical Attractiveness \times Earning Potential				
Sex of subject	Characteristics of partner			
	Physically attractive		Physically unattractive	
	High earning potential	Low earning potential	High earning potential	Low earning potential
Male	5.10	4.17	3.09	2.92
Female	4.44	3.67	3.12	2.00

expressive person in both conditions, but particularly if the person was unattractive. The t value was 2.47 ($p < .05$) for the attractive condition and 5.18 ($p < .001$) for the unattractive condition.

A similar finding emerged for the Gender of Subject \times Physical Attractiveness \times Earning Potential interaction ($F = 5.73$; $p < .02$). That is, males were more attracted to a high earning potential woman than a low earning potential woman only if she was attractive ($t = 3.92$; $p < .001$). They did not distinguish between an unattractive woman who did not have earning potential and an unattractive woman who had earning potential ($t = .60$; $p = \text{ns}$). Women expressed more attraction to the high than low earning potential person in both conditions, but the difference was slightly greater if the person was unattractive. The t value was 3.47 ($p = .001$) for the attractive condition and 5.36 ($p < .001$) for the unattractive condition.

Perceived Effects of Characteristics of the Stimulus Person

Another purpose of this study was to examine if subjects accurately perceived the relative influence of these factors in their judgments about the stimulus person. The results indicated that the internal characteristics (expressiveness, personality) were reported by the subjects to be more important to them in making judgments of the desirability of the prospective date than were the external characteristics (physical attractiveness, earning potential). (See Table III.) The t test pair analyses indicated no difference in the perceived importance of personality and expression, but both were perceived to be more important than physical attractiveness and earning potential. Fur-

Table III. Means Indicating Perceived Importance of Partner Characteristics

	Total sample	Males	Females	<i>t</i>
Personality	5.84	5.71	5.99	5.30 ^a
Expressiveness	5.77	5.57	5.97	10.12 ^b
Physical attractiveness	5.20	5.45	4.96	13.16 ^c
Earning potential	4.74	4.23	5.24	38.14 ^c

^a*p* < .05.^b*p* < .01.^c*p* < .001.

thermore, physical attractiveness was perceived to be more important than earning potential. Thus, even though the experimental results indicated that physical attractiveness had a greater effect than expressiveness on subjects' attraction for the stimulus person, subjects thought that physical attractiveness was less important to them than expressiveness in their formation of judgments of the desirability of the potential date.

Gender differences were also found in how important each of the factors was perceived to be. Personality, expressiveness, and earning potential were judged to be more important by women than by men, whereas men judged physical attractiveness to be more important than women. The largest gender difference found was for earning potential. (See Table III for the specific results.) These results were found despite the fact that the experimental results had indicated no gender differences in the effects of the variables on attraction.

DISCUSSION

A person perception experiment was conducted to examine how information presented about a person of the opposite gender (stimulus person) affected how much subjects were attracted to and desired to date him/her. The stimulus person was presented as either physically attractive or physically unattractive, high or low in earning/career potential, and high or low in expressiveness.

As hypothesized, the physical attractiveness of the stimulus person had the greatest effect on attraction for him/her. These results are consistent with other previous studies that have examined how actual attraction for a prospective date is related to the date's characteristics (e.g., Walster et al., 1966). Physical attractiveness may be important in initial attraction for a number of reasons. People may assume that physically attractive individuals have many other desirable traits ("what is beautiful is good") and/or may hope that their own prestige will increase by being associated with an attractive

person (for a review of this research, see Hatfield & Sprecher, 1985). Physical attractiveness may be important particularly at the beginning stage of the relationship. Murstein (1976) discussed how the first stage of screening prospective partners involves an emphasis on stimulus characteristics (e.g., physical attractiveness).

In the present study, both earning potential and expressiveness also had significant effects on attraction for the stimulus person, as hypothesized. This is the first experiment to demonstrate the impact of these variables on initial attraction. These two variables can be added to the list of factors that have been identified in the social psychology literature as determinants of initial attraction, a list that includes physical attractiveness, similarity, proximity, reciprocity, and competence.

Although the experimental results indicated that physical attractiveness was a more important predictor of attraction than earning potential and expressiveness, subjects did not accurately perceive it to be the most important. Subjects in this study were asked at the end of the experimental booklet to indicate how important each of four characteristics presented about the stimulus person had been in evaluating him/her. Subjects assumed that both personality and expressiveness were more important in their desirability judgments than was physical attractiveness. In fact, personality was judged to be the most important even though the response provided on the bogus evaluation form to the personality item were relatively uninformative (a 5 on a 7-point scale was checked, and the comments were "His (her) personality seems fine, although it was hard to tell in 20 minutes."). Subjects rated expressiveness as the second most important characteristic, although it had been the manipulated factor having the smallest actual effect on attraction. Physical attractiveness and earning potential were judged to be third and fourth in importance to males, whereas the reverse order was found for females.

Why the discrepancy between the actual effects (the experimental part of the study) and the perceived effects (the self-report part of the study)? One possibility is that people do not want to be completely honest in responses to direct questions because it could make them look "bad" (e.g., concerned with superficial characteristics). Although some conscious distortion may be occurring in the direction of socially desirable responses, much falsification in an anonymous questionnaire is unlikely. The other possible explanation is that people may not know what is most important to them or what actually affects their attraction to someone. In a classic paper in the area of social cognition, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) argued that people often do not know what stimulus creates a particular response, and in such cases use "implicit causal theories" provided by the culture to explain a response. To illustrate their point, they draw on literature in several areas of psychology and social psychology (e.g., dissonance, attribution) to present evidence that people report on their cognitive processes without any true introspection. The same

lack of awareness argument could be applied to this area of determinants of initial attraction. Identifying what characteristics are desired in a partner and why attraction is or is not experienced toward a specific person involves higher order cognitive processes that people may be incapable of successfully monitoring. Instead, men and women may rely on implicit causal theories or social belief systems to determine what they report to be attractive in someone. Consistent with this, Duck and Sants (1983) have argued that personal relationships researchers attribute more self-awareness to participants in relationships than they actually have.

As hypothesized, males and females were similarly affected by the characteristics of the potential date. That is, the experimental results indicated that there were no significant gender differences in the degree to which physical attractiveness, earning potential, and expressiveness affected attraction, with the exception of the two three-way interactions (discussed below). In their judgments of how the factors affected their attraction to the stimulus person, however, men gave greater emphasis to physical attractiveness than did women, whereas women gave more importance to the other three characteristics than did men. Thus, it seems that men and women are basically attracted to the same characteristics, but their beliefs about what should be important are influenced yet by traditional cultural stereotypes (that women should seek someone who had good earning/career potential and men should seek a partner who is attractive).

There were some subtle differences found between men and women, however. The three-way interactions found in the experimental results indicate that men are affected by nonphysical characteristics in a potential date only if she is attractive, whereas women respond to nonphysical characteristics in both a physically attractive and a physically unattractive potential date (and slightly more if he is unattractive). These results suggest that a woman cannot compensate for an unattractive appearance with social status or warmth, at least in romantic situations.

The results of this study suggest that the answers to the questions, "What do people desire in a romantic partner?" and "Do men and women desire the same traits?" depend on the specific methodological approach used. If the investigator asks men and women what they believe is important to them in making their dating choices, physical attractiveness is not judged to be as important as other characteristics (e.g., expressiveness) and gender differences emerge along stereotypical lines. On the other hand, if subjects' expressed affection for a prospective date is related to the date's characteristics, physical attractiveness is found to be important and few gender differences are found.

There are several avenues for future research in this area. One would be to examine the importance of these same determinants of attraction in other age groups. Other characteristics (e.g., intelligence, sense of humor),

in combination with these, might also be considered. Another topic for future exploration is to examine the implicit theories that men and women have about attraction processes and how these theories translate into relational behaviors.

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