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Is Beauty the Key to a Better Life?

1. What am I being asked to believe or accept?

Attractiveness plays an important role in whether or not an individual will be successful- both at home and in the workplace. Some individuals argue that attractiveness can hinder a persons chance for a successful relationship and can belittle their talents and intelligence. Others argue that attractiveness can improve an individual's chances of having a happy, successful relationship, and that beautiful people earn more, live longer, and have better lives.

2. What evidence is there to support the assertion?

Our American culture looks to a women's body, and physical appearance, as a way of determining femininity (Kalof, 1999). There is evidence that suggests that physical attractiveness influences others perceptions and evaluation, treatment afforded by others, and overt behavior and self-perception. This occurs throughout an individual's lifespan, in both men and women, and in other cultures as well (Baron, Markman, & Bollinger, 2006).

For centuries, beauty has been equated with having positive qualities. Beautiful people are perceived as having elegant homes, expensive cars, and successful lives. They are also expected to be healthy, wealthy, ad wise (Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004).

They are also perceived as being more skilled, dominant, healthy, warm, and intelligent than unattractive people. The stereotype of beauty also includes an individual having poise, humor, kindness, strength, happiness, excitement, and/or sophistication.

Attractive persons are viewed as being more competent than unattractive persons. They are also viewed as being more socially desirable and more likely to have a successful relationship (Farley, Chia, & Allred, 1998).

There is the stereotype that 'what is beautiful is good'- however, research suggests that this might not always be the case. Beauty can cause envy and feelings of jealousy which are considered bad. In relationships, attractive individuals are perceived as being unfaithful, having insecurities, and being more likely to have misunderstandings.

Relationship quality is judged as being poor for attractive individuals versus that of unattractive individuals (Kalof, 1999). Attractive persons are also seen as being vain, self-centered, and promiscuous (Farley et al., 1998).

In Kalof's study (1999), participants were asked to judge the pictures inside of both *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. While there were both positive and negative characteristics attributed to the pictures, there were a higher percentage of negative characteristics. The majority of the pictures were described as 'vain', 'egotistical', 'snobbish', 'cruel', 'evil', 'manipulative', 'immature', 'dumb', 'sarcastic', and 'uncooperative'. Surprisingly- among women rather than men, the images in *Cosmopolitan* were described as 'cold' and 'superficial'. Men tended to see *Cosmopolitan* as portraying 'strong' and 'confident' women. Both men and women described the images as portraying 'confident', 'strong', 'caring', and/or 'loyal' individuals (Kalof, 1999).

When it comes to cosmetics- women wearing makeup are perceived as being more feminine than those who do not wear makeup. Cosmetics enhance facial symmetry, thus increasing perceived attraction. When wearing makeup, a woman's mood and

behavior can also change from their mood and behavior without makeup. Individuals report a greater sense of well-being and confidence when wearing makeup, versus not wearing makeup (Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, L  v  que, & Pineau, 2006). Studies suggest that facial attractiveness can inadvertently affect decisions when it comes to dating, friends, and job hiring (Kalof, 1999). Wearing makeup has been correlated with positive benefits such as higher earning potential, professional class, more prestigious job offers, health, and confidence (Nash et al., 2006).

3. Are there alternative ways of interpreting the evidence?

We tend to believe that how we perceive physical appearance is influenced by direct observation and cultural depictions. While these might influence our perceptions of beauty- there is also the suggestion that judgement of beauty may be the result of our unconscious. Perception may be driven by implicit cognitive operations, causing people to favor attractive persons automatically and unawarely. Evidence of this is apparent in infants- they turn their attention towards attractive strangers over unattractive individuals (Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004).

4. What additional evidence would help to evaluate the alternatives?

Further research should focus on looking at the beauty stereotype to see when it exists and when it reverses (Farley, et al., 1998). Also, the exact advantages and disadvantages of attractiveness could be looked at in more depth. Looking at other cultures, a more diverse ethnic background, and larger groups could provide new evidence for discussion. More research could also look into the theory of beauty being judged by the unconscious.

5. What conclusions are most reasonable?

There are both advantages and disadvantages to being attractive, but the same can be said for being unattractive. I found nothing conclusive in the content saying one way or another. I think that it may be true that beautiful people have an easier time. However, they may struggle more than the 'average' person to insure they keep their appearances. Also, as cosmetics seem to enhance a person's appearance, those who consider themselves unattractive could improve their appearance with the use of cosmetics.

Citation

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