People in American society are continually bombarded with messages about the importance of physical appearance. These messages appear on television and billboards and are heard on the radio. This emphasis also emerges through people’s viewing well-known actors and actresses as ideal people who are thin, physically fit, attractive, and popular. The media tells us that cosmetic/plastic surgery, diets, or expensive products are the paths that should be taken to look like those who are famous. It is hardly ever mentioned how much these famous individuals do to enhance their own beauty.

Nevid (1984) found differences in the physical characteristics men and women found important in a romantic partner. Nevid asked participants, who had a mean age of 21.5 years, to rate various physical characteristics, demographic characteristics, and personal qualities in terms of their importance in a “sexual relationship” and in a “meaningful or long-term relationship” (1984, p. 403). He found that physical characteristics were of greater importance for men than for women when speaking of both types of relationships.

Researchers have widely studied men’s interest in physical attractiveness in terms of its importance, its impact on perceptions, and the role it plays in our choices of a partner. According to Cunningham (1986), men, regardless of ethnicity, preferred women to have large eyes, prominent cheekbones, a small nose, and a wide smile. Women of a normal weight with large breasts and a low waist-to-hip ratio were also appealing to the opposite sex.

In today’s society it seems as though a person’s face is the first physical feature evaluated. Wickham and Morris (2003) conducted a study of the relationship between facial attractiveness and distinctiveness of unfamiliar faces. They rated distinctiveness in terms of whether the face could have been easily spotted in a crowd and the deviation from an average face. They concluded that as long as an individual had one distinctive physical feature, such as large eyes, they would be easily noticed within a crowd. This one distinctive feature made them stand out in the crowd because it made them different from those faces that were typical (average). This distinctive example of large eyes was one of the features that Cunningham (1986) claimed was attractive to men. Physical attractiveness, perhaps, was so important that people noticed and sin-
gled out those who were below average or below their standards of what they wanted in a romantic partner.

As mentioned above, an individual’s face is one of the many physical characteristics on which people base their first impressions. Attractive individuals are thought to be more likable and better people based on their appearance (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). According to Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991), good-looking people are thought to be smart, successful, happy, well adjusted, socially skilled, confident, and assertive, but also vain. In terms of personal judgments, physical attractiveness has been found to be more important to men than women. This finding could explain the results of a study that found that 91% of cosmetic surgeries were performed on women in the United States in 1998 (Brehm et al., 2002). In 1998, research showed that cosmetic surgeries had increased 153% and twice as many breast enlargements and liposuctions were done on patients 18 years old or younger than in 1992 (Kalb, 1999).

With the increased attention given to physical attractiveness and its relationship to mate selection, the matching hypothesis was derived. According to the matching hypothesis, individuals will choose a partner with similar levels of attractiveness among other similarities (Brehm et al., 2002). Research has indicated that individuals are attracted to others who are more attractive than they are, but most often the interest is not returned. To avoid rejection, people tend to choose someone similar in attractiveness level to themselves. People resist taking a chance of being rejected; they therefore choose a person that they feel confident will return their interest. Not only do people choose someone who has the same level of physical attractiveness as their own, but they also choose someone with similar personality characteristics, background, and attitudes. For example, according to Botwin, Buss, and Schackelford (1997), people who have similar styles and traits like each other more, especially as they spent more time with them. Additionally, individuals with similar emotional styles are more attracted to one another (Locke & Horowitz, 1990).

Most studies that support the matching hypothesis have been correlational and have focused on actual relationships (e.g., Folkes, 1982). Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, and Rottmann’s (1966) classic study examined the dating choices of members of a college dance organization and found that physical attractiveness significantly predicted whether or not someone was asked on a date or a second date, but the participant’s attractiveness did not predict that outcome.

The majority of past research in this area has been done on how we choose a romantic partner in reality. “Reality TV” is meant as to be a replica of what occurs in society. These shows give us something to which we can compare our lives. They are becoming more and more popular, some in the form of game shows, others dating shows, and so on. Most research on reality TV has been devoted to aggression. For example, Cavender, Bond-Maupin, and Jurik (1999) reported that, according to popular discussion, women are vulnerable to victimization, especially girls in their youth (p. 645). These researchers investigated differences in how women were depicted as crime victims from episodes of the first series of America’s Most Wanted (AMW) and episodes from a more recent series of this show. The present study used procedures similar to those used by Cavender et al.

The matching hypothesis has not been studied in reality TV shows. The present study examined whether or not the matching hypothesis with regard to physical attractiveness is evident in reality television. It was hypothesized that the matching hypothesis would apply to individuals on reality television shows; therefore, the individuals ultimately would choose a romantic partner with a similar level of attractiveness.

**Method**

The present study was based on two reality television shows that included choosing a romantic partner, The Bachelor and ElimiDATE. In the TV ratings of 2001-2002, The Bachelor was ranked in the 35th spot and ElimiDATE was ranked in the 147th spot. The audience of The Bachelor had increased over the past few seasons from 8.7 million to 13.1 million and grown 62% among adults from the ages 18-49 (Rogers, 2004). Because these shows are commonly known as “reality TV shows,” individuals look at them as examples of reality.

**Stimuli**

The Bachelor is a reality TV show in which one man chooses a romantic partner with the intention of marrying her in the future. He chooses from a group of approximately 25 women. They go on dates and also spend time together as a group. The women are the same contestants throughout that particular season. Throughout the season, there are six eliminations in which the man chooses whom he wants to keep and whom he wants to leave the group.

The other reality TV show that was watched was ElimiDATE, which is a half-hour show. During the examined show, four single women tried to win the heart of the target male, who was also trying to find a match. They went on a date as a group and as time passed, the target person eliminated the female participants one by one. For this show, the contestants were different for each episode. There were three elimina-
Coding Scheme

Before viewing the shows, the researchers devised a coding scheme for each of the variables of interest. Coders were then trained on this scheme. Once both coders felt comfortable with rating each of the variables, they separately watched and rated the target shows. All the participants in each of the shows were coded. Gender was coded as male or female. The coders estimated their ethnicity and if they were unsure, they marked undecided. Age was usually given in these shows. The coders estimated each contestant’s height and weight. Physical attractiveness was coded on a scale from 1-10 with 1 denoting extremely unattractive and 10 denoting extremely attractive. Hair color was coded as brown, blond, black, or red. Hair length was coded as long, medium, or short. Bust size was coded based on the estimated cup size A, B, C, D, or more. Occupation was usually given within these shows. Humor, friendliness, competitiveness, level of affection, common interest, and arrogance was coded on a scale of 1-3 with 1 denoting below average, 2 average, and 3 above average, and if the characteristic was not displayed, it was coded as not applicable. The order in which each person was cut from the choices of potential partners was also coded. For example, if someone was cut at the second elimination process of the show The Bachelor, then 2/6 was recorded, with six being the number of total elimination processes. Each person’s data were compared to their romantic partner’s data for each variable.

Results

The primary coder’s data were correlated with the cross coder’s data in order to test inter-rater reliability. The variables that were established as reliable were age, bust, humor, friendly, competitive, level of affection, and arrogance. The level of attractiveness and the level of common interest were the two variables that were found to be unreliable (see Table 1). The primary coder’s data were used for all other analyses. Pearson correlational analyses determined the nature of the relationship between the target’s attractiveness and the women’s attractiveness, and when the individual was eliminated from the program. The correlation between similarity of attractiveness and when the person was cut was not significant, $r(49) = -0.12, p = 0.40$.

Because the other variables were ranked, Spearman rho correlation analyses were conducted. This analysis revealed that the rank of the candidates duration as a dating candidate correlated significantly with the candidates’ ranks in terms of funniness, $r(49) = 0.28, p = 0.04$; friendliness, $r(49) = 0.48, p < 0.01$; competitiveness, $r(49) = 0.62, p < 0.01$; level of affection, $r(49) = 0.67, p < 0.01$; level of arrogance, $r(49) = 0.56, p < 0.01$; and interest, $r(49) = 0.37, p < 0.01$. In addition, age was significantly negatively correlated, $r(49) = -0.41, p < 0.01$, indicating that the older the contestants were, the earlier they were cut. The variables funny, friendly, competitive, affectionate, interest, and arrogance resulted in positive correlations.

Subsequent analyses included a Stepwise Multiple Regression, with competitive, funny, arrogant, affectionate, attractive, friendly, age, and interest as predictors, and when the individual was cut as the criterion (see Table 2). The first four were found significantly to predict cut in that order, but the other four were not significant predictors. Note that this is the order of strength, and that after the four significant predictors are entered, the variables friendly, age, and interest, which were previously correlated with elimination are no longer significant. Thus, their predictive power overlapped with the other predictors. Note also that the level of arrogance, which was shown to be positively correlated with elimination, is now negative. The arrogance variable therefore appears to be suppressed by the presence of the other predictors (e.g., competitiveness). Hence, when the women are
competitive, being arrogant appears to be a disadvantage for them. Otherwise, it is a good characteristic to have in the dating process.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that the target person of the reality TV shows would choose someone with a similar level of attractiveness to their own. The hypothesis was not supported. There was no relationship between the contestant’s level of attractiveness and when they were cut from the show. Finding no significant relationship could be due to almost all the participants on the reality shows being attractive. It is important to note, however, that the variable of attractiveness had low inter-rater reliability. Further, there may not be as much variability as there is in real life. Being funny, friendly, competitive, affectionate, interesting, and arrogant were positively correlated with when the individuals were cut. The more the individual showed these characteristics, the later they were cut. Also, the younger the women were, the more likely they were to be chosen. Because of the general lack of support for the matching hypothesis in the present results, we focus primarily on the other exploratory analyses that we conducted.

When conducting the Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis, the strongest relationship was found between competitiveness and when the individual was cut. It resulted in a positive relation, meaning that the more competitive the individuals were, the more likely they were to be chosen or cut later. Funny was also found to have a positive relation with when the individual was cut. The funnier the individual was the more likely they were to be chosen. Level of affection was also positively related; therefore, the more affectionate the individual was, the more likely they were to be chosen. A negative correlation was found between the level of arrogance and when the individual was cut. The more arrogant they were, the less likely they were to be chosen.

The present study demonstrates the importance of examining reality TV. There are definitely issues related to social psychology reflected within the results of this study. Perhaps, personality plays a stronger role in mate selection than attractiveness does, or it may be found in other reality shows that similarity in attractiveness does play an important factor in mate selection. Folkes (1982) found a significant relationship between matching in appearance and the steps taken to establish a relationship. However, the present study found something different, no similarities of appearance in the target and the woman chosen. It is important to note that on many of these shows all the contestants are physically attractive, creating a ceiling effect for the matching hypothesis. In this way, again, reality TV does not necessarily reflect reality.

There were several limitations to the present study. The coding for attractiveness and the level of interest were shown to be unreliable. The coders may have been looking for different things when evaluating attractiveness, as well as when evaluating the level of common interest. The positive correlation between

<table>
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the level of affection and cut could have been due to the producers possibly editing the show to display specific characteristics of the winners verses the losers, because they already knew who won before they edited the show. Therefore, the characteristics of each participant may not have been displayed accurately. Also, one of the stimuli used was a video called the *Best of the Bachelor*, rather than each episode of the season. Therefore, characteristics that influenced the targets choice may not have been present within this video. By only using two different reality shows, we may not have had an accurate representation of reality TV. Also, we only coded one season of each. There may have been variations or changes that the producers or editors of the show made throughout the seasons.

As mentioned before, psychologists should study reality TV shows because they seem to influence many viewers. It is worth examining if reality TV does indeed reflect reality at all. Researchers may want to examine more than two reality TV shows, as well as different types of shows. For instance, it could be that physical appearance and certain personality characteristics become more or less important when the show demands team participation (e.g., *Survivor*) than when it is a dating show. Likewise, physical appearance might have a different impact when the show is based on competency or talents (e.g., *The Apprentice, American Idol*). Further research should also utilize more than two coders because personal judgments vary and influence ratings. Finally, future research interested in the dating aspect of these shows should examine other characteristics, such as the seductiveness of clothing or whether the women had large eyes.

**References**


