

# **A Literature Review on Physiognomic Homogamy**

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## **Abstract**

This literature review is meant to cover the working definitions, importance, and potential reasoning behind the experience of physiognomic homogamy. Physiognomic homogamy constitutes the cross-section between physical attractiveness and homogamy. Homogamy, which will be more thoroughly depicted within the paper, encompasses each trait shared by both partners that determines the success rate of a relationship throughout all stages. Physical attractiveness is one of these traits—it is the scale on which we dictate the level of aesthetic pleasantness associated with the physical features of us and those around us (i.e., physical beauty). An in-depth study regarding multiple papers was done to reach the conclusion that physiognomic homogamy is a clear indicator of relationship success and can be determined through self-perceived confidence, opposite-sex parent imprinting theory, and the correlation between personality and physical attractiveness. This is especially critical information as it may aid in the process of efficient mate selection and provide insight as to why certain relationships were unsuccessful in the past.

## **Keywords**

Homogamy, Physical Attractiveness, Physiognomic Homogamy, Literature Review

## Introduction

There are numerous factors to take into consideration when choosing a potential mate. It is not unlikely to seek out characteristics that align with our own personal preferences, including hair color, eye color, weight, height, gender, and a plethora of other traits that influence our initial decision to approach another human romantically. The specific factors that were just described are all known as a part of physical attractiveness, and studies show that physical sameness is a trait sought out when looking for potential mates (Chambers, Christiansen, & Kunz, 1983).

Some of these factors, including the aforementioned one, have a direct impact on the likelihood that the relationship will work out successfully and last long enough to progress into marriage. This is known as homogamy, a concept described by Jones (1929) as a particular trait shared by both the husband and wife. Homogamy takes into consideration each major property that will inevitably determine the advancement of a relationship and the compatibility of each of its members. Physical attractiveness falls under one of these properties; it is the way we perceive our physical selves and our potential partner's physical appearance as well. The cross-section between these two concepts is known as physiognomic homogamy, and there is ample evidence to support that this information may contribute to our knowledge of mate selection, the length of our relationships, and the connection to our relationships with opposite-sex parents (Bereczkei, Gyuris, & Weisfeld, 2004).

Because the majority of the population will participate in selecting a mate that they spend long bouts of time with, this information plays a key role in nearly every individual's life. To understand each component that comprises a successful relationship would inherently mean that the odds of entering one are much higher. This would also likely indicate a higher rate of positive feelings, ultimately leading toward higher self-confidence and overall better quality of life. As relationships continue on, one of the defining characteristics of their success is homogamy. Homogamy is what takes a relationship from dating to marriage, and that's something that everyone should know in order to approach rela-

tionships intelligently (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). This paper is meant to examine the evidence behind physiognomic homogamy and why we can expect to seek out certain partnerships over time. Specifically, this will be in regard to how physically similar we are to the mates we choose and to how physically similar they are to our opposite-sex parent.

## **Determining Our Own Physical Attractiveness**

As stated above, we are more likely to choose a partner who resembles our own physical appearance. This begs the question of how we would determine what we look like in the first place, potentially inviting in issues of body dysmorphia (a condition characterized by the obsessive or intrusive thoughts regarding perceived “flaws” in the body’s appearance) or other effects that may alter our perception. This can actually be measured through a scale-like system where the concepts that we take into consideration include our own aesthetic, the aesthetic that we prefer our partner to obtain, and a self-perceived attractiveness rating that is a clear indicator of how we view ourselves. The point here is not necessarily to determine our own physical attractiveness correctly (or, perhaps, accurately), but instead to merely observe the level of self-confidence that we hold as individuals (regardless of if this is how others view us or if this is considered “correct”). It is also quite important to establish how we reached this level of self-confidence and what it may mean in terms of our relationships. Not only can this affect romantic partnerships as we contribute to them, but it can also impact the potential mates we seek out during the mating process. On the flip side of this, our romantic partnerships can be a determining factor in our level of self-confidence, thus telling us that these two concepts are heavily intertwined and rely on one another to compose the entirety of self-perceived-confidence and possible success rate of current or new relationships.

First, it would be appropriate to discuss the idea of aesthetics and how we may come to select one for ourselves. According to the laws of homogamy, once we have decided on this aesthetic, it would only make

sense to approach a potential mate who has a similar aesthetic to that of our own. Lundy, Barker, and Glenn (2013) found that one's aesthetic can include a number of different elements, including music, art, social upbringing, interests, values, and other features that may contribute to their aesthetic as a whole. Not only were these components identified, but they were also linked to our perception of others around us. If we can accurately determine someone's personality based on their aesthetic, and we find that this is similar or dissimilar to our own, we can avoid those who may not fit the mold of what we desire (Lundy et al., 2013).

One of these attributes includes physical attractiveness and how we find it important when determining someone else's aesthetic. We attempt to match our own aesthetic with that of the person we are pursuing, so we must have an idea of our own physical attractiveness because, if we did not, we would not be able to perform this matching process. In the next paragraph, I will discuss the Lundy, Schenkel, Akrie, and Walker (2010) article that provided the crucial Likert scale called the Desire for Aesthetics Scale. This scale allowed participants to assess the importance of coming into contact with certain aesthetic stimuli (including physical attractiveness). A few important lessons emerge about humans and their aesthetic when taking a closer look: first, we can place a number value on what we find imperative when seeking out other aesthetics. Again, this would mean that we have an idea of our own aesthetic because we pursue those who have a similar aesthetic to the one we hold. Second, it is possible to put a number on physical attractiveness, which would likely indicate feelings toward our own physical appearance and the value that we place on physical attractiveness. Thus, this is evidence to indicate that we can calculate our own aesthetic and that we may partially do so by articulating what we are looking for in a potential mate.

Interestingly enough, another study was written to describe how the Desire for Aesthetics scale came to light. Lundy, Schenkel, Akrie, and Walker (2010) portrayed in their study how they chose what questions would occupy this scale and how participants reacted to the questionnaire. Specifically looking at the physical attractiveness portion of the scale, the researchers found that participants were apt to focus on physical attrac-

tiveness, even more so than certain other aspects. This is likely because physical attractiveness falls under the category of our aesthetic, and as we saw before, humans tend to value their own aesthetic and wish to find those who may be a similar match. Their research also found that males are more likely to focus on physical attractiveness strategies than they would on alternative methods, meaning this feat seems to rank higher on the list when determining a mate. This finding correlates with that of Terry and Macklin (1977) who discovered that men, when asked to pair together the individuals in married couples, oftentimes matched other men with women who were considered more attractive than that man's actual wife. We can conclude from this information that men do tend to focus more on the physical attractiveness of their potential mate, and we may even consider the idea that they have a higher level of self-confidence or an "exaggerated" self-perception when doing so. This sheds some light on our ability to perceive our own physical attractiveness and provides evidence to the idea that we may not be doing so accurately. More indications of this will appear in future sections of the paper.

Now that we have portrayed how we create an aesthetic and provided the reasons for its importance in finding a mate, we must observe self-confidence and its connection to physiognomic homogamy. Bale and Archer (2013) described self-confidence as an innate ability to establish our own value based on our romantic partnerships and how highly they deem our ability to perform in a relationship. Essentially, this would mean that our worth can be understood through others' perceptions of us and how likely they would be to enter a romantic partnership with us. Furthermore, this definition of self-esteem could then establish the length of these relationships as a higher level of self-esteem would equate to a better partnership, as stated before. Bale and Archer (2013) also stated this as well, exclaiming that if we have a higher self-confidence, we will inevitably think more positively of ourselves, thus making us feel positively toward those who resemble us. The "accuracy" of this self-perceived physical attractiveness has been mentioned before, but it would be efficient to discuss this concept in-depth to provide evidence behind why it is not necessarily crucial to

be “accurate,” but instead to merely understand how we come to the conclusion of where our physical attractiveness would land on a scale. Conceptualizing this provides insight into how we decide on a partner, how long our relationships will last, the success of these relationships, and the ability to perceive ourselves. A higher self-perceived physical attractiveness would be linked to a higher level of self-confidence, and this parallel appears across all levels of self-confidence. Pozzebon, Visser, and Bogaert (2012) found that we are unable to correctly perceive ourselves at times due to the environmental influences that we come into contact with every day. These would include instances such as visiting the doctor’s office, hearing how others may speak about us, unflattering pictures of ourselves, etc. Each of these plays a role in how we come to formulate a complete picture of our physical appearance. Unfortunately, they may alter this final picture and may cause a fluctuation in the production of this image. Despite this, we can still conclude that it is possible to decipher a method of self-perception and because this can be “wrong” in a sense, we may inherently affect our own mate selection through physiognomic homogamy.

## **Homogamy’s Basis and Effects**

To start, let’s attach a more in-depth working definition to homogamy to enhance the understanding for the purpose of this paper. Homogamy is the idea that we should have similar beliefs, values, intelligence levels, physical attractiveness, etc. with our partner in order to have a long-lasting and successful relationship. Blackwell and Lichter (2004) stated that homogamy is crucial in determining which couples are capable of staying together long enough to toy with the idea of marriage. It is also a vital aspect when deciding who will begin dating in the first place. The primary idea here is that as relationships continue on into the more serious stages, our desires become more specific. If our partner does not meet these certain qualifications, they do not make it to the next stage, and the relationship will ultimately fail. Homogamy ensures that each stage is met and that there can be a cohesive partnership without one person giving or receiving too much in the process. Physical attractiveness plays the most crucial role in the beginning stages when

we are first determining which partners are even candidates in the mate selection process. However, as we'll see in later sections, physical appearance is also linked to personality. This would inherently mean that physical appearance does matter in later stages and that it has a hand in multiple homogamy factors, not just its own.

## **The Cross-Section Between Physical Attractiveness and Homogamy (Physiognomic Homogamy)**

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that supports the idea behind physiognomic homogamy. Multiple studies found that participants were able to accurately determine which individuals were romantically involved with their counterpart strictly because of their similar physical features. Hinsz (1989) found that married couples were found to resemble one another, and did so through a blind pairing process. An extremely successful study, most of the participants were able to precisely pair the couples together because we so blatantly prefer partners of our own aesthetic. It would also be beneficial to mention here the idea that Doug Kenrick provided on this matter; he stated that we each have a mate value that can be determined, and that this would include physical attractiveness (Gutierrez, Kenrick, Partch, 2017). Beautiful people will attract beautiful people, and although everyone may desire this pool of humans, only those at a similar level will be able to successfully seek them out. This still provides evidence that we attract those with a rating degree that matches our own. The reason that Hinsz suspected this to be the case was because of how often we are exposed to our own facial features. The more exposure that we have to our own face, the more we tend to recognize and trust those with similar attributes.

This is not an uncommon finding; another study mentions this as well, stating that we tend to trust those who look like us because we are more comfortable with the idea of ourselves (Little, Penton-Voak, Burt, & Perrett, 2003). This would account for the idea behind self-confidence and may provide some backing to the theory that a higher self-confi-

dence would lead to a partnership with someone who holds our same attributes (i.e., higher self-confidence would inherently indicate a trust and respect for oneself, thus translating that to others who have the same characteristics).

Terry and Macklin (1977) performed a similar study to portray this information as well. Another blind pairing, judges were asked to take the individual pictures of participants and match them up with their spouse. Again, they were able to do this with extreme accuracy and ease based solely on the physical appearance of each couple. This provides us with a few conclusions, one of those being that we all seem to have a similar thought process in determining someone's physical attractiveness. Even if we are unable to consistently figure out our own physical attractiveness in an accurate manner, we can still semi-correctly (at least) sense the physical attractiveness of those around us. Considering the fact that multiple judges were able to perform this task in the studies mentioned, we can assume that there is a universal scale in determining physical attractiveness. If this was not the case, we would not be able to correctly pair each partnership despite having different backgrounds, aesthetics, personalities, etc. Another conclusion that we can come to is that if we are naturally thinking in terms of matching physical appearance regarding couples, we can ultimately assume that this is how we would think nearly all the time, providing evidence that we tend to gravitate toward those who look like us.

There is another theory that may provide some explanation as to why we are choosing partners that resemble us, and it is the imprinting theory of opposite-sex parents. This theory states that we tend to look for partners who remind us of our opposite-sex parent, especially if the relationship with this parent was one of trust and comfort. Little, Penton-Voak, Burt, and Perrett (2003) stated that they found this to be a factor indicating our preference toward those who look like us, and they are not the only ones to do so. Nojo, Tamura, and Ihara (2012) also found this to be the case, and they added in the additional idea that self-referent phenotype matching may be included as well (it should be noted that self-referent phenotype matching is a form of



recognition that is used to determine the degree of relatedness through a matching of cues between humans). Valentova, Bártová, Štěrbová, and Varella (2017), again, confirmed this information in their study. Each one of these research projects found that there is an overwhelming amount of evidence to support that opposite-sex imprinting is a primary determinant of who we will choose to mate with. This begs the question of whether this also is linked to us physically resembling our parents. If we share the same physical traits as the opposite-sex parent, it would only make sense for us to seek those out in potential mates (considering all of the information discussed previously in this paper). If we have a strong relationship with that parent and they happen to look like us, we would inevitably desire that in our partnerships because it builds a strong foundational trust within those who remind us of that parent (and, naturally, us).

A third layer to this can be added to better understand personality's role in physical attractiveness. Little and Perrett (2007) found that personalities and physical appearance tend to be linked with one another through facial features and traits such as neuroticism, agreeableness, openness, etc. For example, more "attractive" (perceived) females were found to have a higher agreeableness (Little & Perrett, 2007). Wong, Wong, Lui, and Wong (2018) confirmed this to be this case as well. One's personal appearance directly reflects their personal interests, thus bringing us to a few conclusions. If our personality matches our appearance, we would begin to look like those who have a similar personality. This would mean several things: first, considering this information, it would make complete sense as to what our process is for choosing partners. We would begin to understand that those who look like us also encompass a similar personality, and this is something that we find attractive considering we want our partners to have a similar aesthetic. Second, we would find even deeper levels of homogamy through this as we begin to cover two varying concepts discussed under homogamy (our matching physical attractiveness and personality types). This would be an underlying connection between homogamy, physical attractiveness, and aesthetics.

## **How the Physiognomic Homogamy Cross-Section Affects our Everyday Lives**

To reiterate, the potential partners that we come into contact with each and every day are the primary justification as to why physiognomic homogamy is crucial to understand. We are utilizing this concept without knowing its origins, and if we are not using it, we may be attempting to form relationships that are not progressing past the initial stages. Relationships currently taking place are still susceptible to these concerns, so this concept is one that should not be taken lightly as it may predict the future outcome of active relationships, and acquiring this knowledge may then lead to an improvement on the ever-increasing rates of divorce. Plus, it is always a strong idea to understand why we are performing in the manner that we are and to recognize where this may be a primal or genetic tendency deeply rooted in our wiring. Little, Penton-Voak, Burt, and Perrett (2003) described this importance through the idea of assortative mating. They stated that this idea may aid in the explanation of why we have individual preferences in our potential mates (Little, Penton-Voak, Burt, & Perrett, 2003). If we are seeking out partners who resemble our parents or even resemble our own phases, we can conceptualize why there would be varying degrees of attraction toward different types of humans.

## **Concluding Remarks**

All of the evidence reviewed here points to the conclusion that physiognomic homogamy is a crucial aspect to take into consideration when choosing a potential mate and that this concept may reveal why we have selected the history of partners that we have. It is a strong indicator of romantic success and appears throughout various studies as one of the top abilities to figure out who is romantically involved with whom.

Physiognomic homogamy is tightly connected to our own self-perception, aesthetic, and self-confidence, and may be considered part of the reason why we place a heavy emphasis on our own looks. Homogamy

itself, through research of multiple studies, has been deemed one of the central measures of romantic success and is thought to be vital when considering which relationships will continue on to the stage of marriage. Although this has all been quite conclusive information, there are still some limitations that should be reviewed when assessing future research. One of these limitations includes the potential idea that other factors should be held responsible for the dismantling of certain relationships. Certainly we cannot assume that couples are unable to stay together merely because of physical appearance. It is challenging to test this, however, because of the sheer number of reasons behind why people decide to end their relationship. Another possible limitation lies in conflicting evidence given by other researchers. Debruine (2005) stated that we seek out the faces of those who resemble us for non-romantic purposes specifically, including an attempt to make friends. Although we trust those who resemble us and are more likely to create friendships with them because of this, we would not choose to romantically pursue them out of fear that we may choose someone with a similar genetic makeup to our own (Debruine, 2005). Although this limitation appeared in Debruine's study, there are still several cases where this is not the consensual agreement on physiognomic homogamy. It should still, however, be discussed as a potential hole in the mapping of physiognomic homogamy.

Quite a few of these studies were experimental studies used to determine if people could pair couples together, but quite a few of them were correlational in their nature of observing how humans participated in the mate selection process. This type of research can be found in various psychological topics, including evolutionary psychology, the psychology of everyday life, psychology in statistics, and lifespan developmental psychology. One largely impactful methodological weakness that seems to be appearing in each study presented here is the idea of cause-and-effect relationships. There may be far more reasons attached to why we seek out our partners, including those such as Kenrick's view which stated that we may do so because mate value is partially determined by outward appearance. There are too many factors to include in mate selection that may affect our choice rather than simply relating to

our partner in physical features. How do we account for those with possible fetishes that disrupt this theory? In future research, there should be more studies done to include those with same-sex parental figures. We have contributed a large focus to the opposite-sex parental imprinting theory, so it would be extremely beneficial to look at how this works under a same-sex couple.

Also, for future research, it is imperative to reflect on how physical attractiveness may be linked to other larger homogamous subcategories. This may potentially provide a finished picture of how our relationships work as a whole and what we can do to assure a more frequent success rate amongst our romantic partnerships. Finally, to include those who fall outside of the bell-curve would indicate potential findings in disorders linked to self-appearance and may provide the psychology community a deeper look into body dysmorphia or other appearance-altering disorders.

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