

The Ideal Features of Physical Attractiveness for Different Relations

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Abstract

Physical attractiveness is a significant public health concern worldwide, influencing mental well-being and relational satisfaction. While universal and culture-specific trends shape standards of beauty, no prior study in Pakistan has explored public perceptions of ideal physical features across different relationships. This study aimed to fill that gap by developing a close-ended questionnaire encompassing various physical traits for men and women. A total of 868 respondents voluntarily participated in an online survey, identifying the ideal features for roles such as father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, boyfriend, and girlfriend. The findings revealed that tall height, a muscular body, a short beard with a short mustache, a light-brown skin tone, brown eyes, and black hair are commonly idealized for men, while medium height, a curved body, fair complexion, brown eyes, and black hair are preferred for women. This study offers the first insight into public perceptions of ideal physical features across different relationships in Pakistan, contributing to the understanding of cultural beauty standards and their implications for social and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Physical Attractiveness, Attraction, Beauty, Body Image, Body Esteem

Introduction

Physical attractiveness cannot be universally defined (Doi, 2017). It is usually considered the beauty and uniqueness of an individual (Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2016), facial features and body shape of a person (Ellis et al., 2019b), and appearance, e.g., clothing (Etcoff, 2011). The definitions of physical attractiveness are heavily based on culture (Patzner, 2012). Some feminists regard beauty as victimization (Savolainen et al., 2020) and socio-economic exchange (Chaker et al., 2019).

No object is beautiful itself; hence, the cognitive processes of the perceiver play a role in considering an object as beautiful or ugly (Sugiyama, 2015). Theories related to physical attractiveness include elementary paradigm which focuses on external attributes of beauty such as facial appearance, personality and communication (Buggio et al., 2012; Cappelle & Fink, 2013; Ferdenzi et al., 2013; Guéguen, 2015; Korichi et al., 2011; Patel & Fitzgerald, 2010; Stephen & McKeegan, 2010; Wade, 2010; Wells et al., 2013); and holistic paradigm which focuses on the subjective characteristics of a person in modifying his appearance e.g. personality traits and sexual orientation (Buss et al., 2016; Nash et al., 2005; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2016).

The ideal features for physical attractiveness are developed mainly by culture (Husain, 2023; Husain et al., 2022; Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2016) but may also involve the novel, creative and subjective attributes of a specific person (Ellis et al., 2019a; Stepanova & Strube, 2018) or some universally accepted standards (Little, Jones, et al., 2011). Media is vital in transforming these standards (Calogero et al., 2007; Kevin, 2001). Examples of cultural variations in the ideal looks include body size, shape, waist-to-hip ratio and weight in British culture (Markovic & Bulut, 2017); body mass index in Malaysian and Japanese culture (Swami et al., 2006; Swami & Tovée, 2005); and fair skin colour in Indian culture (Karan, 2008; Nagar, 2018). The standards for physical attractiveness have been changing from time to time e.g. round and full bodies to thin and skinny bodies (Calogero et al., 2007; Levine & Smolak, 2010; Swami, 2007; Treloar, 1999).

The researchers could not find any earlier study on Pakistani culture that could reflect the ideal characteristics for physical attraction in Pakistan. Therefore, the current study was initiated to gather Pakistanis' trends in this regard. Another specialty of the current study was its focus on the relational variations in physical attractiveness, i.e., how the attractiveness of different relations was idealized and the variations in this regard.

Method

Participants

The current study was an online survey in which the respondents participated voluntarily. Data collected through the online form was cleaned for missing or unengaged responses, linearity, Homoscedasticity, and Multicollinearity. 809 Respondents were finally selected to be analyzed. 316 of them were men, and 493 of them were women. 701 of them were unmarried, and 108 of them were married. Their ages ranged between 16 and 55, and their educational qualifications ranged between 10 and 18 years of formal education.

Instrument

A specific close-ended questionnaire was developed for this study, which included a variety of possible responses to each physical feature of men and women. The choices for masculine relations included height (tall, medium, short), body shape (muscular, slim / thin, round / fat), facial features (long beard with long mustaches, long beard with short mustaches, short beard with long mustaches, short beard with short mustaches, no beard and long mustaches, no beard and short mustaches, clean shaved mature look, clean shaved babyish look), dress (kurta shalwar, qameez shalwar, qameez shalwar with waistcoat, pant+coat+waistcoat+tie, pant+coat+tie, pant and shirt with tie, pant and shirt without tie, trouser with t-shirt), head covers (white religious cap, chitralli cap, p-cap, amama / turban, nothing on head), skin complexion (light / pale white, white / fair, medium / white to light brown, moderate brown, dark brown, very dark brown to black), hair color (chocolate brown, deep black brown, black, rainbow color, orange copper, green, medium gray, golden blonde, dark warm brown, neutral medium brown, copper brown, white, red), and eye color (aqua green, hazel, brown, black, grey). The choices for feminine relations included height (tall, medium, short), body shape (curved, slim / thin, round / fat), facial features (mature look, babyish look, make-up look, nerdy look, face covered), dress (traditional shalwar qameez, tights with long shirt, tights with short shirt, patyala shalwar with short shirt, chooridar with shirt, plazzo with shirt, jeans with shirt), head covers (dupatta, chadar, scarf, nothing on head), skin complexion (light / pale white, white / fair, medium / white to light brown, moderate brown, dark brown, very dark brown to black), hair color (chocolate brown, deep black brown, black, rainbow color, orange copper, green, medium gray, golden blonde, dark warm brown, neutral medium brown, copper brown, white, red), and eye color (aqua green, hazel, brown, black, grey). Each respondent was asked to design the ideal shape for each of the ten understudied relations, with the help of the options available against each relation. The relations which were studied included father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, boyfriend, and girlfriend. The questionnaire also included the demographic component to obtain information about respondent's gender, age, marital status, and educational qualification.

Procedure

Google Forms was used to upload the questionnaire on the internet. The researchers marketed the form using different social media groups, e.g., Facebook and WhatsApp. The form was online for one month. 59 forms were discarded in the data cleansing process. The remaining 809 forms were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Findings

The current study explored the ideal features of physical attractiveness for different relations (table 1). The findings revealed that the ideal father is tall in height, muscular, has a short beard with short moustaches, wears a kurta shalwar, has nothing on his head, has a medium skin complexion, i.e. white to light brown coloured, has black hair, and has brown eyes. The ideal brother and the ideal son are tall heighted, muscular, having short beard with short mustaches, wearing trouser with t-shirt, having nothing on head, having medium skin complexion i.e. white to light brown colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes. The ideal husband and the ideal boyfriend are tall heighted, muscular, having short beard with short mustaches, wearing pant and shirt without tie, having nothing on head, having medium skin complexion i.e. white to light brown colored, having black hair and having brown eyes. The ideal mother is medium heighted, having curved body, having mature look, wearing traditional shalwar qamees, having dupatta on head, having medium skin complexion i.e. white to light brown colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes. The ideal sister is medium heighted, having curved body, having babyish look, wearing traditional shalwar qamees, having dupatta on head, having medium skin complexion i.e. white to light brown colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes. The ideal wife is medium heighted, having curved body figure, having beautified look by wearing makeup, wearing traditional shalwar qamees, having dupatta on head, having medium skin complexion i.e. white to light brown colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes. The ideal daughter is medium heighted, having curved body, having babyish look, wearing traditional shalwar qamees, having dupatta, having fair skin complexion i.e. white colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes. The ideal girlfriend is medium heighted, having curved body figure, having mature look, wearing traditional shalwar qamees, having nothing on head, having fair skin complexion i.e. white colored, having black hair, and having brown eyes.

Pakistani women do not differentiate in the ideal personality of a husband and a boyfriend. On the other hand, Pakistani men do differentiate between an ideal wife and an ideal girlfriend. Dupatta is seen as mandatory for all women except girlfriends, who may be allowed to keep their heads empty. The preferred skin colour for all relationships is medium, i.e. white to light brown, except for daughters and girlfriends who desire to be fairly white. Black hair colour and brown eyes are idealized for all relationships. Traditional shalwar kameez are the most preferred choice for all categories of women. Muscular bodies are desired for all categories of men. Curved body figures are idealized for all categories of women.

Apart from the general features discussed above, the current study has also found certain variations. Married, adults, and the elderly prefer medium heighted father compared to unmarried and adolescents whose ideal father is tall heighted. Females prefer mothers with medium skin tone and males prefer fairly white mothers. Elderly and university graduates prefer clean shaved sons in comparison to adolescents, adults, and college graduates whose ideal son has a short beard and short moustaches. All categories of the relationships prefer trouser with t-shirt for son except the elderly who prefer shalwar qamees for son. Men idealize fairly white daughters and women idealize medium-colored daughters. The elderly idealize medium-heighted brother while all other categories idealize tall-heighted brother. Adolescents, college graduates, and married idealize clean shaved brother; all other categories idealize brother with short beard and short mustaches. Elderly idealize brother in qamees shalwar in comparison with rest of the categories who idealize brother in trouser with t-shirt. Elderly and college graduates idealize sister with mature look and rest of the categories idealize sister with babyish look. The ideal husband in men's opinion is clean shaved, whereby women idealize husband with short beard and short mustaches. Wife is idealized with beautified look through makeup for all the categories except the elderly who idealize mature looking wife. The ideal hair color of a wife in women's opinion is chocolate brown, whereby men idealize wife with black hair. The ideal boyfriend for women is a tall heighted, medium skin toned person wearing paint and shirt without tie, whereby a medium heighted fairly white person wearing shalwar qamees is the ideal boyfriend in men's opinion. The ideal girlfriend for men is fairly white colored, black hair who wears shalwar qamees, has a curved body figure, and a mature look. The ideal girlfriend, in a woman's opinion, is medium-toned, brown-black hair, who wears jeans with a shirt, has a slim body figure, and a beautified by make-up look.

Discussion

The current study revealed Pakistanis-specific preferences for the ideal physical features of different relations. Tall height, muscular body, short beard with short mustaches, light-brown skin-tone, brown eyes, and black hair are commonly idealized for men. Medium height, curved body, fair complexion, brown eyes, and black hair are commonly idealized for women. Most of these preferences align with the universal trends of beauty and physical attractiveness. Fair skin-tone, for example, is considered an extremely important factor for physical attractiveness of women globally (Fink et al., 2018; Husain & Aziz, 2014; Husain & Gulzar, 2015; Karan, 2008; Nagar, 2018; Ryabov, 2019; Tadinac,

2010; Vera Cruz, 2018) which puts women into a state of competition to become fairer (Brebner et al., 2011). Medium skin-tone i.e. not purely white and not so dark, is preferred over dark skin-tone (Coetzee et al., 2012; Garza et al., 2016; Ryabov, 2019; Shankar & Subish, 2016; Stepanova & Strube, 2018; Vera Cruz, 2018). Skin color is generally not an important factor in men's attractiveness (Wade, 2016). Hair also contributes to physical attractiveness of both men and women (Fink et al., 2016; Matz & Hinsz, 2018). Tall height (Buunk et al., 2019) and muscular bodies (Crossley et al., 2012; Jeffreys, 2014; Law & Labre, 2002; Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005; Smolak & Murnen, 2008) are significant factors for men's physical attractiveness. Women prefer Bearded men over cleanshaven (Dixson et al., 2016). Curved body figures of women are considered physically attractive (Calogero et al., 2007; Del Zotto & Pegna, 2017; Garza et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2015; Wade, 2010). Facial redness (Thorstenson, Pazda, Elliot & Perrett, 2017) and heavier voice tones (Feinberg et al., 2011; O'Connor et al., 2014) are also considered attractive for men. Thin jawline, small chin and nose, prominent cheekbones, fuller lips (Cerrati & Thomas, 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Wade et al., 2018), large buttocks (Heidekrueger et al., 2017), facial redness (Thorstenson, Pazda, Elliot & Perrett, 2017), longer eyelashes (Adam, 2020), dark and differentiated limbal ring around the eye (Peshek et al., 2011), large round eyes (Chang et al., 2016; Wade et al., 2018), enhanced pupil size (Chang et al., 2016), and higher pitched voices (Babel et al., 2014; Borkowska & Pawlowski, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2011; Little, Connely, et al., 2011; O'Connor et al., 2014; Pisanski & Rendall, 2011; Puts et al., 2011) are some other factors involved in a women's beauty.

Being physically attractive is an important public health concern worldwide (Cash et al., 2004; Cash & Smolak, 2011; Neighbors et al., 2008; Pruis & Janowsky, 2010; Rozin et al., 2001). Satisfaction with one's physical features has strong positive associations with healthy behaviors, higher self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, and overall psychological wellbeing (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007; Diener et al., 1995; Donaghue, 2009; Satinsky et al., 2012; Stokes & Frederick-Recascino, 2003; Swami et al., 2009; Swami, Hadji-Michael, et al., 2008; Swami, Rozmus-Wrzesinska, et al., 2008; Swami & Tovee, 2008). Dissatisfaction with physical features, on the other hand, is associated with poor psychological wellbeing (Keery et al., 2004), depression (Mond et al., 2011; Paxton et al., 2006), and lower self-esteem (van den Berg et al., 2010; Wertheim et al., 2001).

For the first time in Pakistan, the current paper depicts the ground realities about public perception of the ideal physical features for different relations. The paper portrays the current trends for ideal looks and personalities, which will help a person understand social norms about being attractive or unattractive.

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Table

Table 1: The ideal features of physical attractiveness for different relations

Relation	Height	Body Shape	Face	Dress	Head Covers	Skin Complexion	Hair Color	Eye Color
Father	Tall	Muscular	Short beard with short mustaches	Kurta Shalwar	Nothing on head	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Brother	Tall	Muscular	Short beard with short mustaches	Trouser with T-Shirt	Nothing on head	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Husband	Tall	Muscular	Short beard with short mustaches	Pant and Shirt without tie	Nothing on head	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Son	Tall	Muscular	Short beard with short mustaches	Trouser with T-Shirt	Nothing on head	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Boyfriend	Tall	Muscular	Short beard with short mustaches	Pant and Shirt without tie	Nothing on head	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Mother	Medium	Curved	Mature look	Traditional Shalwar Qamees	Dupatta	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Sister	Medium	Curved	Babyish look	Traditional Shalwar Qamees	Dupatta	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Wife	Medium	Curved	Beautified look (with make-up)	Traditional Shalwar Qamees	Dupatta	Medium, white to light brown	Black	Brown
Daughter	Medium	Curved	Babyish look	Traditional Shalwar Qamees	Dupatta	White, fair	Black	Brown
Girlfriend	Medium	Curved	Mature look	Traditional Shalwar Qamees	Nothing on head	White, fair	Black	Brown