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| **Factors Affecting Attractiveness: Physical Attractiveness** |
| **Physical Attractiveness AO1*** *Shackelford and Larsen (1997)* found that people with *symmetrical faces* are rated as *more attractive*
* It may be an *honest signal of genetic fitness* (difficult to fake)
* Also attracted to *neotenous* (‘baby face’) features e.g. widely separated and large eyes, a delicate chin, small nose
* These trigger a *protective, or caring instinct*
* *McNulty et al (2008)* found that the *initial attractiveness* that brought partners together *continued to be an important feature* of the relationship after marriage, for at least several years…
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| **AO1** | **AO3** |
| **The Halo Effect**We have preconceived ideas about the personality traits that attractive people must have, and they are universally positive. This is the physical attractiveness stereotype, a widely-accepted view of attractive people neatly summed up by Karen Dion (1972) of ‘What is beautiful is good’ e.g. Dion et al found that physically attractive people are rated as kind, strong, sociable, and successful compared to unattractive people. We are more likely to behave positively towards attractive people as we believe they possess these positive qualities - a good example of self-fulfilling prophecy.The term halo-effect is used to describe how one distinguishing feature (in this case their physical attractiveness) tends to influence our judgements of a person’s other attributes e.g. their personality. | **Research Support**P: One strength of the theory of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships is that there is supportive research.E: For example, Palmer and Peterson (2012) found that physically attractive people were rated as more politically knowledgeable and competent than unattractive people. This halo effect was so powerful that it persisted even when PPs knew that these ‘knowledgeable’ people had no particular expertise.E: This is a strength because it shows us that if one feature, such as physical attractiveness, of an individual is deemed positive then other features, such as intelligence and honesty, may also be deemed positive, just as the halo effect suggests. However, this could have major implications for real-life scenarios such as the political process. Perhaps there are dangers for democracy if politicians are judged as suitable for office merely because they are considered physically attractive by enough voters. L: Even still, the theory itself of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attractiveness in adult relationships has gained support and therefore explanatory power.***MAID: Real-life implications…*** |
| **The Matching Hypothesis**Common-sense tells us we can’t all form relationships with the most attractive people. Walster et al (1966) suggested the matching hypothesis, and claims that people choose romantic partners who are roughly of similar physical attractiveness to each other. To do this we have to make a realistic judgement about our own ‘value’ to a potential partner. In other words, we compromise. We desire the most physically attractive partner possible for all sorts of evolutionary, social, cultural and psychological reasons. But we balance this against the wish to avoid being rejected by someone ‘out of our league’. In terms of physical attractiveness at least, there’s a difference between what we would like in an ideal partner and what we are prepared to settle for. | **Contradictory Research**P: One weakness of the theory of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships is that there is contradictory research.E: For example, Taylor et al (2011) studied the activity logs of a popular online dating site. Online daters sought meetings with potential partners who were more physically attractive than them. E: This is a weakness because according to the matching hypothesis, we should choose people who are of a similar attractiveness to us, not try and go for someone considered ;out of our league’. L: This was real-life testing of the matching hypothesis because it measured actual date choices and not merely preferences meaning it had high ecological validity, which further weakens the overall matching hypothesis as a factor affecting attractiveness in romantic relationships.***MAID: Lacks Mundane Realism…*** |
| **Physical Attractiveness AO3 continued…** |
| **Individual Differences**P: One weakness of the theory of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attractiveness in romantic relationships is that it does not consider individual differences.E: For example, Towhey (1979) asked male and female PPs to rate how much they would like a target individual based on their photograph and some biographical information. The PPs also completed a questionnaire – the MACHO scale – designed to measure sexist attitudes and behaviours. Towhey found that PPs who scored highly on the scale were more influenced by the physical attractiveness of the target when making their judgement of likeability. Low scores were less sensitive to this influence. E: This shows that the effects of physical attractiveness are not innate as the theory of physical attractiveness would suggest, and can be moderated by other factors and therefore challenges the notion that it is significant consideration in relationship formation for all potential partners.L: As a result, the overall credibility of the theory of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attractiveness in romantic relationships is weakened.***MAID: Self-report technique*** | **Role of Cultural Influences**P:One strength of the theory of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attractiveness in romantic relationships is that it is not culturally bias.E: For example, Cunningham (1995) found that female features of large eyes, prominent cheekbones, small nose and high eyebrows were rated as highly attractive by white, Hispanic and Asian males. Wheeler and Kim (1997) found that Korean and American students judged physically attractive people to be more trustworthy, concerned for other people, mature and friendly. E: This is a strength because across both culture types, collectivist and individualist, stereotype of what is attractive is strong and is important. This supports the view that physical attractiveness IS an important factor affecting romantic relationships because universally, this is considered by a variety of cultures.L: As a result, the explanatory power of physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attractiveness in romantic relationships is increased as it can be applied cross-culturally. |