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What is appealing? sex and racial differences in perceptions of the physical attractiveness of women

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WHAT IS APPEALING?: SEX AND RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS OF

WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

In today's society a beauty ideal exists in America, which attempts to define female beauty as fitting into a certain mold. Certain characteristics have been deemed the most attractive when it comes to female physical attractiveness, and an ideal image of beauty has been presented by the media. This research focuses on whether or not everyone buys into that beauty ideal, and examines the impact that a person's sex and race has on the physical characteristics which that individual defines as the most appealing.

Surveys were administered to 300 UCF students age 18-35. Participants were asked about ten different physical characteristics relating to women, and were asked to choose the characteristic among each group that they found the most physically attractive or beautiful. The study showed that both sex and racial differences do exist, and that there are variations in what different people consider beautiful. Not everyone has the same opinion on what is attractive in regards to the physical appearance of women.

DEDICATION

For my parents, because without the two of you, none of this would have even been possible.

Thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams no matter how big or small they are. I love

you both very much, and words cannot express how thankful and grateful I am for all that you

have done and continue to do for me and my sisters. You two really are the best.

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INTRODUCTION

Beauty and physical appearance are two things that are considered to be of great importance in today's society. In the U.S. today, many strive for physical perfection, and much attention is focused on one's exterior and the way one looks. A beauty ideal has been created overtime through the combination of several elements within American culture, and this ideal image attempts to define female beauty as fitting into a certain mold. Certain characteristics, such as having a thin body, big eyes, full lips, flawless skin, and high cheekbones, for example, have been deemed the most attractive when it comes to female physical attractiveness in a young body. A model of beauty has been presented by the media, but whether or not everyone buys into that ideal is a topic worth delving into (Goodman, Morris, & Sutheland, 2008).

The impact that a person's sex and race has on the physical characteristics which that individual defines as the most appealing should also be examined. While there have been studies related to topics such as these, there are very few if any studies such as this one, which focuses on both gender *and* racial differences in relation to perceptions of the physical attractiveness of women as well as on the views of *both* sexes on *women* as opposed to their views on the opposite sex. Studying this subject matter even further can help to gain insight into an area in which there are still many unanswered questions and inconsistent results. Delving more into this topic will lead to clearer, more concise answers on the matter at hand.

Therefore it is imperative to ask, does the male perception of female beauty differ from the female one, and does the race of a respondent influence these perceptions? Despite the images presented through various media outlets such as advertisement, film, television, and

magazines that promote a certain beauty ideal, it would be interesting to see the variations in what different people consider beautiful. Furthermore, results from this study could be pivotal for research in this area, and could open the door to many different areas, angles, and aspects of study related to investigation for this topic. A study comparing and contrasting the physical characteristics individuals rate as the most attractive for women would be ideal for examining this.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current American society has emphasized youth as beautiful and getting old as unattractive. Lijtmaer (2010) presents summaries on beauty and aging, beauty and culture, and on theories of physical beauty. He provides a clinical example of a female patient. The conflicts and fantasies she experiences are investigated, as she tries to bring her own body closer to both her perception of idealized beauty and the ideal image presented through the media with the help of cosmetic surgery. She wants to get liposuction to achieve the thinner body frame considered ideal in the media. The quests for perfection have led to a major increase in cosmetic surgery procedures (Lijtmaer, 2010), as more and more try to obtain the beauty ideal consisting of certain traits such as bigger breasts and thinner bodies, and prolong their youth. Consumers of cosmetic surgery believe that these procedures can lead to happiness. After acquiring the physical characteristics thought of to be the most beautiful, many believe that they will then gain positive emotions of feeling attractive. (Lijtmaer, 2010)

Some people may remain miserable and feel unattractive because they do not possess the traits considered to be ideal. Feeling unattractive could possibly lead to many different types of inner conflicts, including depression, anxiety, and unhappiness. Few studies focus on women's emotional responses to various beauty types; however, there are studies such as the one by Goodman and Sutherland (2008) that show that there are differences in opinions between people in the industry who choose the models for fashion magazines and the audience who views them. This study had participants look at 6 different beauty types and examined their responses to each type. Not everyone may want to have the look represented through the media or may consider

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that look as the most attractive. Studies such as this one show that there are differing opinions on what is both physically attractive and physically appealing.

Perceptions of overall physical attractiveness can be based on numerous characteristics. A study by Brown, Cash, & Noles (1986) reveals this, as the results of their study found that both facial and bodily attributes were considerable measures in determining the attractiveness of both males and females. This study demonstrates that people are attracted to numerous features that both encompass and differentiate from those embodied by the ideal.

Sex Differences

Glasser, Robert, and Feliciano (2009) found that men are over 3.5 times more likely than women to have body type preferences (relating to the shape of a body) when it comes to dating. This could possibly be a reason why some heterosexual women do try to obtain the beauty ideal, and why many are concerned with having their body look a certain way in order to be perceived as attractive. Perhaps these women are trying to satisfy men's desires. A study examining the determinants of female physical attractiveness focused on weight to height ratio (WHR), (BMI), and curvaceousness, and revealed that these factors do influence a woman's perception of self-attractiveness (Fischer & Voracek, 2006). Women want to obtain the ideal seen in the media and feel bad about themselves when they do not have bodies that are considered to be the most attractive. Several Sociology studies, such as the one conducted by Fishcer and Voracek (2006), have found that women prefer the thinner bodies that are projected to be the most appealing of existing body types. Additionally, several Sociology studies have revealed that women tend to

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overestimate male preferences for thin female figures. The results of one such study performed by Cohn and Adler (1992) support the proposition that women tend to have a strong bias towards thinner body types. About half of the women sampled in the study chose "own ideal" and "attractive" figures that were at least one body silhouette thinner than their own current size. Analysis revealed that not only do women overestimate the extent to which men perceive thin women as attractive, but they also overestimate the extent to which thin figures are viewed as ideal by their female peers. As expressed in this study, conclusions can be made that women regard thin figures as the most desirable and attractive, and they appear to have a common classification as to what constitutes an ideal figure.

Physical attractiveness is not limited to body type and shape. Many physical characteristics determine the physical attractiveness of an individual, and several studies have examined different physical characteristics trying to determine what attributes makes a person more physically appealing than others. One of the earlier studies on this topic was conducted by Feinman and Gill (1978) on 482 female and 549 male Caucasian students in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. The study focused on eye color, hair color, and complexion color of the opposite sex and its purpose was to determine the preferences among each sex for each physical characteristic. The results of the study showed that males revealed a "somewhat greater preference for lighter female coloration" for women as opposed to darker female coloration. Both sexes were found to have a strong aversion for redheads, and men favored blonde (38%) or brown hair (41%). In regards to eye color, most men (27%) chose light blue eyes as the color they liked best. Next was brown at 25%, and hazel and dark brown were both tied at 22%.

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A more recent study focused on the preferences of three different physical characteristics- skin tone, hair length, and hair color- in relation to a woman's attractiveness, health, and fertility. The participants of the previous study were 130 men and 112 women recruited from a campus setting in Greater London. The participants were asked to rate a series of 12 line drawings that varied in three levels of skin tone, two levels of hair color, and two levels of hair length. The results showed that light-toned figures were rated more positively than the dark-toned and tan figures. Brunettes were also rated more positively than blondes. Men rated long hair as more attractive than short hair for the dark-toned and tan figures, but not for the light figures. Women rated long hair as more attractive than short hair only for the dark-toned figures. Both women and men rated dark hair more positively than blonde hair for all three skin tones; however, women were more likely to rate dark hair higher than blonde hair for all three skin tones (Swami, Furnham, and Joshi (2008).

In addition to hair color, hair style can also be rated at different levels of attraction. Examining different attributes such as hair color and style is important because it helps to see what characteristics are viewed as most attractive, and how these traits relate to the beauty ideal. Mesko and Bereczkei (2004) did a study on thirty young men that focused on hairstyles, and found that hairstyles also have a large impact on female facial attractiveness. According to Mesko and Berczekei, the long and medium-length hair (shoulder-length) styles were the only two hairstyles out of the six examined that had a significant, positive effect on women's attractiveness. The results of the study found that these two hairstyles improved the physical appearance of less attractive women more so than they did for the attractive women. The females rated as more attractive had higher brows, larger eyes, and smaller chins than those who were

rated as less attractive. Therefore, preferences for certain characteristics can be seen across both sexes, and there seems to be a general census that women prefer thinner body frames in comparison to men, as well as in comparison to other body types.

<p align="center">Racial Differences</p>

Around the world, what defines physical attractiveness in women varies, and the beauty ideal varies across countries. This reveals that race and ethnicity have the ability to dramatically alter attractiveness preferences (Gottschall, 2008), which is understandable because there are so many different cultural backgrounds that possess various physical characteristics. For many, fitting into one category of beauty is unrealistic and impossible. Studies such as the one done by Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, and Wu (1995) depict the similarities and differences of what is defined as beautiful across many racial and ethnic backgrounds, and suggest that among certain cultures there might exist same-race preferences. Jones, Davis, Harris, Bennett, Brown, Wood, Jones, Spencer, Nelson, Brown, and Waddell (2003) support this "similarity-attraction effect" in their study, which found that black males were more likely to rate black females with similar skin color to their own as most attractive.

It is commonly believed that the African American culture places less emphasis on preventing weight gain in women, and that most African American men prefer more curvaceous body types. More black men are said to prefer "thick" body types, whereas most white men are said to go for thin women usually of their own race. Several Sociology studies have been done that examine the differences between body type preferences among individuals of different racial

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and ethnic backgrounds. A study conducted on 100 non-Hispanic males (50 Caucasian and 50 African American) between the ages of 18 and 58 years old by Freedman, Carter, Sbrocco, and Gray (2007) found that both African-American and Caucasian males prefer underweight and normal (about 145 pounds on a 5 foot 7 inch body frame) weight women, and that contrary to popular expectations African-American males did not choose the heavier female figures depicted in the study as ideal.

Conley and McCabe (2011) conducted a study on 1,440 men that revealed the BMI preferences of these men. The results found that the BMI of the raters did influence and make a difference on the attractiveness ratings of the photographs they were asked to critique. Photographs of women were altered so that there were two photographs of each woman being rated, one with a low BMI and one with a high BMI. The study found that "black raters were more likely than white raters to report finding a low-BMI [subject] attractive, but not the corresponding high-BMI [subject]" (p. 25). Among the men in the study done by Glasser, Robert, and Feliciano (2009), the non-white groups were more likely to prefer women with average body types as opposed to body types that were thin or thin and toned. Although most male daters in the study chose the thinner body types, those that were African-American and Latino were more accepting of and open to larger female body types. Most African American men were open to the greatest variety of body types and weight. This study went against the usual black-white dichotomy and revealed the preferences of other ethnic groups as well. The minorities the study encompassed included African-American, Asian, and Latino men, and the results revealed that all three of these groups were less interested than white men in the thin, toned female body. Therefore, Glasser, Robert, and Feliciano (2009) concluded that race-

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ethnicity and gender does influence body type preferences. Men and whites were found to be significantly more likely than women and non-whites to have strong preferences.

However, while there is evidence to support the hypothesis that more Caucasian men prefer thinner figures than African-American men, research shows that when asked about body type preferences during studies more African-American men tend to prefer thinner figures in comparison to heavier figures as well. This counters the belief that there is pressure within the African- American community for women to have more voluptuous bodies, and suggests that there is probably just less pressure within these communities for women to lose weight (Greenberg & LaPorte, 1996) and a variety of features are valued—not just how much one weighs.

Nonetheless, while there might be less pressure on African American women in regards to body size, pressures on African American women do exist in relation to other physical characteristics. African American women have long been affected by the white standard of beauty, and Patton (2006) questions societal definitions of beauty and the devastating effects it has had and continues to have on African American women.

<u>Conclusion</u>

More recently in media, examples of change in the beauty ideal can be seen as well as a more diverse point of view in regards to beauty. There are popular examples that challenge this ideal and show that what is viewed as attractive can vary for everyone. A character worth mentioning is the character of Ugly Betty on ABC. Her character challenges the dominant ideals

of feminine beauty. She represents the complete opposite of what society defines as beautiful. She is also self-assured and confident despite the fact that she challenges traditional standards of beauty (Esch, 2010). However, during the extent of the show the appearance of her character transforms. She starts to dress more fashionably, no longer wears glasses, and her hair style changes as well, which leads one to question the real power of traditional beauty standards and the desire for one to possess what is considered attractive.

The Dove campaign celebrates what they define as real beauty, which according to Dove, is represented by all shapes and sizes. The article by Millard (2009) examines Dove's presentation on beauty and women's reactions to it. It outlines interpretation processes and discovers that expressing one's beauty and self requires different elements of performance. Dove's assertion that beauty is diverse is important in redefining beauty standards and rebuilding women's self-esteem. It is worth examining men and women's views in light of these new images. While a beauty ideal certainly does exist there is still some evidence of change, and of contrasting opinions. Dove uses models of different sizes, colors, heights, etc. to reflect this. However, their advertisements still carry an element of perfection, as the models have long hair and flawless skin despite their full-figured body sizes.

The current study differed from the ones above because the research was conducted solely on college students. The study focused on gender and racial differences related to the physical appearance of women. It is unique because unlike most studies which ask the opinion of women on men, it instead asks the opinion of women on women. There are shifts in media, and the results related to this topic seem to be inconsistent. Contributing important information to

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research in this area, providing clearer answers, and presenting information on this subject from

angles that have hardly been looked at before are good reasons to keep this research going.

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METHODOLOGY

Pen and paper surveys (see appendix) examining this issue were distributed to 300 students at a southern public university in the spring of 2011. The sample was a convenience sample. The original quota of the sample was set at 150 women and 150 men, all of whom remained anonymous. However, the amount of men and women who took the survey varied from this ideal. The criteria for those who took the survey were that they had to be UCF students and between the ages of 18 and 35. The sample was acquired by going into classrooms and handing out surveys with permission from professors. The purpose of the survey was to determine the differences between male and female perceptions of female beauty and physical attractiveness, to examine what physical characteristics both sexes found the most physically attractive or beautiful in relation to women, and to examine the influence that race had on these perceptions.

On the survey were 10 questions asking about certain physical characteristics in regards to the physical appearance of women. This section of the survey requested that the individual choose which specific characteristic out of a group of options they thought represented their version of the ideal woman, thus formulating their definition of what was most attractive or beautiful to them in regards to the physical appearance of women. Questions included ones such as: "what hair length do you find most attractive," "what hair type do you find most attractive," "what body type do you find most attractive," and "what skin color do you find the most attractive," among several other questions (see appendix). Demographic questions were asked in the last part of the survey. The independent variables of the study are the sex (male or female) and race/ethnicity (black, white, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or other) of the respondent.

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Other demographic information was collected including the age, current relationship status, sexual orientation, height, and weight of a respondent, and their answer to a question asking whether or not they are looking for a relationship and if they are what type. The dependent variables in the study are the physical characteristics relating to the physical appearance of women. These specific characteristics are: eye color, hair color, body type, height, hair type, breast size, hair length, skin color, butt size, and make-up look. Body type was chosen instead of weight because it was thought to be a characteristic that participants would be able to measure more accurately.

All data were entered and analyzed using SPSS. Univariate analyses were conducted to determine sample characteristics and the overall preferred characteristics. Crosstabulations between characteristics and sex and race were conducted to determine if there were statistical differences in these preferences. Given the categorical nature of the data, multivariate techniques are unfortunately not appropriate.

RESULTS

The average age of the participants involved in the study was 21.65 years old (Table 1). The majority of the individuals who took the survey were White (64%), while the fewest amount of people identified as Asian/Pacific Islander.

Table 1. Sample Demographics (N=300)

Mean age	21.65
Sex	
Female	61
Male	39
Race/Ethnicity	
White	64
Hispanic	13
Black	14
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
Other	7

Notes: All numbers presented are percentages except for mean age.

To examine statistically significant differences based on sex and race in the preferred characteristics, crosstabulations were conducted. The first set examine the physical characteristics that both men and women chose among each set as the most attractive or beautiful when it comes to the physical appearance of women. As shown in Table 2, there are significant differences in the skin color deemed to be most attractive (*$\chi2$= 12.899, p< .05). While nearly half of men (45%) chose fair skin, under a third of women (28%) did so. Women were more varied in their responses.

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Table 2. Crosstabulation Between Skin Color and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Fair	45	28	34
Olive	7	12	10
Bronze	23	26	25
Light Brown/Caramel	21	22	22
Medium Brown	3	10	7
Dark Brown	1	3	2

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$= 12.899, p< .05

Table 3 shows that the plurality of men (35%) and women (42%) chose green eyes as the most attractive and reveals that besides the "other" category, dark brown eyes was chosen the least amount of times by both men and women as the most attractive eye color. For both men and women, blue eyes were the second most popular options.

Table 3. Crosstabulation Between Eye Color and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Dark Brown	10	7	8
Light Brown	17	17	17
Green	35	42	39
Blue	31	28	29
Other	7	6	6

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$= 2.034, p< n.s.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 show that most men who took the survey chose medium length hair that reaches the shoulders, is straight in texture, and is either dark brown or blonde as the most attractive. On the other hand, most women chose long hair that reaches a woman's mid-back and is wavy and dark brown in color as the most beautiful. Therefore, there are statistically

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significant differences for the hair type (*$\chi2$= 21.554, p< .05), hair length (*$\chi2$= 23.199, p< .05), and hair color (*$\chi2$= 15.751, p<.05) judged to be the most attractive.

Table 4. Crosstabulation Between Hair Type and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Straight	58	32	42
Wavy	32	46	40
Curly	9	20	15
Afro-Centric	2	3	2

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 21.554, p< .05

Table 5. Crosstabulation Between Hair Length and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Very Short (boy/pixie-cut)	4	8	7
Short (chin-length bob)	4	5	5
Medium-Length (shoulder-length)	53	28	38
Long (mid-back)	38	51	46
Very Long (past mid-back)	1	8	5

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 23.199, p< .05

Table 6. Crosstabulation Between Hair Color and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Black	15	15	15
Dark Brown	26	42	36
Light Brown	22	18	20
Blonde	26	12	17
Red	8	11	10
Other	4	3	3

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 15.751,p<.05

While men and women seem to disagree about ideal hair types, Tables 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 all reveal that both men and women chose the hour glass body type, height that is between 5'3" and 5'6", large C cup breasts, a medium-sized butt, and a make-up look that consists of natural or little make-up as the most physically attractive characteristics out of the categories that those descriptions pertain to in relation to the physical appearance of women.

Table 7. Crosstabulation Between Body Type and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Apple	2	2	2
Pear (bottom heavy)	13	5	8
Hour Glass	67	73	71
Top Heavy-Small Bottom	2	5	4
Thin All Over	16	15	16

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 7.919, p< n.s.

Table 8. Crosstabulation Between Height and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
5'-5'2"	20	11	14
5'3"-5'6"	60	49	53
5'7"-5'10"	19	30	26
5'11"+	2	10	7

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 15.902, p< .05

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Table 9. Crosstabulation Between Breast Size and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Extra Small (AA cup)	0	1	1
Small (A cup)	0	3	2
Medium (B cup)	43	46	44
Large (C cup)	47	46	46
Extra Large (D+ cup)	10	4	6

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$= 9.777, p< .05

Table 10. Crosstabulation Between Butt Size and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
None/Flat	0	1	1
Small	15	16	16
Medium	73	74	73
Large	12	9	10

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$=1.795, p<n.s.

Table 11. Crosstabulation Between Make-Up Look and Sex*

	Men	Women	Total
Make-Up	2	8	6
Natural/Little Make-Up	87	85	86
No Make-Up At All	10	7	8

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.
*$\chi2$=7.767, p<.05

However, while men and women did opt for the same choices in regards to those five characteristics, three of them show statistically significant differences. The height (*$\chi2$= 15.902, p< .05), breast size (*$\chi2$= 9.777, p< .05), and make-up look (*$\chi2$=7.767, p<.05) a respondent chose as the most attractive or beautiful is statistically different in regards to each sex. While the number of men and women who chose certain categories in regards to breast size and make-up are similar and the majority of men and women chose certain groupings, the outliers of the other categories create the difference and make the relationship for these characteristics statistically significant. Therefore, out of all ten characteristics being examined, which eye color, body type, and butt size deemed to be the most attractive were the only three shown to not have a statistically significant relationship to sex. This reveals that the responses among women and men varied.

This study also examined racial differences for the ten characteristics. Comparable to how responses were for the sexes, similarities and differences among each racial group occurred as well. Table 12 shows that in regards to the skin color found most attractive for women, most whites chose fair skin, most Hispanics chose bronze skin, most blacks and those that formed the "other" category chose light brown/caramel skin, and most Asian/Pacific Islanders chose olive skin. In regards to Table 13, most whites, Hispanics, and those that formed the "other" category chose green as the most attractive eye color, while most blacks chose light brown and Asian/Pacific Islanders chose both green and blue.

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Table 12. Crosstabulation Between Skin Color and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Fair	50	13	2	0	5	35
Olive	9	8	2	57	14	10
Bronze	22	58	5	14	29	25
Light Brown/Caramel	14	21	46	14	48	22
Medium Brown	4	0	34	0	5	7
Dark Brown	1	0	10	14	0	2

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2$=173.080,p<.05

Table 13. Crosstabulation Between Eye Color and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Dark Brown	7	5	17	14	5	8
Light Brown	9	18	49	14	19	17
Green	43	42	20	29	48	40
Blue	36	26	2	29	24	29
Other	5	8	12	14	5	6

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2$=59.237,p<.05

Table 14 shows that whites, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and those that form the "other" category all chose straight hair as the most attractive hair type for women. Hispanics and blacks both prefer wavy hair. Every racial group selected long hair that was mid-back length as the most attractive except for the "other" group, whose individuals chose both shoulder-length and mid-back length hair as most appealing (refer to Table 15). Dark brown hair was the hair color the chosen as the most attractive by every racial group except for blacks, who picked black hair (Table 16).

Table 14. Crosstabulation Between Hair Type and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Straight	46	34	27	57	48	42
Wavy	41	47	34	43	33	41
Curly	12	18	29	0	14	15
Afro-Centric	1	0	10	0	5	2

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2=25.792, p<.05$

Table 15. Crosstabulation Between Hair Length and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Very Short (boy/pixie cut)	5	5	17	0	5	7
Short (chin-length bob)	5	5	5	0	5	5
Medium-Length (shoulder-length)	40	40	27	29	43	38
Long (mid-back)	45	45	49	57	43	46
Very Long (past mid-back)	5	5	2	14	5	5

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2=12.191, p<n.s.$

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Table 16. Crosstabulation Between Hair Color and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Black	6	18	51	29	14	15
Dark Brown	36	34	29	43	48	36
Light Brown	24	16	2	14	19	19
Blonde	21	16	5	0	10	17
Red	10	13	7	0	10	10
Other	3	3	5	14	0	3

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$=71.405, p< .05

According to Table 17, every racial group chose the hour glass body shape as the most attractive except for the Asian/Pacific Islanders, who chose the thin all over body type as the most eye-catching. Asian/Pacific Islanders also differed from the other racial groups in the height that they chose as most attractive. While they chose the height range of 5'-5'2" as the most attractive, every other racial group chose the height range of 5'3"-5'6" (refer to Table 18).

Table 17. Crosstabulation Between Body Type and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Apple	1	0	5	29	0	2
Pear (bottom heavy)	8	13	5	0	14	8
Hour Glass	72	63	76	29	76	70
Top Heavy-Small Bottom	3	13	0	0	0	4
Thin All Over	17	11	15	43	10	16

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$=49.807, p< .05

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Table 18. Crosstabulation Between Height and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
5'-5'2"	13	18	12	43	10	14
5'3"-5'6"	56	53	44	29	57	54
5'7"-5'10"	27	18	29	29	24	26
5'11"+	4	11	15	0	10	7

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2$=15.395, p<n.s.

Table 19 shows that most whites chose large (C cup) breasts as the most attractive, most Hispanics chose both medium (B cup) and large (C cup) breasts as the most attractive, and the other racial groups (which consists of blacks, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and the "other" category) all chose medium (B cup) breasts as the most beautiful. In regards to butt size and make-up look, every racial group chose a medium sized butt and natural/little make-up as the most striking (see Tables 20 and 21).

Table 19. Crosstabulation Between Breast Size and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Extra Small (AA cup)	0	0	5	0	0	1
Small (A cup)	3	0	3	0	0	2
Medium (B cup)	41	47	54	57	52	45
Large (C cup)	50	47	28	43	43	46
Extra Large (D+ cup)	6	6	10	0	5	7

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi2$=21.647,p<n.s.

Table 20. Crosstabulation Between Butt Size and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
None/Flat	0	0	2	0	0	0
Small	19	11	7	29	10	16
Medium	75	79	68	57	71	74
Large	7	11	20	14	19	10

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$=25.589,p<n.s.

Table 21. Crosstabulation Between Make-Up Look and Race*

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	Total
Make-Up	6	8	5	0	5	6
Natural/Little Make-Up	88	84	76	100	81	86
No Make Up At All	6	8	20	0	14	8

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

*$\chi 2$=11.366,p<n.s.

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DISCUSSION

Crosstabs were run on 10 different dependent variables in relation to the sex and race of each participant. Data analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant difference with regards to 7 of the dependent variables: skin color, hair type, hair length, hair color, height, breast size, and the make-up look (a participant chose as the most physically attractive or beautiful) and sex. Which eye color, body type, and butt size a participant chose as the most physically attractive did not seem to have a statistically significant relationship with the sex of the participant. The results of the Tables 3 through 12 show that most men in this study think that a woman who is between 5'3" and 5'6", has an hour glass body shape, large C cup breasts, a medium-sized butt, fair skin, green eyes, straight hair that is medium-length (at her shoulders) and either dark brown or blonde in color, and who wears little make-up so that it looks natural, is the most physically attractive. On the other hand, while most women in this study would agree with the men that a woman who is between 5'3" and 5'6", has hour glass body shape, large C cup breasts, a medium-sized butt, fair skin, green eyes, and who wears little make-up so that it looks natural is the most attractive, they think that dark brown hair that is wavy and long (at a woman's mid-back) is the most beautiful.

Data analysis also revealed that there seems to be a statistically significant relationship between 5 of the variables: skin color, eye color, hair type, hair color, and body type (a participant chose as the most physically attractive or beautiful) and race. Which hair length, height, breast size, butt size, and make-up look a participant chose as the most physically attractive did not seem to have a statistically significant relationship with the race of the

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participant. The results of the Tables 13 through 22 show that in this study most white students think that a woman who is between 5'3" and 5'6", has fair skin and green eyes, dark brown hair that is long (mid-back length) and straight, large C cup breasts, a medium sized butt, an hour glass body shape, and wear natural/little make-up is the most attractive. While the Hispanic students in this study would agree with the majority of white students that a woman who is between 5'3" and 5'6", has green eyes, dark brown hair that is long hair (mid-back length), a medium sized butt, an hour glass body type, and wears natural make-up is the most attractive, they think that bronze skin, wavy hair, and both medium (B cup) and large (C cup) breasts are the most beautiful. Most black students in this study agree with most of the white and Hispanic students that long hair, an hour glass body shape, a medium sized butt, medium breasts, a height range between 5'3" and 5'6", and natural make-up is the most attractive. However, they would define light brown eyes, light brown/caramel skin, black wavy hair as being the most eye-catching. The Asian/Pacific Islanders in this study also find long hair, medium breasts and a medium sized butt, and natural make-up the most attractive, but they think that olive skin, the thin all over body type, both green and blue eyes, dark brown straight hair, and a height range between 5' and 5'2" is the best. The rest of the students in this study that fit into the "other" category think that a woman who is between 5'3" and 5'6", has light brown/caramel skin and green eyes, dark brown long or medium length straight hair, an hour glass body type, medium breasts and a medium sized butt, and wears natural/little make-up is the most attractive.

Therefore, it can be concluded that while many similarities do exist between the physical characteristics that men, women, and individuals from different racial groups define as the most physically attractive and beautiful when it comes to the physical appearance of women, sex and

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racial differences are prevalent as well. While the study revealed that the male perception of female beauty among UCF students age 18 to 35 is similar to the female one in many ways, it also revealed that there are differences between the two and that race does have its influence. There is a statistically significant relationship between the skin color, hair type, hair length, hair color, height, breast size, and make-up look (even though some of the results are very close) each sex considers the most attractive for women. In relation to the perceptions of each racial group, there is a statistically significant relationship between the skin color, eye color, hair type, hair color, and body type each race chose as the most eye-catching (values depicted under each Table). This study illustrates that answers to questions asking "what is the most attractive when it comes to female beauty, physical appearance, and physical attractiveness," may vary among the sexes and different racial groups depending on the characteristic being discussed.

This study fits in with the studies in the literature review through its examination, discussion, and main focus on the topic of female beauty and physical attractiveness. The results of its findings were both similar to and different from a few of the studies previously mentioned. In comparison to the study conducted by Feinman and Gill (1978), which found that men revealed a "somewhat greater preference for lighter female coloration" for women as opposed to darker coloration, the results of this study also found that most men (45%) chose fair skin as the most attractive. Similar to the study done by Brown, Cash, & Noles (1986), this study found that both facial and bodily attributes are of great importance when determining the attractiveness of (in this case) females. This supports the idea that perceptions of overall physical attractiveness are based on several different things.

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In their study, Freedman, Carter, Sbrocco, and Gray (2007) found that contrary to popular societal expectations African-American males did not choose the heavier female figures predicted in their research to be ideal. This study supports that finding, as most of the blacks surveyed chose the hourglass body type (a body type that is on the thinner to normal weight range) as the most attractive. It also depicted the similarities and differences of what is defined as beautiful across many cultures just as the study done by Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu did, and suggested that among certain cultures same-race preferences might in fact exist. The results of this study revealed that answers for the skin color considered to be the most attractive seemed to be related to the skin colors most often found among the racial group of the respondent. In relation to the other characteristics, it was found that participants also seemed to choose characteristics that were not uncommon to their own racial and ethnic groups. When looking at the answers of both male and female white and black respondents in this study, it was found that patterns emerged in the data and respondents seemed to be more drawn to characteristics that represented themselves. This was especially true for skin color, hair color, and eye color. While statistical analyses cannot be done due to the sample size of participants, comparisons can be made. The majority of black men chose light brown/caramel skin, black hair, and light brown eyes as the most attractive whereas the majority of white men chose fair skin, dark brown or light brown hair, and green or blue eyes as the most attractive. In regards to women, the majority of black women chose light brown/caramel or medium-brown skin, black hair, and light brown eyes as the most attractive whereas the majority of white women chose fair skin, dark brown hair, and green eyes followed closely by blue as the most attractive. This

reveals that people seem to reflect themselves and often find what is similar in appearance to what they look like as attractive.

The beauty ideal consists of certain traits such as a thinner body frame and larger breasts, and for some the attributes examined in the data analysis of this study the preferred characteristics did seem to match that. Most participants did in fact choose the thinner body types and larger breasts as being the most attractive and beautiful. These results partially support Lijtmaer's (2010) summaries on theories of physical beauty and beauty and culture, as certain traits chosen did depict the ideal image presented through the media. This study represents reliable methods of examining the subject area it observes because it supports Sociology studies that have been done before, which demonstrate that standards of attractiveness vary across demographic groups. It also helps to uphold the argument that sex and racial-ethnic variations and preferences do exist in relation to female physical attractiveness.

Future research would consist of including additional questions on the survey asking what age ranges participants feel are the most beautiful, and how much advertisement, media, and imaging a participant consumes in a given time period. How media consumption affects one's perception of female beauty is another factor that could add additional significant information to research in this area. Whether or not there are sex and racial differences in relation to that can also be examined. Examining the effect of a participant's own physical characteristics on their preferences and how geographical locations and features play a role in attractiveness is also worth looking into. Qualitative studies that can be done in regards to research in this area involve observing reactions of participants in social settings, or interviewing and questioning people in society and asking them what they think denotes physical female

beauty. Many times beauty is situational. Roles an individual has in society and an individual's social setting (for example being in a night club versus on a playground) could influence perceptions of that individual's attractiveness and the various factors that would make that individual appealing. Research examining social context and its influence on beauty should be considered and expanded upon. While conclusions have been made, there is still a lot to be discovered.

APPENDIX: SURVEY

This survey is completely anonymous. You must be 18 years or older to complete the

survey. Please write/circle answers legibly.

- **<u>When it comes to female beauty, physical appearance, and physical attractiveness:</u>**

1. What eye color do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) dark brown
   b) light brown
   c) green
   d) blue
   e) other _____

2. What hair color do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) black
   b) dark brown
   c) light brown
   d) blonde
   e) red
   f) other _____

3. What body type do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) apple
   b) pear(bottom heavy)
   c) hour glass
   d) top heavy-small bottom
   e) thin all over

4. What height do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) under 5'
   b) 5'-5'2"
   c) 5'3"-5'6"
   d) 5'7"-5'10"
   e) 5'11"+

5. What hair type do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) straight
   b) wavy
   c) curly
   d) afro-centric

6. What breast size do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) extra small (AA cup)
   b) small (A cup)
   c) medium (B cup)
   d) large (C cup)
   e) extra large (D+ cup)

7. What hair length do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) Very short (boy/pixie-cut)
   b) Short (chin-length bob)
   c) medium-length (shoulder-length)
   d) long (mid-back)
   e) very long (past mid-back)

8. What skin color do you find the most attractive? (circle one)

   a) fair (an ex: White)
   b) olive (an ex: Asian)
   c) bronze (an ex: Hispanic)
   d) light brown/caramel (mixed race/light-skinned black)
   e) medium-brown
   f) dark brown

9. What butt size do you find most attractive? (circle one)

   a) None/flat
   b) small
   c) medium
   d) large

10. What look do you prefer? (circle one)

    a) make-up
    b) natural/little make-up
    c) no makeup at all

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- **Demographic Questions**

11. Gender:

   a) male
   b) female

12. Race/ethnicity:

   a) White
   b) Hispanic
   c) Black/African-American
   d) Asian/Pacific Islander
   e) Other _____

13. Age: _____

14. Current relationship status:

   a) Single
   b) In an open-relationship
   c) In a closed/exclusive relationship
   d) Engaged
   e) Married
   f) Divorced

15. Are you looking for a relationship? If so, what type?

   a) Yes _____
   b) No

16. Sexual orientation:

   a) Heterosexual
   b) Homosexual
   c) Bi-sexual

17. Height: _____

18. Weight/estimated weight: _____

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