Effect of Group Status on Physical Attractiveness Preferences—From the Japanese Case to a General Cognitive Perspective

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ABSTRACT. The development of intergroup physical attractiveness preferences and the effect of national status on physical attractiveness judgments were examined. Study 1 reveals that ranking of national status and physical attractiveness are correlated. Study 2 shows that national labels attached to persons affect the ratings of their attractiveness. The results of Study 3 demonstrate that people tend to connect attractive people with nations of higher status. The author suggests that perceptions of national attractiveness derive from a categorization process linking status and appearance, as well as from indigenous dispositions toward certain physical features related to the preference of an ingroup mate.

There is a disgust for the Jew, just as there is a disgust for the Chinese or the Negro among certain people. Thus it is not from the body that the sense of repulsion arises, since one may love a Jewess very well if one does not know what her race is, rather it is something which enters the body from the mind. (Sartre, 1948, p. 11)

INTERGROUP PERCEPTION is a pivotal theme in current social psychology, and its cognitive aspects have been heavily investigated. Nevertheless, researchers have overlooked the issue of physical appearance in intergroup relations, even though it is the first variable to be perceived and categorized. Numerous historical and ethnographic sources indicate that initial encounters with outgroup

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members may result in feelings of repulsion, fear, and hostility that are often responses to appearance (van der Dennen, 1987). People also show a strong preference for others who are similar to and physically resemble them (Allport, 1954). Finally, social groups tend to emphasize or manipulate distinctive appearance (physical features, clothing, ornaments, etc.) to demarcate themselves from outgroups.

Among the countless examples of attitudes about appearance held by those in ingroups and outgroups, none has been as documented as the European aversion toward the physiques of African Blacks. Initial encounters with African Blacks during the 16th century led European explorers to look upon them with amazement mixed with repulsion. European records show that Blacks’ physical features, especially skin color, were taken as evidence of their supposed inferiority (Walvin, 1973). The Black African was considered ugly “by reason of his color and also his ‘horrid curls’ and ‘disfigured’ lips and nose” (Jordan, 1974, p. 6).

Although contemporary Blacks’ impressions regarding Whites are unknown, White men’s attitudes toward Blacks were probably not an exception. During the same period, the Europeans themselves were considered by the Chinese, for example, as physically defective creatures, who “provoked curiosity mingled with a feeling of repulsion and pity” (Dikötter, 1992, p. 14). As the Blacks resembled apes in the European eyes, the latter resembled macaques in the Chinese eyes, and both confirmed the observation of Epicharm, a thinker related to the Sophists, that “the most beautiful thing in the world for a dog is a dog, for an ox another ox” (cited in Tatarkiewicz, 1980, p. 133).

Despite initial impressions, lasting contacts tend to change images. Yet, whereas the denigration of Blacks’ features has continued well into the 20th century, the Chinese have gradually come to like certain European features and have partly adopted their customs and standards of beauty (Dikötter, 1992). What is the reason the physique of one group, or at least certain features of it, has been almost constantly denigrated, whereas another has become an object of admiration?

Studies dealing with human ethnocentrism can hardly account for the baffling tendency of intergroup physical preferences to fluctuate. Although the importance of race in determining preferences regarding physical attractiveness has been demonstrated (Cross & Cross, 1971; Martin, 1964; Milgram, 1978), most research has focused on the role of race in ingroup-outgroup (physical) stereotyping. Furthermore, the majority of studies have dealt with the racial effect upon the White-Black bipolarity within the peculiar American racial context; studies thus have somewhat ignored the wider issue. Race is unquestionably an important determinant in attractiveness preferences, yet it is not the only parameter in intergroup relations and, arguably, not the most basic one.

**Status as the Determinant in Evaluation of Attractiveness**

My thesis is that the status of a group is, in the long run, the most important factor in determining its physical preferences toward both others and self. Status is a feature that “denotes one’s social dominance, that is, it reflects one’s relative position in a social hierarchy” (Patterson, 1983, p. 109). In addition, status also refers to “the judgment of that person by the social group (however that’s defined, and however that’s measured)” (Henley, 1977, p. 20).

Group status is an imaginary construct based on geopolitical reality and group image (Brigham, 1971; Duijker & Frijda, 1961; Hamilton & Trollez, 1986). Although group status refers to the perceived position of a group the same way personal status refers to the perceived social position of an individual, its effect on the perception of group physical attractiveness is more intricate and, consequently, more obscure.

The psychological literature has little to say about the link between status and attractiveness preferences in the ethnic and the national arenas, and studies on ethnic and national stereotypes have largely ignored the physical component. Still, it can be contended that the effect of group status on intergroup physical attractiveness preferences can be inferred from several sources. First, we may infer from the role status plays for individuals. Second, we may infer from specific physical characteristics, which are related to both status and attractiveness. And finally, we may examine the development of the status-attractiveness notion in a single group—preferably one that has only recently developed such preferences.

**The Effect of Status Within Individuals**

Webster and Driskell (1983) argued that physical attractiveness is used as a diffuse status characteristic similar to sex, race, and even age (based on Berger, Rosenholts, & Zelditch, 1980). In those terms, status is created by the social expectation of attractive people’s greater competence, and therefore serves as a useful clue of people’s ability to perform tasks. This suggestion was supported by Kalick (1988), who asked participants to match portraits rated beforehand for attractiveness with various descriptions of status. Kalick demonstrated that attractiveness is associated with various descriptions of status, especially inherited or ascribed status labels, and concluded that attractiveness produces stereotyped inferences.

How early do such inferences begin? Vaughn and Langlois (1983) found that among females, the positive correlation between peer status and attractiveness started in the preschool years and continued into adolescence, in which dominance as a manifestation of status was found to correlate with physical attractiveness in both genders (Weisfeld, Bloch, & Ivers, 1983, 1984).

The link between status and beauty has been extensively studied within the context of human mating behavior in general and marriage in particular. The differential effect of status on perceived attractiveness has been explained as an outcome of social exchange between material security and attractiveness (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1976). It has been argued that people of high status can provide wealth and security and consequently are able
to attract more attractive partners. For that reason, status characteristics are perceived as an extension of physical characteristics. To examine that theory, Hill, Nocks, and Gardner (1987) manipulated models’ costumes representing high and low status and asked students to view slides of persons of the opposite sex, rating them for attractiveness as well as for desirability as partners.

Findings showed that all attractiveness measures were enhanced when models wore high-status costumes. Mate status and beauty may have different relevance for men and women in the current social milieu of sexual inequality. Hill et al. (1987) found that women raters were more susceptible to the status manipulation, whereas other studies have shown that association with an attractive female enhanced a male’s prestige and the evaluation of his status. That effect, however, did not extend to females (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976; Sigall & Landy, 1973).

Studies in real-life settings have reached similar conclusions, showing that a partner of high status often wishes and is able to mate with an attractive partner, with men usually taking the former role and women the latter. In a longitudinal study, Elder (1969) demonstrated that in adolescence, mobile girls were rated as more attractive than nonmobile girls. He concluded that in marriage mobility for the American working-class woman, physical attractiveness is more important than educational achievement (see also Taylor & Glenn, 1976; Udry, 1978).

Elder’s conclusion may have relevance to women of other classes as well. Mazur (1993) demonstrated that a woman’s social class can be validly judged from her wedding portrait. Judges not only could guess the social class of the bride who were pictured, but they were likely to regard brides with beautiful faces as belonging to the upper class.

The ultimate evidence for a real-life link between socioeconomic status and physical attractiveness was provided by Kaczorowski (1989, cited in Symmott, 1989), who examined data of the Canadian Quality of Life Panel Survey on 4,000 adults, collected between 1977 and 1981. Kaczorowski not only found that good-looking people earn 75% more than ugly people do, but that good looks determine wealth, rather than vice versa.

Effect of Status on Preferences for Specific Body Characteristics—The Case of Skin Color

Skin color seems to be the physical characteristic through which the above contention can best be demonstrated, because of its great variance across nations, as well as its infallible prominence in any human interaction. Skin color cannot be concealed or substantially changed, and it is relatively stable throughout life.

Skin color and attractiveness are related through the seemingly universal preference for lighter skin color. Van den Berghe and Frost (1986) examined available records from 51 societies and found that 47 of them showed a clear preference for “the lighter end of the locally represented spectrum, though not necessarily for the lightest possible skin color” (p. 92). Even the remaining four societies showed no unequivocal preference for darker skin.

Skin color is also associated with status, as a short tour around the globe would unmistakably reveal. India, as a multiracial, traditional society, can serve as a suitable starting point for examination of this notion. In almost all sections of Indian society “there is clearly a preference for light skin color” (Betelie, 1967, p. 453). In countries with a colonial heritage, especially in nonsegregated multiracial societies such as those of Central and South America, skin color has often been considered an indicator of the purity of one’s ethnic origins.

The West Indies notion that “the lighter skinned person quite often considers himself to be on a higher social plane than a person of darker color” probably prevails throughout that geographic region (Little, 1967, p. 516). Furthermore, a person of high social standing whose racial characteristics cannot be clearly determined may be referred to as “White,” whereas a person of low standing with identical skin color may be referred as “Black” (Harris, Gomes Consorte, Lang, & Byrne, 1993; Lancaster, 1991; Pitt-Rivers, 1967).

Status based on color has reached its apex in two societies: South Africa and the United States. South Africa, as the last country to hold a policy of apartheid, until recently exhibited perhaps the world’s most overt example of the connection between status and color. Color was the sole determinant of power there, and social status was stratified like a gray-scale spectrum (Legum, 1967).

Lincoln (1967), who reviewed the role of skin color in the United States, suggested that it was probably “the most important single index of uncritical human evaluation” (p. 527). The notable cultural shift and social progress in American society over the last few decades notwithstanding, Hughes and Hertel (1990) detected “little evidence that the association between skin color and socioeconomic status changed during the 30-year period between 1950 and 1980” (p. 1105). Not of less significance is their second conclusion that the impact of skin color is as great as the impact of race on the socioeconomic status of African Americans (see also Hall, 1992; Hill, 1944; Keith & Herring, 1991).

The color issue in the United States concerns not only African Americans. A recent study suggested that close relations between status and skin color can also be found among Mexican Americans (Arce, Murguia, & Frisbie, 1987). This evidence, as well as supporting data from many other societies not mentioned here, invariably shows that dark skin is perceived as a cue for low status and low attractiveness.

The Effect of Status Within Culture—The Case of Japan

Two features qualify Japanese society for a special position in the present framework. First, Japanese people had virtually no contact with the outside world for more than 200 years—a period of isolation that continued until the mid-19th century. Even after the opening of its ports under Western pressure, Japan’s geo-
graphical location and the fact that it had never been physically colonized meant that contact with foreigners was strictly limited. Second, Japan is one of the most homogeneous societies on earth; contact with minorities of different appearance has been minimal.

Although Japan was kept strictly isolated during the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), Dutch ships were allowed to land at a tiny island off Nagasaki. Few Japanese in that period ever saw a foreigner, and those who witnessed the unusual phenomenon regarded them “as a special variety of goblin that bore only a superficial resemblance to a normal human being”; a popular rumor insisted that “when the Dutch men urinate they raise one leg like dogs” (Keene, 1969, pp. 16–17).

Following Commodore Perry’s arrival and the opening of Japanese ports (1853), the old attitudes reappeared, but only for a short time. In a few years, the foreign power was recognized, and a full-scale modernization campaign was launched. Western clothing became compulsory for government officials four years after the Meiji restoration, and old customs and preferences rapidly vanished (Hirakawa, 1989). By the 1920s, “anything Western was considered ‘modern’ and, therefore, ‘superior,’” and “the subtile, not fully conscious, trend toward an idealization of western physical features by the Japanese apparently became of increasing importance” (Wagatsuma, 1967, pp. 416–417). In a few years, the Japanese adopted Western fashion, and the final stage of wholesale imitation started. However, the imitation abruptly declined with the rise of Japanese ultranationalism in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, “the rapidity with which Western standards of beauty became idealized after the war attests to the continuous drift that occurred in spite of ten years of antagonism and military hostilities” (Wagatsuma, 1967, p. 417; Wagatsuma & Yoneyama, 1967). Postwar studies revealed the presence of most, if not all, of the stereotypes and perceptions about physical attractiveness that existed in the West (Iwawaki & Lerner, 1974; Kownar & Ogawa, 1993a; Lerner & Iwawaki, 1975). In a less systematic fashion, one may note the prevalence of “Western” beauty consciousness in present-day Japan, as in an excessive use of foreign models, the partial preference for “Western-type” faces, and alteration through plastic surgery of Japanese body parts to a more Western appearance (Kuwabara, 1983; Shirakabe, 1991).

The Intergroup Appearance Preferences Theory

Drawing from biological, evolutionary, anthropological, and social–cognitive research, I (Kownar, 1994) advanced the following premises regarding the way group status affects the physical preferences of another group with whom it interacts.

1. People are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive social identity through the distinctiveness of their own group from other groups.

2. Physical characteristics, real or imagined, are often the most visible signs for such a distinction.

3. Initial contacts with outgroup members will lead to repulsion and denigration. Minimal contact will lead to increased comparison on a single dimension. This, in turn, increases distinction and maintains distance.

4. Longer contact will lead to further comparisons and, consequently, to the recognition of status.

5. Status recognition will bring about a decrease in repulsion toward groups of equal or higher status and an increase in repulsion toward groups of lower status.

6. Categorization processes and stereotypes will link the (physical) characteristics of high-status outgroups with notions of beauty and goodness and the characteristics of low-status groups with ugliness.

7. Long exposure to high-status groups will result in the acceptance of values common to that group, as well as preference for their physical characteristics.

8. In the long run, sexual selection (and occasionally natural selection) will cause ingroup members (initially high-status members of that group) to physically resemble members of high-status groups.

My focus in the present research was on the psychological mechanism, and especially the cognitive aspects, that link group status with physical attractiveness (Premise 6). Rather than dealing with racial labels, I concentrated on the effect of national status (though admittedly, the two labels often overlap). I believed that national labels could provide a better indication than racial labels of the effect of status on preferences regarding physical appearance, because national status is more transitory and because the differences between the physical appearances of persons of different nationalities are often blurred. In other words, if the effects of national status could be shown to be important in persons’ perceptions, it would be obvious that racial status is also important.

I designed three studies, to examine three corresponding hypotheses derived from my theory.

Study 1: A Preliminary Examination

Overview

My goal was to examine the existence of a general link between the perceived national status of various nations and the evaluation of national physical characteristics (attractiveness, stature, and skin color). I examined the link through several independently ranked dimensions concerning international status and group attractiveness. The general hypothesis I attempted to confirm was as follows:
Hypothesis 1: National status and physical attractiveness stereotyping of outgroup members are related.

Prediction 1: Ranking of countries on various dimensions of national status will result in a high correlation with ranking of attractiveness (general attractiveness, high stature, light skin).

Prediction 2: Unknown states will be associated with low status and consequently ranked low in the attractiveness dimension.

Prediction 3: The rank of own group in the attractiveness dimension will depend on its relative status.

Method

Participants and design. One hundred eighty (82 women and 98 men) undergraduates enrolled in a Japanese national university (mean age of 19.4 years; SD = 0.8), all of whom were Japanese nationals, participated at the request of their instructors. The design consisted of two between-subjects factors, region of ranking (West vs. East) and ranking dimension (economy, culture, general evaluation, physical attractiveness, stature, and skin color).

Testing material. Two questionnaires were used in the study. The first, the National Status Questionnaire, had two versions representing two geographical regions: the West version contained a list of 16 states located in Europe and North America, and the East version contained a list of 16 states located in east and southeast Asia. Both lists included Japan as well as a nonexistent state—Batoriga in the West and Saroda in the East—and both were to be sorted according to one of the following criteria (dimensions): economy, culture, and general evaluation, from highest or best (1) to lowest or worst (16). The questionnaire had six different forms (three dimensions × two regions).

The second questionnaire, the Physique Questionnaire, contained the same two lists of states, but ranking was to be conducted according to different dimensions: physical attractiveness (from the most attractive to the least), stature (from the tallest to the shortest), and skin color (from the lightest to the darkest). This questionnaire also had six different forms (three dimensions × two regions).

Each participant was required to fill out only one version of each questionnaire.

Procedure. Participants were randomly handed one version of each questionnaire. The questionnaires were prearranged in such a way that participants received one form from each region of ranking, so that one listing would not interfere with the other. The ranking dimensions in each questionnaire and the order of presentation were fully counterbalanced across participants and gender. The survey was presented as “a study of current international relations,” and the participants were instructed to imagine the nations listed and their inhabitants before the ranking.

After completion, the ranking scores were entered and averaged, and the overall ranking (hierarchy) for each dimension in each region was calculated.

Results

Correlations between the overall ranking in each dimension within each region were calculated using the Spearman rank coefficient. The results revealed very high correlations between most of the dimensions (see Table 1).

The participants’ ratings of their own country’s rank in each dimension were compared between the two regions. A Mann–Whitney test indicated that the average ranking of Japan in the East was significantly higher than in the West in all the comparison domains except economy (ranked first in both regions), general evaluation (1st in the East and 2nd in the West; p < .0002), culture (1st vs. 4th; p < .0001), physical attractiveness (1st vs. 10th; p < .006), stature, and skin color (both second vs. 16th; p < .0001).

The ratings of the nonexistent country were very similar in both regions. Batoriga in the West was rated last in all dimensions except for stature and skin color, in which it was rated next-to-last. Saroda in the East was ranked 14th in general evaluation, economy, and stature, 16th in culture and physical attractiveness, and 10th in skin color.

Discussion

The findings of very high correlations between several indicators of national status and attractiveness confirmed the first prediction. The low rank assigned to the two nonexistent countries supported the second prediction, that participants would associate anonymity with low status. Hartley (1946), who added three fictitious groups to a list of 32 nations and races in a study of social distance, found that prejudiced students were also prejudiced against nonexistent groups.

In the present study, however, both countries were uniformly ranked at the bottom of their lists. The consistent judgment of those groups may be explained by the findings that people’s judgments of outgroups “tend to be relatively unpoliticized when they recognize their unfamiliarity with the group being judged” (Peabody, 1985, p. 41). Another rationale the participants used may simply have been the equation of anonymity with lower status. That is, if people belonging to strong (and famed) countries are more attractive, people belonging to completely unknown countries ought to have low status, and thus be unattractive, and vice versa.

Finally, the rank of Japan (the participants’ own group) in the two regions showed that the participants rated their own people as taller, lighter, and generally more attractive than other peoples in East Asia, but not when compared with various peoples in the West. These results suggest that a majority of the partici-
pans made a sharp distinction between the two regions on the three dimensions of physical stereotyping. Although collective ratings of stature and skin color may be based on real differences, the distinct ratings of attractiveness in each region are conspicuous.

**Study 2: Effect of National Status on Physical Attractiveness Judgment**

**Overview**

In the second study, I investigated the effect of national labeling on attractiveness evaluation and stereotyping of unfamiliar people. Participants were asked to rate 15 photos of people who in one condition were labeled as natives of Italy, and in another condition as natives of Iran. The Japanese public image of the two nations differs sharply: Italy is respected for its cultural legacy, whereas Iran is known for its fanatical and militant recent history (Research Committee of Japanese National Character, 1992). Furthermore, the Japanese have recently had some annoying experiences with Iranians, who as illegal workers in Japan have often been portrayed as a threat to the public order (Hazu, 1993; “Tokyo cracks,” 1993).

In addition to considering the countries’ distinct national images, I chose these two labels because a preliminary survey indicated that Japanese students have only a vague image regarding the physical differences between peoples of the two countries. I assumed that people linked with higher national status (Italy) would be rated as more attractive than those linked with lower national status (Iran).

In Study 2, I attempted to confirm the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** People belonging to high-status nations are beautiful.

Prediction 4: Members of high-status nations will be evaluated as more physically attractive than members of low-status nations, even when the same stimuli are observed.

Prediction 5: Judgments of attractiveness of members of either high- or low-status groups will be related to judgments regarding personality.

**Method**

**Participants and design.** One hundred forty-four (72 women and 72 men) undergraduates enrolled in a Japanese national university (mean age of 19.0 years, SD = 0.9), all of whom were Japanese nationals, participated at the request of their instructors. Scores of 6 participants who either did not understand the instructions or did not fully cooperate were discarded. The design consisted of one between-subjects factor, Nationality (Italy vs. Iran), and one within-subject factor, Stimuli’s Employment Status (SES; high vs. low).
Testing material. I used 15 portraits of male adults, 9 of whom were Iranians and 6 of whom were Latin Americans (mean age 26.7; SD = 3.3). The individuals had been photographed at a fixed distance and presented a neutral expression. Two of the pictures were color photos, and the remaining photos were monochrome. All background details and clothes were erased, to avoid showing any irrelevant information (see Figure 1).

The resulting portraits were presented in a booklet with a single 25 × 18 cm monochrome or 13 × 8 cm color photo on each page. In the booklet, the pictures were arranged in three clusters: The first cluster consisted of five randomly arranged monochrome portraits (Photos 1–5), the second consisted of eight randomly arranged monochrome portraits (Photos 6–13), and the third consisted of two color portraits (Photos 14–15).

The pictures in the first and third clusters were shown without additional information, whereas in the second cluster, a personal description, including place of birth, age, marital status, education, and occupation, was attached to the photo of each person. The eight photographed persons were all described as married and of similar age, but their education level and occupational status (SES) differed. Labels of education and SES were divided into high- and low-status groups (physician, lawyer, diplomat, and entrepreneur vs. cleaner, waiter, farmer, and part-time salesperson). In addition, the stated birthplaces (nationality) of the persons in the photos differed from booklet to booklet (Italy or Iran). Altogether, there were 16 different booklets (eight professional labels for each portrait × two nationalities).

As a dependent measure, several scales arranged in four questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire, Cluster A, consisted of five 10-point attractiveness scales for Photos 1–5 and eight personality and behavioral 10-point bipolar scales for one photographed person (Photo 1). The scales included the following items: health condition, affect, activity, goodness, age, education, economic condition, and gender appearance.

The second questionnaire, Cluster B, consisted of eight attractiveness scales for Photos 6–13 and eight attitudinal and behavioral 10-point bipolar scales for one photographed person (Photo 6). The scales included the following items: facial expression, family relations, communication skills, employment potential, intelligence, SES, social attitude, and kindness.

In the third questionnaire, Cluster C, participants were asked to rate the skin color of the photographed persons (Photos 14–15) on two scales: an absolute scale (a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from light to dark) and a scale relative to the self (a 5-point scale).

The final measure was a self-evaluation questionnaire (SEQ) consisting of four 10-point Likert-type scales concerning the participants’ own physical attractiveness, academic ability, human relations, and future prospects. Scores for the last three scales were summed into a “general evaluation” score.

Three scales were used as an independent measure: the Body Esteem (BE) Scale (Franzoi & Shields, 1984), which was originally designed to measure body satisfaction (35 body-related items); the E-scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), which measures ethnocentrism (20 items); and the F-scale (Adorno et al., 1950), which was constructed to measure the antidemocratic and authoritarian personality structure assumed to support prejudice (29 items).

Procedure. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, presented as a survey on “Students’ adjustment and attitudes toward university and daily life,” each participant received a set of scales that included the BE scale, the E-scale, and the F-scale. The data from this survey were processed, and the score of each participant in each scale was sorted and classified as high or low according to the median of the sample. The sorting was performed separately for each gender.

The second phase took place in a class 3 to 4 weeks later, when the survey was presented as “a comparative survey regarding perceptions of foreigners and their faces.” Participants were randomly handed one of the booklets, the three cluster questionnaires, and a sealed envelope containing the SEQ. In addition, they received a written general explanation stating that the photos were taken in Italy or Iran and a general outline of prevailing Japanese images of those nations. When they had completed the first part, participants were instructed to insert the
questionnaires into the envelope and to fill in the SEQ, ostensibly for another survey. Later, the participants were debriefed about the manipulation and the goals of the study.

**Results**

**Attractiveness ratings.** A 2 (nationality) × 2 (participant’s sex) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the total physical attractiveness ratings of the monochrome pictures (Photos 1–13) did not reveal an interaction (p < .15), yet analysis within each sex showed that the women rated the stimuli labeled Italian as more attractive, F(1, 64) = 4.5, p < .04. There was also a tendency for the women to evaluate the skin color of the two color portraits (Photos 14–15) as darker (relative to themselves) when they were labeled Iranians, F(1, 55) = 3.3, p < .08 (see Table 2).

I also examined the effect of the photographed person’s status and nationality on personality and behavioral attributions. The scores of the first cluster (no indication of SES level) were subjected to a principal components analysis using varimax rotation, which indicated that 74% of the variance was accounted for by four factors. The items for the four factors were selected on the basis of their loading (minimum 0.5) and were as follows: General Quality I (education, goodness, and economic condition), Physical Condition (health and age), Facial Expression I (affect, gender appearance), Vigor (activity and health). A 2 (nationality) × 2 (sex) ANOVA on each factor revealed a main effect of nationality in the first factor (General Quality I) and a main effect of sex in the third factor (Facial Expression I), F(1, 121) = 3.8, p = .05, and F(1, 121) = 7.5, p < .007, respectively. Italians were rated higher than Iranians were, and the women rated the stimuli lower than the men did (see Table 3).

A similar factor analysis of the second cluster (with SES indicated) also yielded four factors that accounted for most (79.2%) of the variance: General Quality II (intelligence, SES), Social Communication (communication, social attitude), Facial Expression II (expression), and Kindness (kindness). Each factor was analyzed by a 2 (nationality) × 2 (sex) ANOVA. Analysis of the General Quality II factor yielded a main effect of SES, F(1, 117) = 14.5, p < .0002, and a weak interaction between nationality and SES, F(1, 117) = 3.4, p < .07.

Higher SES stimuli were rated higher, and SES had greater effect for the Iranians. Analysis of the Social Communication factor revealed an interaction between nationality and SES, as well as for nationality and sex, F(1, 116) = 10.3, p < .002, and F(1, 116) = 6.5, p < .02, respectively. Italians were rated higher, and the women rated Italians higher. Within the women, there was a nationality main effect, F(1, 62) = 7.2, p < .01. An analysis of the Facial Expression II factor revealed an interaction between nationality and sex, F(1, 117) = 6.6, p < .02. The women rated Italian faces as more expressive, whereas the men rated them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Score range</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>“Italian”</th>
<th>“Iranian”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photos 1–13: Attractiveness rating</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All participants</td>
<td>13–130</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>62.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>13–130</td>
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<td>60.5**</td>
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<td>63.1</td>
<td>63.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>13–130</td>
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<td>13.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Photos 6–13: Attractiveness rating</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Both SES</td>
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<td>21.3</td>
<td>20.0*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4–40</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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<td>4–40</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
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<td><strong>Photos 14 and 15: Skin color relative to self</strong></td>
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<td>6.94*</td>
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<td>6.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2–10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.22</td>
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</table>

*Note. SES = stimuli’s employment status.

*p < 1. **p < .05.

in the opposite direction. Within the women, there was a nationality main effect, F(1, 62) = 7.1, p < .01. Analysis of kindness revealed main effects of SES and nationality, F(1, 117) = 11.7, p < .001, and F(1, 117) = 5.9, p < .02, respective-
### TABLE 3

**M and SD Attributional Ratings in Each Factor, for Each Nationality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/condition</th>
<th>Score range</th>
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<th>“Iranian”</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Quality I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>2–20</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>11.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Condition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>2–20</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Expression I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>2–20</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigor</td>
<td>2–20</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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**Cluster 2**

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<td>3–30</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>3–30</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>3–30</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Social Communication</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>3–30</td>
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<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>M</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.6</td>
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<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>3–30</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Expression II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All labels</strong></td>
<td>1–10</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.1**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>1–10</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
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<td><strong>M</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: SES = stimuli's employment status.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

### TABLE 3—Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>“Iranian”</th>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>M</strong></td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All labels</strong></td>
<td>1–10</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.8***</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>High SES</td>
<td>1–10</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.7</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SES = stimuli’s employment status.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

ly. Low SES stimuli and Italians were rated as kinder (nationality was significant only within the women), F(1, 62) = 16.3, p < .0002.

Finally, I examined the effect of ratings on the participants’ self-evaluations. A 2 (nationality) × 2 (sex) ANOVA of the participants’ self-evaluations (attractiveness and general evaluation) revealed only a main effect of sex, as the men rated their own attractiveness higher than the women did, F(1, 92) = 5.4, p < .03.

Separate 2 (nationality) × 2 (sex) × 3 (BE level/F score level/E score level) ANOVAs on the participants’ ratings of their own attractiveness revealed a main effect of BE, F(1, 60) = 6.4, p < .02. As expected, participants with high BE evaluated themselves higher than participants with low BE did.

Similar three-way analysis of the general evaluation scores again revealed a main effect of BE, F(1, 61) = 7.9, p < .007, an interaction between sex and nationality, F(1, 61) = 6.1, p < .02, but only limited nationality effect (p < .12). The men who rated Iranians had higher general evaluations than men who rated Italians, whereas among the women, I observed a milder and opposite phenomenon. A 2 (nationality) × 2 (BE level) ANOVA within each gender revealed main effects of nationality and BE level within the men, F(1, 21) = 4.6, p < .05, and F(1, 21) = 4.2, p < .06, respectively. Participants who rated Italians or had lower BE rated themselves lower (see Table 4).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 2 demonstrate that the manipulation of national status labels tends to affect judgments regarding physical attractiveness. Labeling a per-
son as having high national status is likely to increase his or her physical appeal, whereas low national status is likely to decrease that appeal.

The effect of national status on attractiveness ratings is not divorced from other stereotypical evaluations of national character. Using 10 pictures that ranged widely in appearance from "marked White" to "marked Black," Secord, Bevan, and Katz (1956) and Secord (1959) demonstrated that as soon as a person was identified as a member of a specific ethnic group (e.g., Black), the whole spectrum of stereotypes regarding that group was attached to that person. As with the present study, the findings of Secord et al. lend support to an earlier study by Katz and Braly (1933), who noted that people "have conditioned responses of varying degrees of aversion or acceptance toward racial labels and where these tags can be readily applied to individuals" (p. 280).

Still, the labeling effect has certain limits. That is, when the experimenter in Secord's (1959) study labeled a photo of a person with markedly Caucasian features as Black, only the more prejudiced participants attached stereotypes regarding Blacks. Thus, Secord concluded that "the mere knowledge that a person is Negro is not in itself sufficient to produce stereotyping" (p. 313).

Labeling people as belonging to a different race can create a cognitive dissonance that blocks the use of stereotypes. The present results suggest, however, that when the appearance differences are not as extreme, the mere knowledge that a person belongs to a certain group may be sufficient to produce stereotyping and even appearance bias.

A similar demonstration of an ethnic labeling effect in the United States was conducted by Razran (1950). He displayed photographs of 30 attractive and ethnically nonspecific young women's faces and asked participants to rate them on several dimensions, including beauty. Two months later, the participants were asked to rate the same stimuli, that time with ethnic surnames attached. Whereas few changes were reported as occurring in the photographs with the Anglo-Saxon surnames, judgments of liking and character dramatically decreased for the photographs labeled Italian and Jewish. Beauty ratings also decreased somewhat, although more moderately. Photos labeled with Italian or Jewish names decreased by 0.3 on a 5-point scale; those with Irish names, by 0.1. (Unfortunately, the author provided neither statistical analysis nor breakdown of gender.)

In results similar to those of Darley and Gross (1983), I also found SES labels to have an effect on evaluations of personality and behavior. Nevertheless, labels of SES did not lead to distinct attractiveness ratings. That outcome indicates that the national labels were more relevant than SES labels to attractiveness stereotypes. Studies on outgroup stereotypes have shown that variance of outgroup stereotypes is much lower than variance of ingroup stereotypes (Linville & Fischer, 1993). Thus, although SES may affect the attractiveness expectancy of the participants' own group, appearance differences within outgroup members tend to be obscure.

An additional issue emerged in the present study: the differences in evaluations by sex. Several explanations may account for the women's greater susceptibility to labels of national status. One is the gender of the person presented. That all the photographed persons used as stimuli were men seems to have had greater importance for the women. Whereas the participating men may have conducted an instant physical attractiveness comparison with the stimuli (Kownar, 1995), the women presumably regarded them also as potential mates. Thus, whereas the men focused on the relative attractiveness of the stimuli, the women were aware of the stimuli's absolute attractiveness.

Women's greater sensitivity to others' status has been a recurrent theme in studies on human mating. Economic and evolutionary models as well as cross-cultural research indicate that when choosing a (long-term) mate, women value a mate's social status more than men do, whereas men value a mate's appearance more than women do (see Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Kenrick & Trost, 1989). More specifically, there is evidence that even when evaluating physical attractiveness per se, women are more attuned to cues of males' SES and are more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>M and SD Ratings of Participants' Own Attractiveness and General Evaluation for Nationality</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>&quot;Iranian&quot;</th>
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<td>4.5*</td>
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</table>

*p < .05.
willing to base decisions to enter into a relationship on such cues (Townsend, 1989; Townsend & Levy, 1990).

Finally, the results of Moss, Miller, and Page's (1975) study may provide a clue to the limited bias of the men that I found in the present study. Moss, Miller, and Page found that when White and Black women were rated in a homogeneous context (all Black or all White), their attractiveness ratings did not differ. However, when rated together, the White women were seen as significantly more attractive than the Black women.

**Study 3: Effect of Physical Attractiveness on National Status Attribution**

**Overview**

The goal of this study was to examine the effect of the implicit status of a nation on the attractiveness stereotypes of its people. Participants were asked to match 30 portraits (15 men and 15 women) with 15 states. The stimuli's physical attractiveness levels and national statuses of the states listed had both been determined in earlier studies.

Following the results obtained in the first two studies, I expected to obtain a high correlation between the implicit national status attached to the portraits and their previous beauty ratings, even though participants were not asked to focus on those features.

In Study 3, I attempted to confirm the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** Beautiful people belong to high-status nations.

**Prediction 6:** Physically attractive people will be associated with high-status nations more often than unattractive people are.

**Method**

The participants were 128 (41 women and 87 men) undergraduates enrolled in a Japanese national university (mean age, 19.3; SD = 1.0). All participants were Japanese nationals and participated at the request of their instructors.

**Testing material.** Stimuli were 30 monochrome pictures; an equal number of photos of men and women were used. About half were photographs of Caucasian fashion models taken from fashion magazines; they were selected to represent aspects of a Western ideal of beauty. The remaining stimuli were Caucasian adults taken from several textbooks on plastic surgery; they were selected to represent aspects of low physical attractiveness. The pictures were divided into two sets by gender, and each set was presented separately.

**Questionnaires.** I prepared two forms, one for each gender, containing a list of 15 countries located in Europe and North America (the list was identical to the Western list used in Study 1, except it excluded Japan). The list was presented in several orders, to prevent a position effect. The implicit physical attractiveness evaluation of each photo was used as a dependent measure. The photos had been rated for attractiveness on a 10-point Likert-type scale in an earlier study (Kowntown & Ogawa, 1993a). The range of the attractiveness ratings of the photos of men was 0.3–8.6 (average = 5.5), and that of the photos of women was 0.3–9.4 (average = 5.0).

**Procedure.** The survey was presented as "A study of the current internationalization level of Japanese university students." Each participant received the two sets of portraits and two matching questionnaires differing in the order of the countries listed. The questionnaire stated that lately Japanese have been traveling to the West in increasing numbers, yet it was doubtful whether they "can distinguish between the various peoples living there."

Therefore, it was stated, the purpose of the study was "to examine students' ability to recognize the nationality of individuals belonging to various peoples in the West." The participants were told that the two sets of 15 photographs were of people from 15 different countries, and they were asked to match each photo with one of the countries listed. Upon completion, the letters indicating each portrait were replaced with their previously established attractiveness ratings, and I calculated the average attractiveness ratings and ranking for each nation.

**Results**

Using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient, I calculated the correlations between the attractiveness rankings of the 15 states determined in Study 3, as well as various dimensions of their national status ranking (determined in Study 1). General evaluation, economy, and culture correlated highly with the implicit attractiveness ranking (r ≥ .95, p < .0005), as did attractiveness and stature (r ≥ .91, p < .001). The only dimension that did not yield a significant correlation with the implicit attractiveness ranking was skin color; yet when the American scores were omitted, the correlation was significant (p < .05).

In addition, I examined the correlation of four ranking orders of either the photographed men or the women as ranked by either the female or the male participants, using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient. Correlations ranged from .90 to 1, all highly significant.

**Discussion**

The findings support my prediction that participants would match attractive stimuli with high-status countries and, conversely, unattractive stimuli with low-status countries. The attractiveness ranking order was highly correlated between the participating women and men, when rating either the female or the male stim-
uli. The gender correlation between and within the stimuli and the raters indicates that stereotypes of national attractiveness and perceptions of national hierarchy are not affected by the gender of a representative person.

In general, the findings of Study 3 reconfirm the well-established notion that “what is beautiful is good” (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). The results of earlier studies have demonstrated that whenever people have to match stimuli with value-laden labels, they tend to match attractive stimuli with positive labels and unattractive stimuli with negative labels. The phenomenon has been shown with labels of social deviancy, homosexuality, mental illness, epilepsy, artistic activity, and so forth (e.g., Hansson & Duffield 1976; Unger, Hildebrand, & Madar, 1982). In that sense, a person’s affiliation with high national status functions like a positive label, whereas low national status functions like a negative label.

General Discussion

Overall, the present findings support the predicted relations between the (national) status of a given group and stereotypes of the appearance of its members. The relations appear to operate in both directions: Persons belonging to high-status nations tend to be evaluated as more attractive than people belonging to low-status nations, and conversely, attractive people tend to be associated with nations of higher status more often than unattractive people do.

In accounting for the above findings, I found two issues to be conspicuous: categorization and mate preference. Although the former is related to stereotypes and the latter to the physical reality, both can be united through the special trait of physical attractiveness. That is, judgments about physical attractiveness are the result of an interplay between subjective and relative aspects that are perceived differently across cultures and individuals, as well as definite aspects that are universally attached to similar values.

Categorization Processes and Stereotypes

From a social and cross-cultural point of view, the fluctuating and subjective character of physical attractiveness indicates the limited possibility of testing it directly in the real world (Kownar, 1995); therefore, the relative intergroup notion often tends to become an important judgment criterion. People’s need to repeatedly judge the appearance of others is an essential part of categorization processes. That is, people seek commonalities among the individuals they encounter and use appearance cues, among others, as a basis for grouping them (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986).

Stereotypes, a product of categorization processes, are used to avoid the overloading of cognitive processes with excessive amounts of information, especially in difficult or demanding information processing contexts (Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994). Hence, once individuals are labeled as members of a certain group, there is a tendency not to perceive them as individuals. Rather, people tend to apply readily available stereotypes, which contain all information previously obtained about that group, to the individuals.

Tajfel (1981) contended that although the judgmental effects of categorization are fairly general, “they are particularly pronounced when judgments are made in dimensions in which scaling in magnitude is simultaneously a scaling in value” (p. 70). Such reasoning accounts for the strength of stereotypes of collective appearance, as they are closely associated with value-laden stereotypical dichotomies such as good–bad and high–low status.

The results of Study 2 suggest that the mere labeling of an individual as being of a certain nationality brings with it a whole set of stereotypes pertinent to that national group, ultimately yielding different attractiveness judgments as well. The high correlations found between various independently rated dimensions for various nations also suggest that knowledge about other nations (especially toward relatively unknown ones) is stored as a prototypic stereotype, and any further attribute needed is readily retrieved from this core stereotype.

The existence of causal relations between perceptions of national status and stereotypes of national attractiveness supports the rather neglected notion that “goodness” affects beauty stereotyping similarly to the way beauty affects attributions of goodness (Felson & Bohnstedt, 1979; Owens & Ford, 1978). Kownar, Ogawa, and Kikuchi (1994) suggested that in the evolution of human culture, the two stereotypes (what is good is beautiful, and what is beautiful is good) have not only become inseparable, but have also reinforced each other.

Viewing status as the appearance of power may further illuminate its link with stereotypes of attractiveness. One aspect of power is the nature and amount of attention given to high-status groups (Fiske, 1993), which is very visible in the ethnic and international arenas (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986).

The recent spread of television carries this effect to even the most isolated regions, supporting Tajfel’s statement that now “no social group is an island” (1981, p. 258). In neglecting news from developing countries and concentrating on events occurring in the West, the Japanese media are no exception to the human tendency to focus on relevant others (e.g., Kawatake & Sugiyama, 1981). The status gap is further illustrated by findings that Japanese television coverage of the United States is about 12 times greater than American television coverage of Japan (Nishizawa, 1994).

Like the news, the entertainment industry (e.g., Hollywood) and the French fashion industry appear to exert a great influence in spreading, as well as sustaining, the high-status image of dominant groups’ appearances. No wonder that whenever a Japanese firm wishes to transmit a message of glamour and status for its products, it uses Caucasian models (Haarmann, 1984).

Finally, if the control of media is a political issue, people’s attention is a psychological issue. Goodwin and Fiske (cited in Fiske, 1993) showed that gaining power results in paying decreasing attention to others. Sensening, Johns, and Var-
ney (1973) found that prejudiced Whites spent less time inspecting photos of Blacks than photos of Whites. Similarly, Rump and Delin (1973) argued that an overestimation of the status of high-status people occurs because observers are more aware of their presence.

Constant exposure to dominant faces may ultimately lead people to regard such features as attractive, because of the human ability to temporarily adopt new ("controllable") status signs (Mazur, 1985). Keating (1985) provided some evidence for the feasibility of this notion by showing that faces of men with dominant features were rated as more attractive than those with nondominant features. If taken one step further, those findings suggest that features of a dominant group could be adopted as cues of dominance.

In sum, members of high-status groups hold a threefold advantage over others from a cognitive viewpoint: They are associated with high status and, consequently, with higher attractiveness; their favorable image is widely promulgated by the media; and they receive greater attention from others.

Mate Preference and the Ideology of Collective Characteristics

Many aspects of human beauty and mate attraction are perceived in a similar way by all humans (Bernstein, Lin, & McClellan, 1982; Buss, 1989; Kalick, 1978). Obviously, there is some cultural variation regarding the notion of human attractiveness, yet if one attempts to analyze human appearance according to its ultimate, or evolutionary, causes (e.g., survival and reproduction), most of the cultural and historical variability of cues of physical attractiveness can be accounted for at least rationalized (Kowner & Ogawa, 1993b; Symons, 1979).

That is, cognitive processes that provide instant categorization have a definite purpose: to help survival and to assist in mate choice. Thus, humans have used mate-choice strategies "to solve specific adaptive problems that their ancestors confronted during the course of human evolution" (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The importance of status can be seen in the fact that in many species, including human beings, mates are chosen partly for their ability to deliver material benefits, such as protection, food, and care (Trivers, 1985). Thus, it is argued that because higher status provides greater benefits, status cues have evolved as one of the determinants of human attractiveness. Consequently, it would be odd had human cultural evolution not furnished individuals with sharp detectors for recognition of status cues (Kowner et al., 1994). The question remains, however, how individual status cues affect appearance preferences at the group level.

Members of high-status groups possess material advantages that lead almost any observer, regardless of age, sex, race, and personality, to perceive them as more attractive. High-status nations tend to be economically better off and technologically more developed than low-status nations. As a result, people of high-status nations tend to enjoy better nutrition, health services, education, and so forth. They also tend to be physically bigger, to live longer, to look younger, and to carry more status-related accessories. For those reasons, rather than temporary fashion or fleeting images, people of high-status nations tend to be perceived as more attractive, and the repeated experience of such evaluation may lead observers to perceive the collective stereotypes accordingly.

Stature, for example, is universally related to attractiveness, partially because of what Berscheid and Walster (1974) called the "cardinal principle" of mating, which asserts that a man ought to be taller than his mate. Following this social quasi-axiom, taller men (up to about 1.6 standard deviation from the population average) obviously have a considerable mating advantage, whereas for women, tallness may become a liability, or at least a factor of lesser importance in mating (Hensley, 1994; Shepperd & Strathman, 1989).

In ancient days, it may be hypothesized, being somewhat taller than the average indicated greater strength, and thus it was associated with dominance in small groups. Stature also varied both within and between social groups along the status continuum. In modern times, greater stature still suggests better nutritional and health conditions (Floud, Warcher, & Gregory, 1990; Greene & Johnston, 1980), and it is often correlated with occupational success and higher wages (Egolf & Corder, 1991; Loh, 1993) as well as with broader aspects of SES (Bielicki & Waliszko, 1992; Malina, Little, Stern, Gaskill, & Hazuda, 1983).

These latter findings corroborate the idea that stature, especially for men, is currently important not in itself, but because it is a predictor of social dominance and subsequently of status (Hensley, 1993). In fact, the existence of intragroup differences in stature seems to be ascribed to accumulated nutritional levels and not to genetic differences. In other words, general economic prowess and national development have been major moderating factors of the fluctuating differences in physique between groups throughout history (Eveleth & Tanner, 1976; Komlos, 1994; Riley, 1994).

Although there is some kernel of the truth in the idea that high-status groups may on average possess greater physical attractiveness, at least according to current standards of beauty, human history contains many examples of higher status groups elevating some of their own physical characteristics, which were only vaguely related to survival or reproduction, to the level of prime cues for higher status and attractiveness.

Skin color is the best example of this. There is much evidence to show that attitudes toward light and dark colors in general and light and dark skin colors in particular have old roots in all human societies; even young children and homogeneous groups hardly exposed to external influences exhibit this preference (Cross & Cross, 1971; Iwakami, Sonoo, Williams, & Best, 1978; Richardson & Green, 1971). Indeed, among native Africans, positive values such as wisdom, purity, and luck have been traditionally attached to white, whereas negative values such as evil and death have been associated with black (Gergen, 1967). Within Japanese society as well, positive attitudes toward light skin were common well before the first encounter with Black people (Hulse, 1967; Russel, 1991).
Van den Berghe and Frost (1986) hypothesized that in the early stages of human evolution, lighter skin color was associated with greater fecundity and regarded as a neotenous trait because of women’s tendency to lighten during puberty. Similarly, lighter skin has been viewed as a neotenous trait because of the tendency of infants’ skin to be lighter than adults'. The seemingly universal observation that men are attracted to women with such cues (Symons, 1979) and the tendency of women to be lighter than males led Van den Berghe and Frost to conclude that the preference for light skin color “links a genetically-based phenotype with a cultural preference, via sexual selection” (p. 100).

If that is the case, once the cultural preference for light skin in women was established, it led to a preferential mating pattern between fair women and high-status men. Certainly the association of dark skin with low status could have gradually been reinforced by, for example, the greater exposure to the sun of people in low-status occupations. Likewise, it is difficult to ignore the accumulated effect of widespread oral and written traditions that since prehistorical times have associated light skin with positive virtues and dark skin with negative ones (Williams, 1966).

If skin color is viewed as a manifestation of status, the attraction for darker (tanned) skin in the West in the second part of the 20th century does not contradict the previous findings; rather, it lends support to our contention that status plays a greater role than actual skin color does in determining skin-color preference. Once darker skin was firmly associated with leisure rather than agricultural labor (whereas light skin was associated with factory work rather than less plebeian labor), a somewhat modified preference could gain favor (Leary & Jones, 1993). However, it is seasonal tanning, not natural darkness from birth, that has been associated with leisure, and a fine distinction has been made between the two. Although this preference could in the long run have led to a change in attitudes toward dark skin, the recent association between tanning and higher risk for skin cancer suggests that it would have been a short-lived trend.

Both skin color and stature are related to current perceptions of status; however, only stature is somewhat affected by intergroup differences of actual economic development. Nevertheless, it is skin color rather than stature that has been used as the cardinal cue for intergroup attractiveness. The reason is related to function; even though high stature is more common among well-fed, high-status nations, it does not result in a clear distinction between their members and members of lower status nations, because of wide and overlapping variations in stature within each population.

Skin color, however, has been used as a cue for ingroup status and thus was relevant for many societies. In addition, it could provide a matchless distinction between Whites and others. Just because of those two features, the difference caused by a mere “handful of melanin” has been the prime attractiveness cue for “superior” or “inferior” groups during the last several centuries. The rise of skin color as an intergroup status cue is the ultimate demonstration of the precedence that stereotypes hold over mate preference in intergroup relations. This seems logical, because individual mate preferences cannot affect intergroup relations, whereas stereotypes can be used to enhance collective cohesiveness and the well-being of the group as a whole.

Overall, the present results demonstrated that the human tendency to categorize people according to collective status may affect judgments of physical attractiveness. This phenomenon suggests that stereotypes of racial attractiveness derive from categorization processes linking status and appearance, as well as from indigenous dispositions toward certain physical features related to ingroup mate preference. The role of group status in such a fundamental process may illuminate other aspects of intergroup relations and ought to be further investigated.

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