



Is It Bad to Prefer Attractive Partners?

ABSTRACT: *Philosophers have rightly condemned lookism—that is, discrimination in favor of attractive people or against unattractive people—in education, the justice system, the workplace, and elsewhere. Surprisingly, however, the almost universal preference for attractive romantic and sexual partners has rarely received serious ethical scrutiny. On its face, it is unclear whether this is a form of discrimination we should reject or tolerate. I consider arguments for both views. On the one hand, a strong case can be made that preferring attractive partners is bad. The idea is that choosing partners based on looks seems essentially similar to other objectionable forms of discrimination. (In particular, the preference for attractive partners is arguably both unfair and harmful to a significant degree.) One can try to resist this conclusion in several ways. I consider three possible replies. The first has to do with the possibility of controlling our partner preferences. The second pertains to attractiveness and ‘good genes’. The last attempts to link certain aspects of attractiveness to a prospective partner’s personality and values. I argue that the first two replies fail conclusively, while the third only amounts to a limited defense of a particular kind of attractiveness preference. The idea that we should often avoid preferring attractive partners is thus compelling.*

KEYWORDS: lookism, relationship ethics, discrimination, partner choice, attractiveness

1. The issue

In a variety of ways, our society favors attractive people and disfavors unattractive people. Social scientists have observed, for instance, that cuter children get more positive attention from their school teachers (Adams and Cohen 1974), that better-looking defendants are treated more leniently by the justice system (Mazzella and Feingold 1994), and that beautiful people are generally perceived as more honest, kind, competent, and friendly (Jackson, Hunter, and Hodge 1995).

These forms of discrimination deserve to be discussed more widely and taken more seriously than they usually are. But treatments of ‘lookism’ by philosophers

This paper has been shaped by many people during its long gestation. Audiences at the University of Illinois at Chicago (especially Anne Eaton) and the 2018 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (especially Jasmine Gunkel and Stephen Kershner) gave me valuable encouragement and feedback on the earliest version. Mahrad Almotahari provided insightful comments on a recent draft. Among the many people with whom I have had interesting discussions about these issues, I am especially grateful to Anthony Blazier, Lisa James, Emily Lacy, Alice Murphy, Jacob Schultz, and Lauren Woomer. Finally, the suggestions of two anonymous referees for this journal led to significant improvements. This paper probably would not exist, and certainly would not be half as good, without these contributions. Sincere thanks to all, even though I did not manage to incorporate all your good ideas (and even if I did not manage to convince any of you).

have condemned most forms of the practice in unambiguous terms (cf. Chambers, *forthcoming*; Davis 2007; Mason 2021; Minerva 2017). And rightly so: it is easy to see that cuter kindergartners are not entitled to a better educational experience, that ugly convicts do not deserve harsher punishments, and so on. Treating people differently in these ways for these reasons is bad, just as it would be morally unacceptable to favor white students or wealthy defendants.

There is another type of lookist discrimination, however, that is both extremely common and widely condoned by people of all moral persuasions. The attitude I am talking about is the preference for attractive sexual and romantic partners. Of course, it would be an understatement to say that we merely tolerate this type of discrimination. It is not only acceptable but thoroughly normal and, in fact, normative, in the sense that we expect people to prefer attractive partners, and divergent preferences are often met with surprise and disapproval. This impression survives empirical scrutiny: as one researcher writes, 'abundant evidence has been collected to show that people clearly prefer physically attractive potential partners over less attractive potential partners' (Greitemeyer 2010: 318).

Philosophers have yet to give this phenomenon much thought. This paper sets out to do so by trying to answer the question posed in the title: Is it morally bad to prefer attractive partners? Or is this a form of discrimination we should accept and perhaps even promote?

I consider arguments for both views. In broad strokes, I think there is at least one strong argument that preferring attractive partners is bad. The idea is that choosing partners based on looks seems essentially similar to other objectionable forms of discrimination. In particular, a case can be made that the preference for attractive partners is both unfair and harmful to a significant degree. (Soble [1982], which I learned about after this paper went to press, is a notable exception to the general neglect. Soble focuses on the issue of fairness and reaches conclusions broadly similar to mine.)

In response to the above arguments, one can point to some features of this case that arguably set it apart from racism, sexism, and the like. There are interesting issues to think through here, but in the end it is not clear that any of these responses is entirely successful. Thus, the idea that we should avoid preferring attractive partners is worth taking seriously. (In the end, I will suggest that one particular version of the preference is defensible though only with many cautious provisos.)

Before getting into these arguments, a few things are worth noting. First, 'attractive' here will always mean 'physically attractive'. Most of us, of course, experience nonphysical attraction too—we find people appealing on emotional or intellectual grounds or on the basis of shared interests or experiences. These other types of attractiveness raise different issues than the physical kind, though, and it is important not to run them together.

Second and relatedly, it is clear that few people choose partners exclusively on the basis of physical features. But it is intelligible to ask whether the preference for attractive partners is bad to the extent that it plays a role in our choices, and this is how I understand the question here. As will become clear below, the evidence

suggests that attractiveness does in fact figure prominently in people's partnering decisions, and therefore the moral issue remains significant.

Third, in talking about what we find physically attractive, I do not mean to assume anything controversial about whether our dispositions are biologically programmed, on the one hand, or socially constructed, on the other. (Probably it is some of both, but that is not a claim I will defend or rely on here.) I also will not be saying much about whether prevailing standards of attractiveness are inherently beneficial or harmful, just or unjust. I happen to think they are bad in many ways, and philosophers have done important work in explaining how (see Irvin [2016] for essays on body aesthetics, many of which deal with the ethical, social, and political dimensions of the subject). But this sort of issue is not my main focus. What I would like to do, rather, is try to answer the question: 'Is the preference for attractive partners inherently unjustifiable, apart from the contingent ways in which mainstream aesthetic standards embody racism, misogyny, ableism, transphobia, and other morally bad attitudes?'

It is important to acknowledge, though, that for whatever reasons—social or biological or both—people largely concur in their judgments about attractiveness. According to a 2000 meta-analysis of facial attractiveness research,

judges (within a given culture) showed high and significant levels of agreement when evaluating the attractiveness of others. . . . More importantly, our cross-cultural and cross-ethnic analyses showed that even diverse groups of raters readily agreed about who is and is not attractive. Both our cross-cultural and cross-ethnic agreement effect sizes are more than double the size necessary to be considered large. (Langlois et al. 2000: 399–400)

Often the Pearson's r coefficient for raters' judgments in these studies is found to be between .85 and .95, where $r = 1$ indicates perfect correlation. This is indeed a strikingly large effect size. Of course, not every population is in perfect concordance about every aspect of attractiveness. Some studies have found small but significant racial differences in body type preferences, for example (Greenberg and LaPorte 1996), as well as cultural effects on certain aspects of facial attractiveness judgments (Little, Apicella, Marlowe 2007). On the whole, though, people tend to agree much more strongly and extensively than they disagree. When I talk about attractiveness below without reference to any particular person's judgments, I typically mean 'attractiveness as per the social consensus' (or, where appropriate, 'attractiveness as per the raters in the relevant study').

Finally, although this paper's main question is philosophical, much of the research I discuss below is from psychology, sociology, and related fields. This is partly because few philosophers have addressed the topic. On the other hand, the scientific literature on attractiveness judgments, their sources, and their effects on people's social and mental lives is quite large. That is fortunate because a responsible philosophical treatment of these issues needs to examine the evidence carefully rather than relying solely on impressions and intuitions.

2. Why Favoring Attractive Partners Seems Bad

2.1 The Argument Sketched

I will start by giving a brief argument to the effect that preferring attractive partners is bad. The idea, as mentioned above, is that discriminating in favor of attractive partners seems relevantly like other morally objectionable forms of discrimination. If you are opposed to sexism and racism in hiring, say, then you should also be opposed to the attractiveness preference. Or so the argument goes.

I do not expect to be able to develop this analogy in a way that will satisfy everyone. To do so would require settling many difficult theoretical questions—for instance, about the natures of harm, fairness, wrongful discrimination, and the relationships between these things. This paper's aims are more modest. I will try to show that, on a range of reasonable views about the relevant ethical questions, the preference for attractive partners plausibly counts as bad.

The word 'bad' will itself function as a hedge term here. I leave open the precise sense in which this and other forms of discrimination may be morally objectionable (for instance, whether they are impermissible or merely suberogatory). These evasions serve partly to avoid complexities I lack the space to address. They are also warranted because my argument highlights two distinct sources of plausible badness—one broadly deontological, one broadly consequentialist—and I prefer to let the reader calculate the resultant of these vectors within her preferred moral framework.

The two sources of badness in question are *unfairness* and *harm*. An *unfair* behavior, as I will use the term, is one that treats possession of some trait as a basis for awarding or denying a benefit even though the extent to which someone possesses that trait is unrelated to the extent to which they deserve the benefit (Feinberg [1970] offers a classic discussion of desert and justice; Arneson [2007] deals with desert and equality). Unfairness is bad for broadly deontological reasons: it can be seen as a type of injustice, a failure to distribute benefits to their appropriate recipients. Note, however, that unfairness need not involve a violation of *rights*—more on this below.

A *harmful* behavior is roughly one that makes some person or group worse off (Purves [2019] defends a worse-off-making theory; Arneson [2018] discusses harm and wrongful discrimination). Worse off in what ways, and relative to what? These are difficult questions for harm theorists in general, but our specific interest is in the harms of discrimination. If a form of discrimination favors group *X* and disfavors group *Y*, I will count it as harmful if it causes the members of *Y* to do significantly worse than the members of *X* along intuitively important dimensions of human well-being (without any compensating benefit). This sort of harm is bad for broadly consequentialist reasons: it involves a net loss of happiness or flourishing compared to a possible discrimination-free state.

A third factor that has sometimes been thought to matter is whether or not possession of the relevant trait is voluntarily controllable. The idea is that it is worse to discriminate against people who have no choice about belonging to the targeted group. In fact, though, control seems to make at most a small moral

difference. There are cases of permissible discrimination involving noncontrollable traits (e.g., basketball teams' preference for tall players), and cases of impermissible discrimination involving controllable traits (e.g., religious discrimination, even when the persecuted group's members are free to convert to other faiths).

Further candidates have been proposed for what makes discrimination wrong, such as its demeaning character (Hellman 2008) or its connection to prejudicial attitudes (Ely 1980). I am doubtful that these are necessary features of morally bad discrimination, but the general problem need not be solved here. All I want to do is establish a sufficient condition. My claim is that if a kind of discrimination is both unfair and harmful to a significant degree—and, perhaps, if it is based on a feature that is not readily controllable—then that kind of discrimination is bad. This seems hard to deny. Indeed, many forms of racism and sexism meet each of these criteria, which seems to go some distance toward explaining their undeniable wrongness (for a theory of wrongful discrimination that incorporates elements of both harm and desert, see Lippert-Rasmussen [2014]). Crucially, though, the same can apparently be said about the preference for attractive partners. Let me take the previous points in reverse order.

2.2 Control

First, for what it is worth, our physical attractiveness is largely not under our voluntary control. We can dress to advantage, get in better shape, improve our grooming habits, and so on. But these kinds of efforts only go so far. Many people would remain decidedly unattractive even if they exerted all their energies in this direction. For example, consider that factors like age, skin condition, and facial structure play a large role in determining attractiveness, all of which are hard or impossible to change. Indeed, Currie and Little (2009) find that facial beauty is the most important component of overall attractiveness. What is more, the kinds of interventions that are under our control require resources to which many people lack access—free time to exercise regularly, access to healthy food, knowledge of fashion, proficiency with cosmetics, and the money to obtain all these things. Thus, becoming much better looking is not a viable option for most people.

2.3 Harm

Second is the question of harm. Do less attractive people suffer significant consequences from being disfavored as partners? This is an important juncture in the argument, so it is important to look closely at the evidence.

In fact, research in social psychology consistently finds that less attractive people have reduced access to satisfying romantic and sexual experiences, and they are consequently more lonely and less happy with these aspects of their lives. I take these outcomes to represent losses along important dimensions of wellbeing.

A few noteworthy findings are as follows. Unattractiveness is correlated with loneliness, social anxiety, self-consciousness, stress, and life dissatisfaction

(Feingold 1992; Zakahi and Duran 1988; Umberson and Hughes 1987). Attractive people are more liked by their peers as children (Barrow, Baker, and Hudson 2011), and attractive heterosexual people have more opposite-sex friends (White 1980) and more enjoyable opposite-sex social interactions (Reis et al. 1982). Perhaps as a result, better-looking people have more sexual partners—more short-term partners for men, and more long-term partners for women (Rhodes, Simmons, and Peters 2005)—and they are more likely to get married and have more children (Jokela 2009). This pattern is consistent with the well-confirmed finding that physical attractiveness is a highly prized quality in a mate, according to both professed preferences (Buss and Barnes 1986; Shackelford, Schmitt, and Buss 2005) and actual choices (Asendorpf, Penke, and Back 2011; Luo and Zhang 2009).

Unsurprisingly in light of these trends, less attractive heterosexual people rate more highly in ‘heterosocial anxiety’, a construct reflecting both uneasiness in interactions with potential partners and unhappiness with one’s love life (Curran and Lippold 1975; Firth 1986; Herold 1979; Leck 2006). One might think that unattractive people with long-term partners are immune to the effects of the beauty preference. But this does not seem true in general—men with less attractive wives are less satisfied with their marriages, for instance, presumably to their spouses’ detriment (Meltzer et al. 2014). It is worth emphasizing that the attractiveness ratings in the above studies are made by neutral third parties, ruling out simple explanations in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies or observer bias.

Of course, it is important to consider effect size alongside statistical significance. Even if physical attractiveness is correlated with relationship prospects in the above ways, the connection might be too weak to merit concern. But that appears not to be the case. For instance, Feingold’s meta-analysis (1992) finds effect sizes of attractiveness of about $r = .30$ and $r = .20$, respectively, on popularity with the opposite sex and freedom from heterosocial anxiety (1992: 324). (A correlation of $r = .30$ is generally considered a medium-sized effect. For instance, gender and weight in adults in the United States are correlated with $r = .26$ [Meyer et al. 2001: 131].) Thus, the tendency of better-looking people to have greater partnering success and satisfaction is comparable in magnitude to the tendency of men to weigh more than women—by no means a negligible effect.

According to one group of researchers, studies like these

suggest that many long-held beliefs about relationships, such as an emphasis on personality or values, are little more than folklore. Of course, individuals seek out a potential mate possessing positive personality traits, as long as those traits are bundled in an attractive package. Although some may dismiss the influence of physical attractiveness as a minor aspect of one’s life, these data clearly indicate that it plays a key role in determining one’s ability to mate. (Westfall, Millar, and Lovitt 2019: 539)

If this way of putting things involves a touch of hyperbole, it also contains a substantial kernel of truth.

People with whom I have discussed these ideas have sometimes expressed skepticism about the harm issue. One common line of thought goes like this: 'Perhaps it is true that the average highly attractive person has, say, ten satisfactory potential partners to choose from, while the average less attractive person only has three. But it does not follow that the unattractive person is worse off. After all, what matters (to most people) is just having at least one satisfactory partner. As long as everyone can pair up with someone they like, as is usually the case, there is no significant harm in getting fewer choices.' I think studies like the above show that this is an inaccurate model of partnering. In reality, it is not just that less attractive people have fewer options; rather, they have a harder time finding partners at all, and their interactions with potential partners are typically rarer and less pleasant. What is more, the attractiveness preference may even affect the quality of long-term relationships. I conclude that discrimination in favor of attractive partners is harmful to a degree worth taking seriously.

Even if this conclusion is correct, one might wonder about the net benefits of an alternative regime in which less attractive people are more widely chosen as partners. Suppose that, as things now stand, *A* and *B* are acquaintances with compatible personalities, interests, and values. While both are on the partnership market, *A* is not particularly attracted to *B* and has avoided getting involved with *B* on this account. After thinking things over, however, *A* decides they should be more open-minded and give *B* a chance.

Is this likely to be a better state of affairs, overall, than the status quo? One might worry that it is not. After all, *A* will plausibly be less happy, because they are now burdened with a partner to whom they do not feel genuinely attracted. Moreover, when *B* comes to realize this, they will surely resent *A* for it—no self-respecting person wants a relationship based on someone's feelings of pity or duty. It seems that *A*'s well-meaning effort is bound to fail, and hence that there is nothing to be gained by getting involved with people to whom one is not attracted.

I do not think this objection succeeds. It goes wrong because it misconstrues both parties' situations in important ways. First, as far as *A* is concerned, the objection underestimates the malleability of our tastes and preferences. It is far from inevitable that someone in *A*'s position would remain unattracted to *B* or would regret choosing *B* as a partner. (For more on this point, see section 3.1 below.) Even if we set this fact aside, the objection mischaracterizes *B*'s position. If *B* is at all perceptive and mature, they will be aware of their unexceptional looks. Thus they will not have pinned their relationship hopes on finding someone who, against all odds, considers them a great beauty. Rather, they will be looking for a partner who values them for their other (and in any case more important) qualities: for their sense of humor, social activism, sexual prowess, impressive collection of classic soul records, or whatever. By hypothesis, *A* and *B* are in a position to appreciate each other in these ways. It is doubtful, and presumptuous to claim, that *B* would prefer continued loneliness to a relationship with someone like *A*. So the worry is not convincing. There is no reason to think that things would not be generally better if less attractive people had more partnering opportunities.

2.4 Unfairness

Finally, is a preference for attractive partners *unfair* in the above sense? That is, are attractive people inherently more deserving of romantic and sexual partnership than unattractive people? The answer depends on what makes someone deserving of partnership. Before saying more on this issue, I need to clarify the notion of partnership I have in mind.

People make partners of one another in many ways and for all sorts of reasons. Some relationships' primary *raison d'être* involve appeasing families, gaining access to resources, strengthening political alliances, improving a partner's social status, getting over an ex, one-upping a rival, or securing a target for a partner's abusive impulses. The natures and goals of the various possible types of partnership are so different that it is obviously hopeless to look for a single, consistent, and all-encompassing notion of 'deserving partner'.

Fortunately, it is not my goal to find such a thing. The notion of partnership that is relevant here is relatively narrow: enough so, I think, that talk about desert stands some chance of making sense. What I have in mind are the kinds of sexual and romantic relationships typically sought in societies like ours. Such relationships aim at (some subset of) the enjoyment of shared activities, romantic passion, sexual satisfaction, friendship, companionship, sharing of material and financial resources, practical and emotional support, mutual esteem, understanding and concern, reproduction, child-raising, and family integration, perhaps among other things. (Obviously some of these items pertain more strongly to certain kinds of relationships than to others.) I am not claiming that partnerships aimed at these ends are objectively the best ones. But I think something like these desiderata are what most people want and expect out of prospective partners in modern liberal societies. Therefore, it is appropriate to focus on such relationships in considering whether or not attractive people are more deserving partners.

What, then, makes someone deserving of partnership in this sense? I think there are at least two defensible views to take here. One possibility is that partnership is a good that everyone deserves, at least insofar as they are able to participate in it and enjoy it. Just as people do not have to do anything special to deserve a satisfying life free from inordinate pain, one might think, neither can they somehow earn or merit partner intimacy and sexual fulfillment. On this view, the notion of 'more deserving partner' makes no more sense than that of 'more deserving property owner' or 'more deserving recipient of disaster relief'; one is fully deserving just by virtue of being a person with the relevant capabilities and needs.

Note that whether everyone *deserves* partnership or sex is an importantly different question from whether there exists a *right* to either. You might deserve a job in your field on account of your skills and experience, for example, or a generous bequest in your grandmother's will thanks to the exemplary kindness you showed her. Nevertheless, your failing to get these things need not constitute rights violations. Suppose that Grandma instead favored your charming miscreant cousin in a moment of weakness. Even if she chose poorly and ought to have done otherwise, you have not been denied something to which you were entitled, and you have no actionable moral claim against Grandma. You deserve the

inheritance most, it is true, but Grandma's right to dispose of her property as she pleases is decisive.

The same goes for the suggestion about partnership. The idea that everyone deserves a partner is distinct from, and weaker than, the idea that everyone has a right to a partner. In particular, the former does not entail that unpartnered people have been denied something owed them or that they have a moral claim (against anyone in particular or against society at large). This point is worth emphasizing because some philosophers have forcefully rejected the idea of a 'right to sex', partly in reaction to recent acts of misogynist violence by sexually disaffected men (Srinivasan 2021; there is much related to this paper's topic in Srinivasan's important book, which carefully examines the politics and ethics of partner choice). I want to be clear that the desert claim being considered here is not tantamount to the assertion of such a right.

Even with this last clarification, some might favor a less ecumenical stance on the desert issue. On this latter conception, partnership is not fully and equally deserved by everyone; rather, a person is deserving only to the extent that they would make a good partner. Being a good partner, in turn, means being apt to achieve the kinds of ends mentioned above. This will require various social, moral, emotional, sexual, and practical competencies, exactly which ones depends on the type of relationship and the preferences of the people involved. But it is hard to see how physical attractiveness might be relevant. A person's looks do not imply anything about their qualifications as a friend, parent, confidant, supporter, sharer of resources, or the like.

One might suspect that attractiveness is relevant to sexual satisfaction, in the sense that people with better-looking partners have more enjoyable sex lives. Is this actually true? As far as I can tell, very little research has addressed this question directly. But I am aware of no evidence for an affirmative answer and a small amount of evidence for a negative answer. In fact, the single study I know of that deals directly with this issue found that 'attractive women with unattractive partners experienced greater sexual satisfaction than attractive women with attractive partners' (Murstein, Reif, and Syracuse-Siewert 2002: 312; there was no significant relationship between partner attractiveness and sexual satisfaction for men). This does not seem implausible. Being good in bed presumably has more to do with things like attentiveness, communication, openness, variety, and feelings of trust and connection.

It is true, as noted above, that being attractive oneself is correlated with having more sex. But this is obviously a different question than the one we are considering here. It would be nice to have more data pertaining to this latter question, but given what we know and what seems likely, there is no reason to think that attractive people make superior sexual partners. In other words, attractiveness probably is not relevant to one's overall goodness as a partner in any significant way.

Before moving on, let me consider a final possible view. This is the idea that the notion of desert simply does not apply to partner choice: there is no interesting sense in which anyone can be said to deserve or not deserve partnership. On this picture, choosing a partner is more or less morally equivalent to choosing an

outfit. If I decide to wear the green shirt rather than the yellow one, that is just because it happens to strike my fancy, and there is no deeper justification to give; it would be confused to ask whether the green shirt *deserves* to be worn, or whether it is more worthy than the other items in my wardrobe. Likewise, selecting a partner is (and can only be) an amoral choice based on arbitrary personal preferences.

If this view were right, the claim that it is unfair to favor attractive partners would stand refuted. Indeed, the notion of fairness would not apply to partner choice at all, and thus no criticism of this kind could succeed against any set of preferences. But I think the view is implausible. Some criteria for choosing partners are obviously unfair. Consider a white supremacist obsessed with racial purity who deplores miscegenation or a man who only pursues virgins because he views other women as morally contaminated. Such people are choosing badly, and their preferences deserve to be criticized. So we should reject the claim that considerations of desert do not apply to partner choice (see Lazenby and Butterfield [2018] for further discussion of the possibility of wrongfully discriminatory partner choice based on factors like race).

This concludes the 'fairness' part of the argument. To summarize, the reasoning was as follows. Either partnership is a good that everyone deserves equally, or else a person deserves partnership to the extent that they would make a satisfactory partner. In the former case, attractiveness is clearly neither here nor there. In the latter case—given the predominant understanding of the nature and goals of partnership in societies like ours—attractiveness also turns out to be irrelevant to desert. That is, on any reasonable view, being more or less attractive does not make someone more or less deserving of partnership.

Given this last claim, it follows that discrimination in favor of attractive potential partners is unfair. I previously argued that it is also harmful (and based on a largely noncontrollable feature). At least for those theorists who hold desert-based or harm-based conceptions of wrongful discrimination, these conclusions suggest that the preference for attractive partners is morally unjustifiable.

3. Three Replies

Of course, interesting philosophical questions are rarely so easy to settle. There are a number of ways to try to defend the preference for attractive partners. In this section, I will present and discuss three such arguments. The first has to do with the possibility of controlling our partner preferences. The second pertains to attractiveness and 'good genes'. The last (and, I think, most successful) links certain aspects of attractiveness to a prospective partner's personality and values.

3.1 Attractiveness and Choice

The first reply I will consider involves the idea that we cannot control our preference for attractive partners: instead, we just find ourselves preferring whomever we prefer, and there is nothing much we can do about it even if we happen to want to. This idea is in line with a popular picture of attraction as a mysterious, irrational force that

often overrides our explicit beliefs and desires. If one also accepts a suitable ‘ought implies can’ principle, it follows that the preference for attractive partners is not blameworthy: we cannot have chosen wrongly because we could not have chosen otherwise than we did.

This line of thought sounds plausible at first, but I do not think it holds up to scrutiny. In order to see why not, it is useful to distinguish between preferences and wants. Say that a *want* is something you desire, or that you are disposed to desire under normal circumstances. A *preference*, by contrast, is what you choose (or what you are disposed to choose) after your wants and other relevant considerations are taken into account. My first claim is that we are not entirely helpless with respect to our partner wants. My second claim is that, even if it were true that we cannot control our wants, this would not mean that we cannot control our preferences.

Start with the first claim. As I think everyone can agree, our wants for many things tend to shift over time as we accumulate experiences and adjust our beliefs and values. Sometimes these changes are guided by deliberate decisions. Suppose you dislike olives, for instance, but you recognize their culinary value and aspire to enjoy them more. After a period of regular exposure—starting with small tastes, if necessary, in conjunction with foods you already like—dislike will give way to tolerance and in time, perhaps, to genuine appreciation. (Actually, this is not a made-up story; a friend of mine cultivated a taste for olives in just this way.)

I suspect that most of us can, and at least occasionally do, make the same kinds of choices about our partnering preferences. And we often have the same kinds of reasons. Just as my friend’s distaste for olives unduly restricted the range of foods he could enjoy, our physical tastes can keep us from taking pleasure in a wider range of people and relationships.

We can learn to like to a new food by eating it more often, but how exactly do we retrain our judgments about attractiveness? The aesthetics literature has some useful suggestions. For example, Eaton (2016) argues that we should modify our taste in bodies in order to combat fat oppression. Taking her cue from Aristotle, Eaton recommends exposing ourselves to ‘vivid and engaging representations’—including artworks, advertisements, and products of popular culture—that ‘aestheticize fat bodies’ (2016: 39). Irvin (2017) is also concerned with the role of attractiveness judgments in maintaining oppressive social relations. Irvin describes a practice she calls ‘aesthetic exploration’, a mode of attention that can plausibly help expand our aesthetic horizons. As Irvin writes:

Our approach is to direct an exploratory gaze at the body and seek out aspects of it that are unique, experiences it affords that we have never had before. We aim to take pleasure in these encounters. On encountering a body with interest and openness, with a willingness to see it in ways that we have never seen it before, we can have an aesthetic experience of it that need not involve assessing it or issuing a verdict about [it]. . . . We can simply immerse ourselves in the experience for its own sake. (2017: 12)

I think these are both promising ways to broaden the spectrum of traits we find physically appealing (or at least agreeable). Of course, even after using all the tools at our disposal, there might be limits to what we can train ourselves to want—I might never come to like pickled herring or extreme body piercings however much I try. But it is enough for my purposes if we can exercise some significant degree of control over our tastes.

Even if I am wrong about our wants, though, it does not follow that we cannot control our partner preferences. To see why, consider again the analogous case of food. Human beings have evolved to find sugary and fatty foods tasty. For most of us, things like ice cream, donuts, and deep-dish pizza count as wants—we enjoy them a great deal and hence we are strongly motivated to eat them. Nevertheless, many people prefer not to have these kinds of foods very often. This is not because their wants are any less powerful, or any less biologically hardwired. Rather, it is because they take themselves to have good reasons to choose differently—practical reasons having to do with health or moral reasons having to do with animal suffering, say. That is, even if we cannot change our desire for fat and sugar, we can very well be motivated to prefer other foods, and we can be happy about our ability to make this choice.

It seems to me that choosing partners presents much the same picture. Suppose it is true that, for one reason or another, we cannot help but feel a strong desire to date or have sex with good-looking people. Does it follow that we are bound to prefer such partners? No, because we might well have countervailing practical or moral reasons not to choose the things we are inclined to want. (The belief that a preference for attractive partners is inappropriately discriminatory could be one such reason.)

I do not think, therefore, that this first argument is successful. If preferring attractive partners is morally defensible, it is not because we are incapable of preferring otherwise.

3.2 Facial Attractiveness and ‘Good Genes’

The next argument I want to consider has to do with attractiveness and Darwinian fitness. It is often speculated that human beings (among other animals) are disposed to prefer facially attractive mates because good looks indicate lower loads of disease and mutation and hence greater fitness and ‘better genes’. Partners with these qualities are people with whom we can expect to have a larger number of fit offspring. And this is arguably a goal we are morally entitled to pursue; surely it is permissible to do what we can to ensure that our future children are healthy and successful.

This line of argument need not presuppose, implausibly, that people are generally aware of and consciously motivated by such fitness considerations. (Some are, but more probably are not.) Rather, the claim is that the pursuit of genetic advantage is in fact the biological reason for our partner preferences (whether we know this or not) and that the preferences are justified because this pursuit is morally worthwhile.

Even if this idea is right, it has an obvious limitation: it only applies to partners with whom we expect to reproduce. But most of the partners the average person has in their lifetime do not fit this description. The proposal then does nothing to explain or justify our preference for attractive partners in casual short-term relationships, one-night hookups, nonprocreative long-term partnerships, and so on. This is especially problematic because people often care most about physical attractiveness in the context of casual dating and temporary sexual relationships. The proposal also fails to explain the preferences of many people who are not cisgender and heterosexual. For instance, cisgender gay partners care about looks as much as anyone, but presumably not for genetic reasons—even if they have children by way of surrogacy or artificial insemination, only one parent makes a genetic contribution, and hence only one partner has a Darwinian motive for valuing the other's attractiveness. All of this suggests that we do not, in fact, generally prefer good-looking partners on account of the genes they will impart to our future children.

At any rate, it is far from clear that attractiveness is actually a good indicator of genetic fitness, as this argument assumes. A growing body of empirical work raises doubts about any such relationship. For instance, a large recent British study failed to find any correlation between childhood health and facial symmetry (Pound et al. 2014). Lee and colleagues (2016) obtained similarly negative results about facial averageness and paternal age at conception, a reliable proxy for mutation load. (Symmetry and averageness are important determinants of facial beauty.) And Mitchem and colleagues (2015) challenge long-standing conventional wisdom by finding no relationship between attractiveness and intelligence.

What are we to make of our preference for attractive faces if the Darwinian explanation is wrong? As it turns out, there is an alternative story preferred by many scientists. According to this rival view, symmetrical and average-looking faces are appealing because they closely resemble facial prototypes—that is, mental 'reference faces' used by the brain to classify stimuli as facelike or non-facelike—and hence they are easier for our visual systems to process. In turn, it is generally true that stimuli that are easy to process tend to be more pleasant to look at. If this theory is right, then facial attractiveness is a matter of processing fluency rather than fitness signaling (see Trujillo, Jankowitsch, and Langlois [2014] for a discussion of this view and some of the evidence in its favor).

I do not mean to imply that any of these issues are settled. Basic research on attractiveness is still ongoing, and some studies have found evidence consistent with the Darwinian view. Still, it is important that the connection between good looks and fitness is apparently neither large nor straightforward. Even if there is some correlation, it is almost certainly not enough to justify the strong general preference for attractive partners, especially because most partnerships are not aimed at reproduction in the first place.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Darwinian defense depends on the assumption that healthy and fit children—or children deemed healthy and fit by the prevailing norms—are better off than children with (traits construed as) illnesses or disabilities. But this assumption is questionable. Disability theorists have argued

that such conditions are not in general bad for the people who have them (Campbell and Stramondo 2017), and that there is no compelling altruistic reason for parents to avoid having disabled children (Barker and Wilson 2019). If this goes for major medicalized conditions that have significant effects on children's lives, then it goes even more for whatever small margin of perceived optimality is lost by settling for a slightly less elite set of genes.

3.3 Style and Personality

There is one more argument to consider, and I think it fares better than its predecessors. Although it does not amount to anything like a general vindication, it plausibly explains why one particular type of attractiveness preference might be justified.

In contrast to the first two arguments, this line of thought focuses on specific and generally non-facial aspects of physical attractiveness. Some examples of the features I have in mind include a person's way of dressing and grooming, their physical comportment (including things like posture, gait, and manner of speaking), and some aspects of body type. I will refer to such qualities as elements of *personal style*.

Aspects of style clearly contribute to a person's overall physical attractiveness. And these qualities seem important, at least in part, because they often tell us something about people's personalities, values, habits, and interests. We can reasonably infer, for instance, that a sharp dresser is conscientious and has a certain aesthetic sensibility. A lean and muscular body reflects a likely interest in sports. People with pink hair tend not to be socially conservative, and so on. At least some of these traits are appropriate grounds for favoring or disfavoring potential partners. What makes someone a better or worse partner for us, after all, is primarily what sort of person they are and whether their traits are compatible with ours.

Physical attraction often seems to work like this. When we are drawn to people's looks, our feelings of interest and pleasure need not take the form of a simple, uninformative reward signal. Rather, attraction is frequently based on the desirable qualities we take people to have, as revealed by their appearances. Suppose you are attracted to Tyler's colorful tattoos and statement-making glasses. Probably this is not just in virtue of their intrinsic aesthetic qualities, but at least in part because of the confident edginess they convey. Your physical attraction is thus mediated (or perhaps even constituted) by your impression that Tyler is the sort of person you find interesting and appealing.

So the argument, in short, is this. It is permissible to prefer physically attractive partners insofar as their attractiveness consists in certain aspects of personal style. That is because these style qualities function as a signal for other things, like personality and values, that can play a legitimate role in partner choice.

There is much to say about this line of thought. In the remainder of the section I will try to answer two important questions: First, why should we think that attractive style qualities are good indicators of other desirable traits? Second, what are the risks and limitations of choosing partners based on aspects of style? (For related

discussion of the relationship between appearance and personal qualities in the context of lookist discrimination, see Liu [2018]).

As for the first question, the available evidence suggests that some personality traits and other qualities are reliably correlated with style. For instance, Albright, Kenny, and Malloy (1988) and Borkenau and Liebler (1992) showed that a person's level of conscientiousness can be predicted from the way they dress. More recently, Naumann and colleagues (2009) found that people can gauge the presence or absence of a variety of traits—notably openness, likability, self-esteem, loneliness, and religiosity—with decent accuracy from full-body photographs of strangers. The cues used to form these impressions included the stylishness, distinctiveness, and neatness of the target subjects as well as their postures and facial expressions. Carney, Colvin, and Hall (2007) studied personality inferences based on very short video clips, finding that ‘judgments for extraversion exhibited the greatest accuracy, followed by negative affect, conscientiousness, IQ, neuroticism, positive affect, openness, and agreeableness’(2007: 1069; with all judgments significantly more accurate than chance).

It is worth noting that it is actually useful to use style qualities as a guide to other traits, in the sense that it would often be hard to get the same information by other means. Without any physical clues to rely on, how would you go about determining that someone is messy or that they lead a sedentary life, or that they reject traditional gender roles? Unlike, say, intelligence or extraversion, these are not the sorts of traits that we can generally gauge from a polite long-distance conversation with a stranger. Thus, inferences from specific aspects of style to personality are often practically indispensable.

This optimistic picture comes with major caveats, however. There are at least four important ways in which style qualities can fail to function as useful or appropriate guides to a potential partner's underlying qualities.

One difficulty is distinguishing real correlations from illusory ones. We are constantly confronted with stereotypes that purport to tell us something about people who look, dress, or act a certain way—blondes, people with glasses or tattoos, people who smile often, men with beards, women who wear makeup, and so on. Some of these generalizations may be fairly reliable, but many others are the products of prejudice or wishful thinking. For example, it is widely believed that shifty eye movement and avoidance of eye contact are signs of dishonesty, but these traits are almost certainly unrelated (DePaulo et al. 2003). Basing our partner preferences on inaccurate generalizations is bad for obvious reasons.

Second, while some correlations between style and personality are reliable to a certain degree, they are also capable of breaking down badly in ways we should be worried about. Hence it would be inappropriate to presume that a fat person is unathletic or that a woman in a hijab is a conservative traditionalist—although such associations may not be statistically without a basis, they also play into demeaning and unreliable stereotypes that masquerade dangerously as universal truths. (For insightful discussion of the possible wrongs of accurate prejudicial beliefs, see Basu [2019].)

Finally, whenever some trait *S* is used as a proxy to infer the presence of another trait *T*, there is an incentive to game the system by manipulating *S* to send one's

desired signal about *T*. This phenomenon is known as Goodhart's law (after the economist Charles Goodhart) or Campbell's law (after the social scientist Donald Campbell). The idea is that 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure' (Strathern 1997: 308), because it comes to reflect people's self-conscious efforts to optimize the target variable rather than the true underlying state of the system of interest.

Goodhart-type problems are a perennial feature of partner choice scenarios insofar as people generally try to make good initial impressions in ways that do not always faithfully indicate their actual traits. Some of these behaviors are expected and hence fairly benign. It is understood that many people will dress better, make more interesting conversation, and be more attentive to a prospective partner on a first date, gradually regressing to a less dazzling mean as the relationship goes on.

But it is likely that the widespread transition to online dating has made Goodhart problems considerably worse. In online settings, initial partnering choices are made on the basis of short profiles dominated by photos. Since users control exactly what potential partners see, meticulously crafting a maximally appealing profile is both possible and strongly incentivized. It is thus no surprise that the internet teems with advice about strategically choosing photos to fine-tune the signals one sends. These sources are sometimes very clear about their outlook:

To get on the good side of her first impression, your profile photos need to convey all the reasons you're such a great catch. This is called 'signalling', and it can make or break your online dating photos. Think of it this way—she's going to imagine herself in the lifestyle the profile pic conveys. It's why unique travel photos are so successful. You're visually communicating that you're interesting, you'll take her to exotic places, and most importantly, that you have the financial means to do it. (Vida Select, *n.d.*)

The goal here is obviously not to convey one's personality, values, and interests as honestly as possible, but rather to build one's self-presentation around signifiers that indicate desirable qualities (with the subtext being that it is wise to do this whether or not one actually possesses those qualities).

All in all, then, the current proposal hangs in a precarious balance. As long as attractive style qualities are good indicators of desirable personality traits, as long as those personality traits are genuinely relevant to someone's quality as a partner, as long as our judgments are not being guided by invidious stereotypes, *and* as long as no deception or manipulation is involved, it is plausibly permissible to choose partners based on the attractiveness of their personal styles. But it is easy to go wrong here, and we are very often not in a position to know whether we are in a good epistemic situation or a bad one.

4. Conclusion

The widespread tendency to favor attractive partners is more morally problematic than most philosophers have realized. If the arguments I have given here are on

the right track, for instance, it is hard to see how a preference for attractive *faces* can be justified at all. (This is particularly concerning because facial beauty seems to be the most important determinant of overall physical attractiveness; cf. Currie and Little [2009].) And other kinds of physical preferences seem permissible only under conditions that are arguably rare in practice. Many of our ordinary romantic and sexual practices, then, likely involve a sort of wrongful discrimination that is not so different from racism or sexism.

As seriously as I think we should take the conclusions defended here, it is important not to confuse them with other, stronger claims. It is not part of my view, for instance, that it is bad to *have* an attractive partner. On the contrary, there is nothing obviously wrong with choosing to date, marry, or sleep with someone good-looking if they are the best person for the job—attractiveness might not be a good reason to favor someone, but it is no reason to do the opposite either. This paper is not a call to engage in ‘reverse discrimination’.

I am also not defending the puritanical view that it is wrong to appreciate human beauty, including the beauty of a potential or actual partner. After all, it is entirely possible to enjoy and admire something without taking these feelings as grounds to do anything in particular. I enjoy looking at wildflowers, but this does not incline me to despoil the landscape by picking them all and carrying them home. And even if it did, the blame would lie with the way I have chosen to respond to my pleasure, not with the pleasure itself. Similarly, there is no need to suppress or apologize for one’s enjoyment of beautiful people. What is problematic is not the appreciation of good looks, but rather a certain sort of possible reaction to it.

An important issue about which I have said very little is how best to respond to the problem on various levels: individually, socially, institutionally, and so on. I regret that space constraints prevent me from addressing these questions here. I leave them for future work—with luck, others’ as well as my own.

WILLIAM D’ALESSANDRO 

MUNICH CENTER FOR MATHEMATICAL PHILOSOPHY

LUDWIG MAXIMILIAN UNIVERSITY OF MUNICH

d.william@lmu.de

References

- Adams, G. R., and A. S. Cohen. (1974) ‘Children’s Physical and Interpersonal Characteristics that Affect Student-teacher Interaction’. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 43, 1–5.
- Albright, Linda, David A. Kenny, and Thomas E. Malloy. (1988) ‘Consensus in Personality Judgments at Zero Acquaintance’. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 387–95.
- Arneson, Richard J. (2007) ‘Desert and Equality’. In Nils Holtug and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (eds.), *Egalitarianism* (New York: Oxford University Press), 262–93.
- Arneson, Richard J. (2018) ‘Discrimination and Harm’. In Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Discrimination* (New York: Routledge), 151–63.
- Asendorpf, Jens B., Lars Penke, and Mitja D. Back. (2011) ‘From Dating to Mating and Relating: Predictors of Initial and Long-term Outcomes of Speed-dating in a Community Sample’. *European Journal of Personality*, 25, 16–30.
- Barker, Matthew J., and Robert A. Wilson. (2019) ‘Well-being, Disability, and Choosing Children’. *Mind*, 128, 305–28.

- Barrow, M. E., J. R. Baker, and J. L. Hudson. (2011) 'Peer Liking, Physical Attractiveness, and Anxiety Disorders in Children'. *Journal of Experimental Psychopathology*, 2, 601-14.
- Basu, Rima. (2019) 'The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs'. *Philosophical Studies*, 176, 2497-2515.
- Borkenau, Peter, and Anette Liebler. (1992) 'Trait Inferences: Sources of Validity at Zero-acquaintance'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 645-57.
- Buss, David M., and Michael Barnes. (1986) 'Preferences in Human Mate Selection'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 599-70.
- Campbell, Stephen M., and Joseph A. Stramondo. (2017) 'The Complicated Relationship between Disability and Well-being'. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27, 151-84.
- Carney, Dana R., C. Randall Colvin, and Judith A. Hall. (2007) 'A Thin Slice Perspective on the Accuracy of First Impressions'. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 1054-72.
- Chambers, Clare. (Forthcoming) *Intact: A Defense of the Unmodified Body*. London: Penguin Books.
- Curran, James, and Stephen Lippold. (1975) 'The Effects of Physical Attraction and Attitude Similarity on Attraction in Dating Dyads'. *Journal of Personality*, 43, 528-39.
- Currie, Thomas E., and Anthony C. Little. (2009) 'The Relative Importance of the Face and Body in Judgments of Human Physical Attractiveness'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 30, 409-16.
- Davis, Andrew. (2007) "'Lookism", Common Schools, Respect and Democracy'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41, 811-27.
- DePaulo, Bella M., James J. Lindsay, Brian E. Malone, Laura Muhlenbruck, Kelly Charlton, and Harris Cooper. (2003) 'Cues to Deception'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 74-118.
- Eaton, A.W. (2016) 'Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression'. In Sherri Irvin (ed.), *Body Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press), 37-59.
- Ely, John Hart. (1980) *Democracy and Distrust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Feinberg, Joel. (1970) 'Justice and Personal Desert'. Reprinted in Marilyn Friedman, Larry May, Kate Parsons and Jennifer Stiff (eds.), *Rights and Reason* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020), 221-50.
- Feingold, Alan. (1992) 'Good-looking People Are Not What We Think'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111, 304-41.
- Firth, E. A. (1986) 'The Relationship of Social Perceptivity to Heterosexual Social Competence'. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 47, 37 IB. University Microfilms No. 86-06, 541.
- Greenberg, Deborah R., and David J. LaPorte. (1996) 'Racial Differences in Body Type Preferences of Men for Women'. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 19, 275-78.
- Greitemeyer, Tobias. (2010) 'Effects of Reciprocity on Attraction: The Role of a Partner's Physical Attractiveness'. *Personal Relationships*, 17, 317-30.
- Hellman, Deborah. (2008) *When Is Discrimination Wrong?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Herold, E. S. (1979) 'Variables Influencing the Dating Adjustment of University Students'. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 8, 73-79.
- Irvin, Sherri, ed. (2016) *Body Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Irvin, Sherri. (2017) 'Resisting Body Oppression: An Aesthetic Approach'. *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly*, 3, 1-25.
- Jackson, Linda, John Hunter, and Carole Hodge. (1995) 'Physical Attractiveness and Intellectual Competence: A Meta-analytic Review'. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58, 108-22.
- Jokela, Markus. (2009) 'Physical Attractiveness and Reproductive Success in Humans: Evidence from the late 20th Century United States'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 30, 342-50.
- Langlois, Judith H., Lisa Kalakanis, Adam J. Rubenstein, Andrea Larson, Monica Hallam, and Monica Smoot. (2000) 'Maxims or Myths of Beauty? A Meta-analytic and Theoretical Review'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 390-423.
- Lazenby, Hugh, and Paul Butterfield. (2018) 'Discrimination and the Personal Sphere'. In Karl Lippert-Rasmussen (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Discrimination* (New York: Routledge), 369-78.
- Leck, Kira. (2006) 'Correlates of Minimal Dating'. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 146, 549-67.
- Lee, Anthony J., Dorian G. Mitchem, Margaret J. Wright, Nicholas G. Martin, Matthew C. Keller, and Brendan P. Zietsch. (2016) 'Facial Averageness and Genetic Quality: Testing Heritability,

- Genetic Correlation with Attractiveness, and the Paternal Age Effect'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 37, 61–66.
- Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper. (2014) *Born Free and Equal? A Philosophical Inquiry into the Nature of Discrimination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Little, Anthony C., Coren L. Apicella, and Frank W. Marlowe. (2007) 'Preferences for Symmetry in Human Faces in Two Cultures: Data from the UK and the Hadza, an Isolated Group of Hunter-gatherers'. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 274, 3113–17.
- Liu, Xiaofei. (2018) 'Lookism and Discrimination'. In Karl Lippert-Rasmussen (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Discrimination* (New York: Routledge), 369–78.
- Luo, Shanghong, and Guangjian Zhang. (2009) 'What Leads to Romantic Attraction: Similarity, Reciprocity, Security, or Beauty? Evidence from a Speed Dating Study'. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 933–64.
- Mason, Andrew. (2021) 'What's Wrong with Everyday Lookism?'. *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, 20, 315–35.
- Mazzella, Ronald, and Alan Feingold. (1994) 'The Effects of Physical Attractiveness, Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Gender of Defendants and Victims on Judgments of Mock jurors: A Meta-analysis.' *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 1315–38.
- Meltzer, Andrea L., James K. McNulty, Grace L. Jackson, and Benjamin R. Karney. (2014) 'Sex Differences in the Implications of Partner Physical Attractiveness for the Trajectory of Marital Satisfaction.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3, 418–28.
- Meyer, Gregory J., Stephen E. Finn, Lorraine D. Eyde, Gary G. Kay, Kevin L. Moreland, Robert R. Dies, Elena J. Eisman, Tom W. Kubiszyn, and Geoffrey M. Reed. (2001) 'Psychological Testing and Psychological Assessment: A Review of Evidence and Issues'. *American Psychologist*, 56, 128–65.
- Minerva, Francesca. (2017) 'The Invisible Discrimination Before our Eyes: A Bioethical Analysis'. *Bioethics*, 31, 180–89.
- Mitchem, Dorian G., Brendan P. Zietsch, Margaret J. Wright, Nicholas G. Martin, John K. Hewitt, and Matthew C. Keller. (2015) 'No Relationship between Intelligence and Facial Attractiveness in a Large, Genetically Informative Sample'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 36, 240–47.
- Murstein, Bernard I., Jeffrey A. Reif, and Gia Syracuse-Siewert. (2002) 'Comparison of the Function of Exchange in Couples of Similar and Differing Physical Attractiveness'. *Psychological Reports*, 91, 299–314.
- Naumann, Laura P., Simine Vazire, Peter J. Rentfrow, and Samuel D. Gosling. (2009) 'Personality Judgments Based on Physical Appearance'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35, 1661–71.
- Pound, Nicholas, David W. Lawson, Arshed M. Toma, Stephen Richmond, Alexei I. Zhurov, and Ian S. Penton-Voak. (2014) 'Facial Fluctuating Asymmetry is not Associated with Childhood Ill-health in a Large British Cohort Study'. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 281, 20141639.
- Purves, Duncan. (2019) 'Harming as Making Worse Off'. *Philosophical Studies*, 176, 2629–56.
- Reis, Harry T., Ladd Wheeler, Nancy Spiegel, Michael H. Kernis, John Nezlek, and Michael Perri. (1982) 'Physical Attractiveness in Social Interaction: II. Why Does Appearance Affect Social Experience?'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 979–96.
- Rhodes, Gillian, Leigh W. Simmons, and Marianne Peters. (2005) 'Attractiveness and Sexual Behavior: Does Attractiveness Enhance Mating Success?'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 26, 186–201.
- Shackelford, Todd A., David P. Schmitt, and David M. Buss. (2005) 'Universal Dimensions of Human Mate Preferences'. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 447–58.
- Sobel, Alan. (1982) 'Physical Attractiveness and Unfair Discrimination'. *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1, 37–64.
- Srinivasan, Amia. (2021) *The Right to Sex*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Strathern, Marilyn. (1997) "'Improving Ratings": Audit in the British University System'. *European Review*, 5, 305–21.
- Trujillo, Logan T., Jessica M. Jankowitsch, and Judith H. Langlois. (2014) 'Beauty is in the Ease of the Beholding: A Neuropsychological Test of the Averageness Theory of Facial Attractiveness'. *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 14, 1061–76.

- Umberson, Debra, and Michael Hughes. (1987) 'The Impact of Physical Attractiveness on Achievement and Psychological Well-being'. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50, 227–36.
- Vida Select. (n.d.) '13 online dating photo tips for guys who want more dates'. Accessed May 13, 2021. <https://www.vidaselect.com/onlinedating-photo-tips-for-guys/>.
- Westfall, R. Shane, Murray G. Millar, and Aileen Lovitt. (2019) 'The Influence of Physical Attractiveness on Belief in a Just World'. *Psychological Reports*, 122, 536–49.
- White, Gregory L. (1980) 'Physical Attractiveness and Courtship Progress'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 660–68.
- Zakahi, Walter R, and Robert L. Duran. (1988) 'Physical Attractiveness as a Contributing Factor to Loneliness: An Exploratory Study'. *Psychological Reports*, 63, 747–51.