

The importance of attractiveness depends on where you live

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Do good-looking people really benefit from their looks, and in what ways? A team of researchers from the University of Georgia and the University of Kansas found that yes; attractive people do tend to have more social relationships and therefore an increased sense of psychological well-being. This seems like common sense, and might be why we spend billions of dollars each year trying to become more attractive. However, the study, published in this month's issue of *Personal Relationships*, also determines that the importance of attractiveness is not universal; rather, it is determined by where we live.

The importance of attractiveness in everyday life is not fixed, or simply a matter of human nature. Instead, the impact of our attractiveness on our social lives depends on the [social environment](#) where we live. Attractiveness does matter in more socially mobile, urban areas (and from a woman's point of view actually indicates psychological well-being), but it is far less relevant in rural areas.

In urban areas individuals experience a high level of social choice, and associating with [attractive](#) people is one of those choices. In other words, in urban areas, a free market of relationships makes attractiveness more important for securing [social connections](#) and consequently for feeling good. In rural areas, relationships are less about choice and more about who is already living in the community. Therefore, attractiveness is less likely to be associated with making friends and feeling good.

Furthermore, urban women need not have below average looks in order

to experience a diminished sense of well-being and social life. Dr. Victoria C. Plaut and her team studied women at mid-life in the U.S. based on data related to their well-being, social connectedness, and their body attractiveness (assessed with a calculation of their waist-to-hip ratio). Plaut points out, "In the field of psychology, research results are generally seen as having a natural and universal applicability. This research suggests that this is far from being the case. Rather, the importance of attractiveness varies with certain sociocultural environments, and, if you think about it, urban environments are actually a relatively recent addition to human life."

More information: To view the abstract for this article, please visit www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo...ct?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0

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