People are often judged or make judgments in regards to their own appearance and the appearance of those around them. While it seems like others may constantly notice appearances, it is important to understand the extent to which appearances are actually making impressions on others. Recent research (e.g., Horgan, Mast, Hall, & Carter, 2004; Wickham & Morris, 2003; and Yarmey, 2004) has attempted to explore what factors determine appearance accuracy, or our memory for the appearance of people with whom we interact. The present study will examine how those varying in social anxiety and public self-consciousness differ in their abilities to accurately recall the appearance of others.

Gender seems like an obvious factor that would play into appearance accuracy. A recent study by Horgan et al. (2004) examined gender’s effect on memory for the appearance of others. The researchers tested participants for appearance memory of pictures and of other people with whom they were interacting. They found that women scored higher on appearance accuracy tests and that memory for female target appearance was higher than memory for male targets. The researchers further explained that appearance accuracy is an important issue to examine, because so often impressions of another’s appearance molds later perceptions and judgments of them.

The attractiveness of a target is another factor that may seem to influence the degree to which people remember a target’s appearance. A recent study by Wickham and Morris (2003) examined the effect of attractiveness by testing individuals’ ability to recognize whether or not they had previously seen various faces. All faces were previously rated for attractiveness (how “good looking” vs. how “ugly” they were) by other participants to obtain attractiveness ratings for the present study. Participants were shown 44 of a possible 88 pictures. They were then shown all 88 and asked whether or not they had seen each face before. Participants showed no significant differences in the

Social Anxiety and Public Self-Consciousness as Predictors of Appearance Accuracy

Appearance has effects on many of our social interactions. But, to what extent are people naturally encoding the appearance of others? Previous research has examined appearance accuracy in eyewitness settings and the numerous physical factors that could affect memory for the appearance of others. The present study, however, focused on 2 personality characteristics, social anxiety and public self-consciousness, that would seem to contribute to varying levels of appearance accuracy. Participants were given 4 min to work on a jigsaw puzzle with a confederate and were then taken into a separate room to complete a questionnaire testing their levels of social anxiety and public self-consciousness as well as their memory for the appearance of the confederate. Social anxiety correlated positively with appearance accuracy and was found to be a unique predictors of appearance accuracy based on a multiple regression. Public self-consciousness, on the other hand, showed no significant correlation and was not found to be a unique predictor of appearance accuracy. Gender differences were also identified, with women showing greater accuracy.
ability to remember attractive faces versus less attractive faces. Thus, the research suggests that, at least in regard to facial features, attractiveness has no impact on appearance accuracy.

Appearance accuracy has implications for research on eyewitness accuracy. Psychologists have done extensive research examining memory for the appearance of criminals and how reliable people are at recalling these appearances. For example, Yarmey’s (2004) study examined how identification was affected by variables such as length of interaction, appearance, and whether or not participants were told in advance that they would be tested. One significant finding of the study was that those told in advance of the testing were significantly better at clothing recall, although no advantage was found in physical characteristic recall. This is important to the issue of appearance accuracy, because it implies that recalling physical attributes is difficult for individuals, regardless of whether or not they are actively trying to memorize these attributes.

A related study had participants stopped by a target who acted either friendly or closed off and hesitant (Yarmey, Jacob, & Porter, 2002). The participant and target interacted for either 5 or 30 s, and after separating for 2 min an investigator asked them to participate in the study by trying to recall specific aspects of the target’s physical and clothing characteristics. The researchers found that recall was not affected by the target acting friendly or hesitant. Not surprisingly, results showed that longer observation periods were helpful in appearance recall, especially for the memory of clothing characteristics. When recalling physical characteristics, longer observations were still often helpful (e.g., eye color, complexion, etc.) but in some cases (e.g., hair color, age, etc.) both time periods produced a similar rate of recall.

While appearance accuracy has been examined in reference to perception of others and eyewitness recall, not all possible variables affecting this construct have been examined. Attractiveness does not seem to impact appearance accuracy, at least in regards to facial recognition (Wickham & Morris, 2004). However, gender seems to impact appearance accuracy, as does the length of encounter and whether or not participants are anticipating a memory test (Horgan et al., 2004; Yarmey et al., 2002; Yarmey, 2004). While these are important findings, many other factors may affect accuracy for the appearance of others. Two potential predictors of appearance accuracy that have not yet been examined are social anxiety and public self-consciousness.

Social anxiety has been defined as uneasiness in the presence of others or the avoidance of social situations due to fear of scrutiny (Darcy, Davila, & Beck, 2005; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Prior research, while not directly examining social anxiety and appearance accuracy, suggests that there may be a relationship between the two characteristics.

For example, social anxiety has been shown to be related to memory recollection. In certain scenarios, Stopa and Bryant (2004) found that individuals high in social anxiety tend to recall memories from an outside observer’s perspective. Socially anxious individuals may tend to do this in situations that produce more anxiety.

Research by Amir, Bower, Briks, and Freshman (2003) involving memory and anxiety also has shown that individuals who are more anxious tend to perform better at implicit memory tasks for socially threatening information. Furthermore, Mogg and Bradley (1998) found that socially anxious individuals tend to view even ambiguous or nonthreatening situations as threatening. This suggests that even in harmless situations, socially anxious individuals are more likely to feel threatened, and therefore might exhibit increased implicit abilities and recall memories from an outsider’s perspective. All of these characteristics could potentially lead to improved memory for the appearance of others.

When looking at anxiety biologically, it appears that anxiety can produce more aware individuals. Mogg and Bradley (1998) found that anxiety can lead to “increased arousal and greater attention to environmental stimuli, especially novel stimuli” (p. 875). This implies that in the present study, in which participants work on a puzzle with a confederate, socially anxious participants may be even more aware of their surroundings, including individuals around them. Individuals low in social anxiety, on the other hand, may not show such attentiveness to their environment.

While socially anxious individuals seem to be biologically and cognitively more prepared to take note of things around them, other factors may have an influence as well. For example, Cash, Theriault, and Natasha (2004) found that higher levels of social-evaluative anxiety were correlated with body image dissatisfaction, dysfunctional investment in appearance, and situational body image dysphoria. This demonstrates that those concerned about what others will think of them also are preoccupied with their body image and appearance. Furthermore, it has been found that individuals with body image problems show increased levels of social comparison (Stormer & Thompson, 1995). If these individuals are engaging in more social comparison, they also are most likely to pay close attention to the appearance of those around them.

Another individual difference variable that may be related to appearance accuracy is public self-consciousness. Public self-consciousness has been defined by Nasby (1989) as the “habitual attentiveness to overt
aspects of the self (e.g., physical appearance and overt behaviors and expressions of affect) that others can observe as well as evaluate” (p. 117). Much research has examined various aspects of public self-consciousness and its’ effects on human behavior.

One area that has been examined is the relationship between public self-consciousness and self-presentation. Researchers have found that those high in public self-consciousness tended to behave in response to how their partner viewed them (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). When their partner thought of them as independent, they tended to present themselves as nonconforming. However, when their partner thought of them as dependent, they tended to conform. This suggests that those high in public self-consciousness pay close attention to their partner in order to draw assumptions about how their partner feels about them.

Fenigstein and Vanable (1992) sought to examine another behavior related to self-consciousness—paranoia. Paranoia is characterized by a “misconception of oneself as the target of another’s thoughts or actions (p. 2)” and often involves “exaggerated self-referent processing (p. 2).” They found that public self-consciousness was highly correlated with paranoia. From this, it can be inferred that those higher in public self-consciousness are more likely to display paranoid thought. Paranoid thought, in turn, causes an individual to pay greater attention to those around them in order to understand the meaning of the thoughts and actions of others. It also requires more elaborative processing of what they see, which could strengthen the memory of what they observe ( Craik & Tulving, 1975).

Another study examined relationships between self-consciousness, self-attention, and social interaction. Fenigstein (1979) discovered that individuals with low public self-consciousness often demonstrate attention that is “consumed by the group activity or other external events—and the group’s behavior in relation to the self is not relevant” (p.77). However, those with a high level of public self-consciousness tend to be very concerned with how they are seen by others. Therefore, the “group’s behavior is perceived as having personal relevance” to the individual (Fenigstein, 1979, p.77). This research suggests that when people do not have a high level of public self-consciousness, they are more likely to be focused on activities, rather than paying careful attention to those around them. This distinction is important in reference to the present study because participants will be establishing a memory for the appearance of others while working on a task. This research is also important because if individuals high in public self-consciousness are really noting behavior in reference to themselves, it has been found that they are much more likely to remember it (Symons & Johnson, 1997).

A study examining self-consciousness and clothing, performed by Solomon and Schopler (1982), had participants complete a survey to examine the relationship between public self-consciousness and various clothing measures. The clothing measure that generated the highest overall correlation for both genders was the one between public self-consciousness and the degree to which what other people wear influences the individuals’ impressions of them. This suggests that publicly self-conscious individuals pay close attention to the clothing and appearance of others, since they are trying to form opinions based on these features.

Public self-consciousness also was found to correlate positively with a characteristic known as appearance anxiety (Dion, Dion, & Keelan, 1990). Appearance anxiety was defined as “apprehension concerning different aspects of one’s physical appearance and how others evaluate them” (p. 220). Research showed that appearance anxiety correlated positively with other forms of social anxiety, including interaction, audience, and test anxiety. These findings indicate that publicly self-conscious individuals are more concerned about their appearance and suggest they may also be more aware of the appearances of those around them.

Appearance accuracy has been found to be an important topic of study. Appearance often affects our judgments of others. Thus, it is important in a wide range of activities, from building relationships with coworkers to recognizing criminals. While many studies have been done in this area, none thus far have looked at the effects of social anxiety and public self-consciousness on appearance accuracy. Social anxiety is expected to correlate with increased appearance anxiety due to the fact that socially anxious individuals often recite memories from an observer perspective, tend to feel threatened and therefore to be more successful in implicit memory tasks, and exhibit increased arousal (Amir et al., 2003; Mogg & Bradley, 1998; Stopa & Bryant, 2004). Individuals high in public self-consciousness also are expected to perform well on appearance accuracy tests. This is due to the fact that individuals high in public self-consciousness are examining others closely, demonstrate paranoid and self-referent processing, and pay attention to clothing of others (Craik & Tulving, 1975; Fenigstein & Vanable, 1992; Schlenker & Weigold, 1990; Solomon & Schopler, 1982; Symons & Johnson, 1997).

Method

Participants

Participants were 53 undergraduate students from a large southeastern university. The sample was gath-
edered by having several students on campus recruit other undergraduates who did not know the confederate. The confederate was a 20-year-old female student from the university. Participation in the study was voluntary. Fifty-one percent of the participants were men and 49% were women. The ethnicity distribution was as follows: 85% Caucasian, 8% African American, 6% Asian, and 2% Indian. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22, with an average age of 19. The majority of the participants were underclassmen, although all class-standing levels were represented (36% freshmen, 43% sophomores, 15% juniors, and 6% seniors).

**Materials**

**Social anxiety.** The social anxiety component of the Self-Consciousness Scale was administered to all participants to measure levels of social anxiety (Fenigstein et al., 1975; see Appendix A). The scale consisted of six items such as “It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations” and “Large groups make me nervous”. Participants were asked to respond to each item with their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). Negative items were reverse scored. The scale’s test-retest correlation was .73 (Fenigstein et al., 1975). In the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .82 was obtained. The social anxiety subscale has been used in numerous studies, including one by Neto and Barros (2000) that found social anxiety to have a positive correlation with loneliness in adolescents and young adults.

**Public self-consciousness.** Public self-consciousness was measured for all participants with the public self-consciousness component of the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975; see Appendix B). The scale consisted of seven items such as “I usually worry about making a good impression” and “I’m usually aware of my appearance”. Participants responded to the items with their level of agreement on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). The scale has a test-retest reliability of .84 (Fenigstein et al., 1975). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha was .61. The public self-consciousness scale is widely used. Bushman (1993) provided predictive validity for the scale by showing that scores on the scale predicted ratings of brand-name and bargain-name products.

**Appearance accuracy.** The appearance accuracy questionnaire followed immediately after the public self-consciousness and social anxiety scales. The questionnaire consisted of five open-ended questions derived from those used in a previous study performed by Horgan et al. (2004; see Appendix C). The questions asked for descriptions of the confederate’s hair, type of clothing top, type of clothing bottom, shoes, and any other details about appearance that the participant could recall. Each participant received an appearance accuracy score based on how many characteristics of the appearance of the confederate were named out of all possible characteristics listed for each question. A list of descriptive words for each question was created by the confederate and a small team of assistants prior to the start of the experiment (See Appendix D). Participants were given one point for every correct descriptive word they gave that was on the approved list (for example, when describing hair, points were awarded for the words “brown,” “straight,” etc.). A total number of incorrect responses also was recorded for each participant. Responses that were irrelevant (i.e., whether the confederate seemed friendly, guesses about the past experience of the confederate, etc.) were not rewarded with a point even if true, but were not counted against the participant either. Specific makeup characteristics were not used either, seeing as though the confederate’s makeup was more pronounced during studies that were earlier in the day, whereas in studies that occurred in the late afternoon, makeup was fading off.

**Procedure**

Each participant was taken into a private room with the experimenter and the confederate. The confederate gave the impression that she also was a participant and had just previously walked in the room and began reading the instructions. After reading the informational letter, the experimenter instructed the participant and confederate to introduce themselves and then to begin working on a miniature 50-piece jigsaw puzzle. While the confederate knew the purpose of the study, she was completely unaware of the social anxiety and public self-consciousness scores of the participants and did not know any of the participants from previous experience. All participants were required to stand and were situated on the side of a table with the confederate on the adjacent side so that the participant could get a full view of the confederate while working if he or she wished. After 4 min, the experimenter asked the participant and confederate to stop working on the puzzle. Both the participant and confederate were told that they needed to complete a questionnaire and the experimenter asked the participant to step out of the room because both “participants” needed to be in separate rooms to answer. The participant completed the questionnaires and knocked on the door to return it to the experimenter when he or she had completed it.
Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations With Appearance Accuracy

The average social anxiety score on a 1–5 scale was measured with 1 being the lowest in social anxiety and 5 being the highest in social anxiety. Social anxiety was found to be relatively low (M = 2.74, SD = .95). The average public self-consciousness score on a 1–5 scale was measured with 1 being the lowest in public self-consciousness and 5 being the highest in public self-consciousness. The average public self-consciousness score was moderate (M = 3.29, SD = .56). A significant positive correlation was found between social anxiety and appearance accuracy (r = .28, p < .05). The correlation between public self-consciousness and appearance accuracy was found to be not significant (r = .20, p = .16).

Gender Differences

An independent samples t test was conducted to examine possible differences in performance on the appearance accuracy questions between men and women. A significant difference between genders was found regarding the number of correct appearance characteristics named, t(52) = 2.22, p = .03. Women scored significantly higher with a M = 6.88, while for men, M = 5.59. Another significant difference was found between men and women on the number of incorrect responses, t(52) = 2.50, p < .02. Women had a significantly lower number of incorrect responses, M = 1.15, as compared to men, M = 2.26.

Predictors of Appearance Accuracy

A multiple regression was run to determine if social anxiety and public self-consciousness were working together to account for variance in appearance accuracy or if either of these factors was a unique predictor. Using a standard multiple regression, public self-consciousness was not found to be a significant unique predictor of appearance accuracy, t(52) = 1.47, p = .15. Social anxiety, on the other hand, was found to be a significant unique predictor of appearance accuracy, t(52) = 2.07, p = .05.

Discussion

The main focus of this study was to examine the relationships between social anxiety, public self-consciousness, and appearance accuracy. Appearance is an important aspect of our social interactions. Understanding different factors that could determine the degree to which we take note of the appearance of others could have implications in a number of areas. Public self-consciousness did not show a significant correlation with appearance accuracy. However, social anxiety did show a significant correlation with appearance accuracy.

Social anxiety was found to be significantly correlated with appearance accuracy, thereby supporting the hypothesis that these constructs are related. This suggests that perhaps individuals with high social anxiety are more alert and are remembering more information implicitly when placed in a new situation with another individual (Amir et al., 2003; Mogg & Bradley, 1998). Social anxiety was found to be a unique predictor of appearance accuracy. Future research might choose to examine what specific aspects of social anxiety cause individuals who are more anxious to perform well on appearance accuracy tasks. These results could have implications in several other areas. For instance, could socially anxious individuals’ eyewitness testimony be more accurate? Also, it could be true that individuals high in social anxiety are mentally recording greater amounts of appearance information and are perhaps more likely to allow these memories to affect their judgments of a person. This could have implications in job interviews, where employers meet with potential employees for only a minimal amount of time and later make judgments about who they will hire. Could socially anxious employers be more likely to make decisions based on appearance because they are more likely to recall and take note of appearances in general? While none of these conclusions can be drawn from the present study, further research could explore the relationship between social anxiety and appearance accuracy in various contexts.

Public self-consciousness was originally thought to correlate positively with appearance accuracy due to the fact that people who are more publicly self-conscious tend to be very concerned with what others think of them, and therefore they might spend more time observing another individual than someone who was less publicly self-conscious (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). Perhaps those high in public self-consciousness spend more time thinking about how they are presenting themselves and what their partner could possibly be thinking, rather than really observing their partner’s behavior and appearance.

Another interesting finding of the study was gender differences in appearance accuracy. Women were found to produce more correct responses and fewer incorrect responses. This finding is consistent with previous research performed by Horgan et al. (2004) that found that women performed better on appearance accuracy tests. This is another aspect of appearance accuracy that could be examined more fully in the future. Are women more reliable in reporting
appearances and to what extent do women make judgments based upon appearance as compared to men? Further research could provide more insight into the reasons for and the implications of gender differences in appearance accuracy.

While the present study did produce interesting findings, particularly the correlation between social anxiety and appearance accuracy, it is important to note that there were some limitations to the study and areas in which it could be improved. First of all, the sample size was relatively small. A larger sample size could possibly have resulted in stronger correlations and more significant findings, particularly in regard to public self-consciousness. In addition, the Cronbach alpha for the public self-consciousness scale was lower than expected and could potentially be a result of the small sample size. Furthermore, the study included a southeastern college student sample that may or may not be representative of people in general. Could it be that college students are more aware of appearance in general? Is appearance more or less of a defining feature in the southern part of the country? Further studies may wish to include a wider assortment of individuals.

This study has uncovered some preliminary findings that need to be further examined. In the future, it would be interesting to conduct a study similar to the present study that has a larger sample size and looks at public self-consciousness and social anxiety as well as other factors such as personality type, paranoia, and so forth. As mentioned previously, appearance affects many areas of our lives and it would be beneficial to understand the different variables that affect the extent to which we notice and remember appearances of others. In the present study, participants worked on a basic puzzle. However, there are many other types of interactions that could be performed. For example, if participants did an activity that forced more interpersonal interaction, results might show increased memory for the appearance of one’s partner. Finally, I think it is important to continue research on social anxiety’s effect on appearance accuracy and try to determine exactly what about social anxiety causes individuals high in this characteristic to perform better on appearance accuracy tests.

References
APPENDIX A

Please indicate how characteristic each of the following statements is of you on the following scale. Indicate your choice by placing a number in the blank before each item.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very Characteristic of me Characteristic of me

1. It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations.
2. I have trouble working when someone is watching me.
3. I get embarrassed very easily.
4. I don’t find it hard to talk to a stranger.
5. I feel anxious when I speak in front of a group.
6. Large groups make me nervous.

APPENDIX B

Please indicate how characteristic each of the following statements is of you on the following scale. Indicate your choice by placing a number in the blank before each item.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very Characteristic of me Characteristic of me

1. I’m concerned about my style of doing things.
2. I’m very concerned about the way I present myself.
3. I’m very self-conscious about the way I look.
4. I usually worry about making a good impression.
5. One of the last things I do before I leave the house is look in the mirror.
6. I’m concerned about what other people think of me.
7. I’m usually aware of my appearance.

APPENDIX C

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Describe your partner’s hair (style, color, length, etc.).
2. Describe the kind of shirt or top your partner wore (type, colors, logos, design, layers, etc.).
3. Describe the kind of pants/skirt your partner wore (type, color, length, design, etc.).
4. Describe the kind of shoes your partner wore (type, color, design, etc.).
5. What other details about your partner’s appearance can you remember? Mention anything you are pretty sure about (e.g. makeup or jewelry, other items of clothing, nationality, notable physical features).

APPENDIX D

Descriptive word key

1. Brown, Straight, Short, Low Ponytail, Side Part, 2 in. Part, Black Ponytail Holder, 2 Bobby Pins
2. Pink, Short-Sleeved, Pink & White Stripes on Collar, 2 Buttons, Round Neck
3. Blue Jeans, Folded Under
4. Pink Flip-Flops, Jewels, Flat
5. Pink Nail Polish, Silver Round Watch, Silver Chain Bracelet with Heart, White/Caucasian, Dark Eyebrows, Scar on Finger, Fair Skin, Blue-Green Eyes, Pearl Earrings, Short (in height), White Belt with Silver Buckle

*Note: answers deemed basically the same in meaning as the words given here also were given credit*