

Study: Personality traits influence perceived attractiveness

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A new study published in *Personal Relationships* examines the way in which perceptions of physical attractiveness are influenced by personality. The study finds that individuals – both men and women – who exhibit positive traits, such as honesty and helpfulness, are perceived as better looking. Those who exhibit negative traits, such as unfairness and rudeness, appear to be less physically attractive to observers.

Participants in the study viewed photographs of opposite-sex individuals and rated them for attractiveness before and after being provided with information on personality traits. After personality information was received, participants also rated the desirability of each individual as a friend and as a dating partner. Information on personality was found to significantly alter perceived desirability, showing that cognitive processes and expectations modify judgments of attractiveness.

“Perceiving a person as having a desirable personality makes the person more suitable in general as a close relationship partner of any kind,” says study author Gary W. Lewandowski, Jr. The findings show that a positive personality leads to greater desirability as a friend, which leads to greater desirability as a romantic partner and, ultimately, to being viewed as more physically attractive.

The findings remained consistent regardless of how “attractive” the individual was initially perceived to be, or of the participants' current relationship status or commitment level with a partner.

Previous studies examined physical appearance and personality mainly as independent sources in predicting attraction. By presenting this information in installments, the study simulates a more typical context in which seeing the person's appearance precedes learning about their personality, and shows that perceptions of a person's physical attractiveness may change over time due to their positive or negative traits.

“This research provides a more positive alternative by reminding people that personality goes a long way toward determining your attractiveness; it can even change people's impressions of how good looking you are,” says Lewandowski.

Source: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

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