



Physical Attractiveness

4.3.2 Relationships

- The evolutionary explanations for partner preferences, including the relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour.
- Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: self-disclosure; physical attractiveness, including the matching hypothesis; filter theory, including social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity.
- Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange theory, equity theory and Rusbult's investment model of commitment, satisfaction, comparison with alternatives and investment. Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown: intra-psychic, dyadic, social and grave dressing phases.
- Virtual relationships in social media: self-disclosure in virtual relationships; effects of absence of gating on the nature of virtual relationships.
- Parasocial relationships: levels of parasocial relationships, the absorption addiction model and the attachment theory explanation.

Factors affecting *attraction*

- Self disclosure
- **Physical attractiveness (including the matching hypothesis)**
- Filter theory



**What makes someone
physically *attractive*?**

What makes people **attractive**?

- **Shackleford and Larson (1997)** found people with symmetrical faces are more attractive as they have an honest set of genetic fitness (its hard to fake facial symmetry).





Neotenous faces (a baby face) with widely separated large eyes, a small chin and a small nose is deemed to be attractive as it triggers a caring instinct.

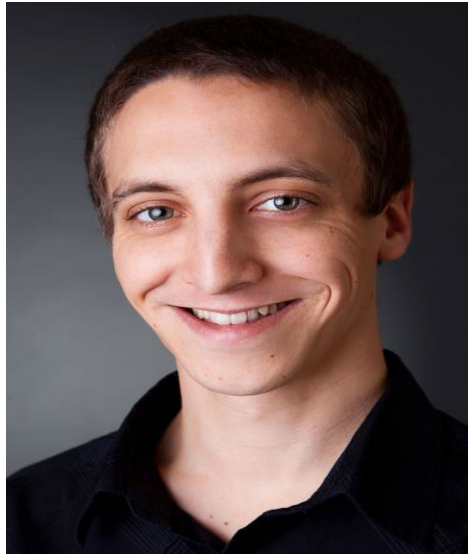
Which topic have we already explored
physical attraction?

Instructions

Rate the pictures on the following slide out of 10

Match them up according to who would date who

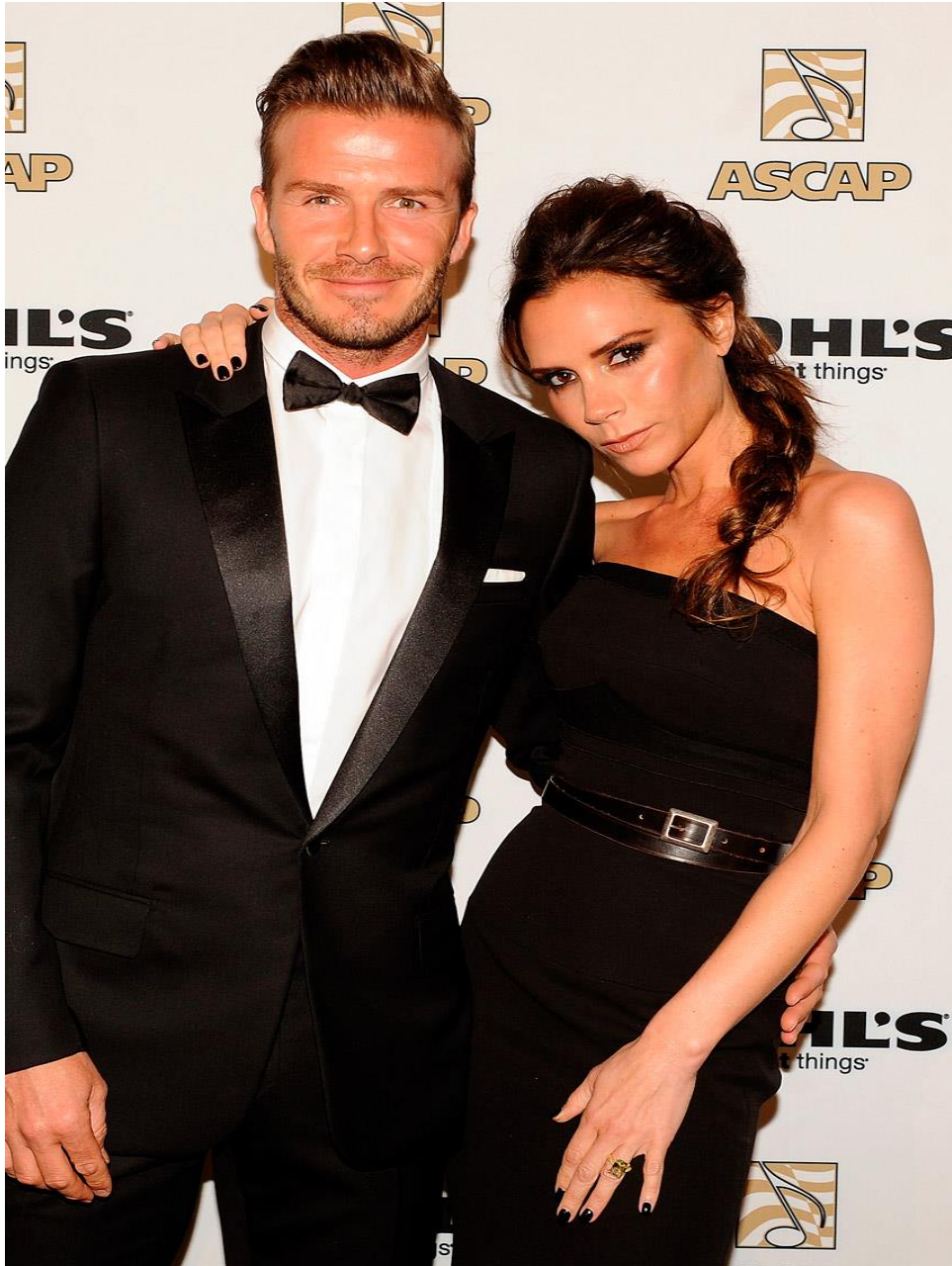
Why have you matched up certain couples?



The Matching Hypothesis

The matching hypothesis (Walster, 1966) claims that people are more likely to form a committed relationship with someone equally attractive or the same level of social desirability.

The theory suggests that people assess their own value and then make '**realistic choices**' by selecting the best available potential partners who are also likely to share this same level of attraction.



Key study: Walster *et al.* (1966)

Procedure In order to test the matching hypothesis, Walster *et al.* advertised a 'computer dance' for new students at the University of Minnesota. From the large number of students who purchased tickets, 376 males and 376 females were randomly selected to take part in the study. When they came to pick up their tickets, four student accomplices surreptitiously rated each of them for physical attractiveness. The participants were then asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire (e.g. to assess personality, intelligence, etc.) and told that the data gathered from these questionnaires would be used to allocate their ideal partner for the evening of the dance. In fact the pairing was done completely randomly. During the intermission part of the dance, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their dates, with a follow-up questionnaire distributed six months after the dance.

Findings The findings from this study did not support the matching hypothesis. Once participants had met their dates, and regardless of their own physical attractiveness, they responded more positively to physically attractive dates and were more likely to subsequently try to arrange dates with them if they were physically attractive. Other factors, such as personality or intelligence, did not affect liking the dates or any subsequent attempts to date them.

However, **Feingold (1988)** found supportive evidence for the matching hypothesis by carrying out a meta-analysis of 17 studies using real-life couples. He established a strong correlation between the partners' ratings of attractiveness, just as predicted by the matching hypothesis.

The Halo Effect

The halo effect is a type of cognitive bias whereby our perception of someone is **positively influenced** by our opinions of that person's other related traits (Thorndike, 1920).

The halo effect can shape our perception of others' intelligence and competence.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEho_4ejkNw





An example of the halo effect is the **attractiveness stereotype**, which refers to the tendency to assign positive qualities and traits to physically attractive people. People often tend to judge attractive individuals to have higher morality, better mental health, and greater intelligence. This cognitive error in judgment reflects one's individual prejudices, ideology, and social perception.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) discovered that teachers generally develop expectations for their students based not merely on the school record but also on their physical appearance.



In the experiment, the teachers were provided with objective information such as a child's academic potential along with a photo of an attractive or unattractive girl or boy. The results indicated that the teachers' expectations concerning the child's academic future were significantly associated with the child's attractiveness.

Topic summary (AO1)



Is there any supporting evidence for the Matching Hypothesis?

A03: Supportive evidence for Matching Hypothesis

A strength of the matching hypothesis is that it is to some extent supported by research.

For example, **Feingold (1988)** conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies, and found a strong correlation between partners' ratings of attractiveness. This shows that people tend to choose a partner who has a similar level of physical attractiveness to themselves, just as the matching hypothesis predicts.

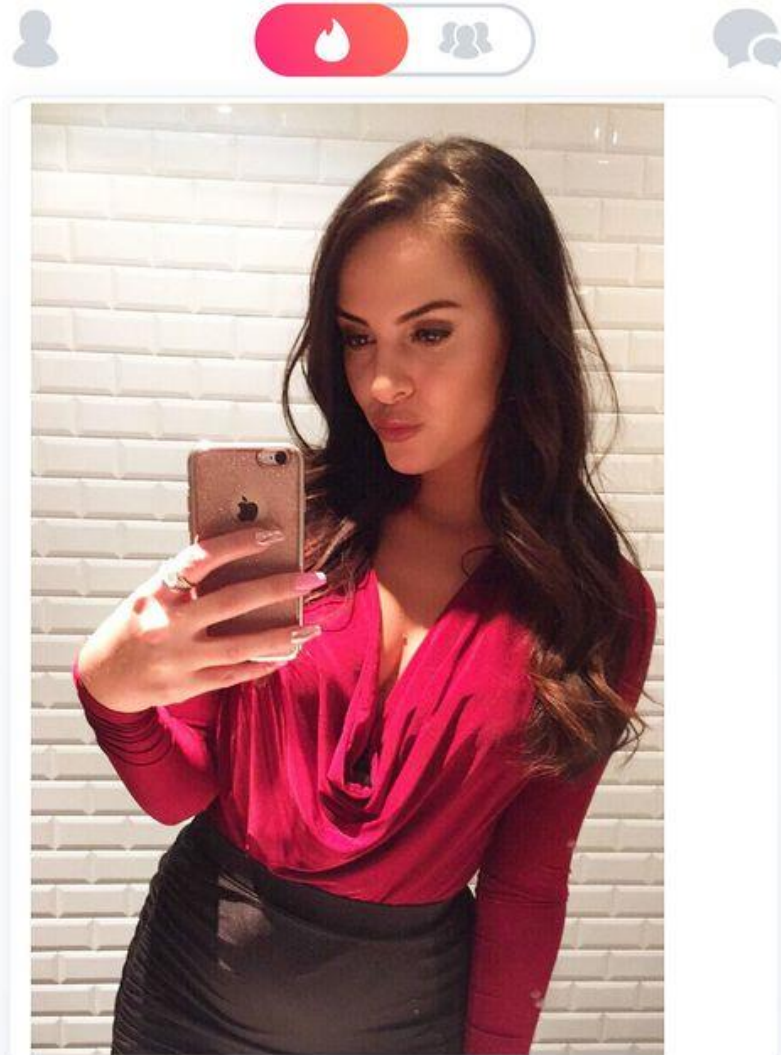
What does this suggest?



Jay, 30
Model and personal trainer



Holly, 21
Film student and model



Jade, 24
Internal recruiter

Do we go for people on 'our level' or strive for more attractive people?



A03: Contradictory evidence

A limitation of the matching hypothesis is that there is contradictory research. Walster et al.'s original study failed to support the hypothesis and other research has also failed to provide conclusive evidence for matching hypothesis.

For example, **Taylor et al. (2011)** investigated the activity log on a dating website and found that website users were more likely to try and arrange a meeting with a potential partner who was more physically attractive than them.

These findings contradict the matching hypothesis, as according to its predictions, website users should seek more dates with a person who is similar in terms of attractiveness, because it provides them with a better chance of being accepted by a potential partner.

This challenges the validity of the theory as the evidence contradicts what the theory predicts.



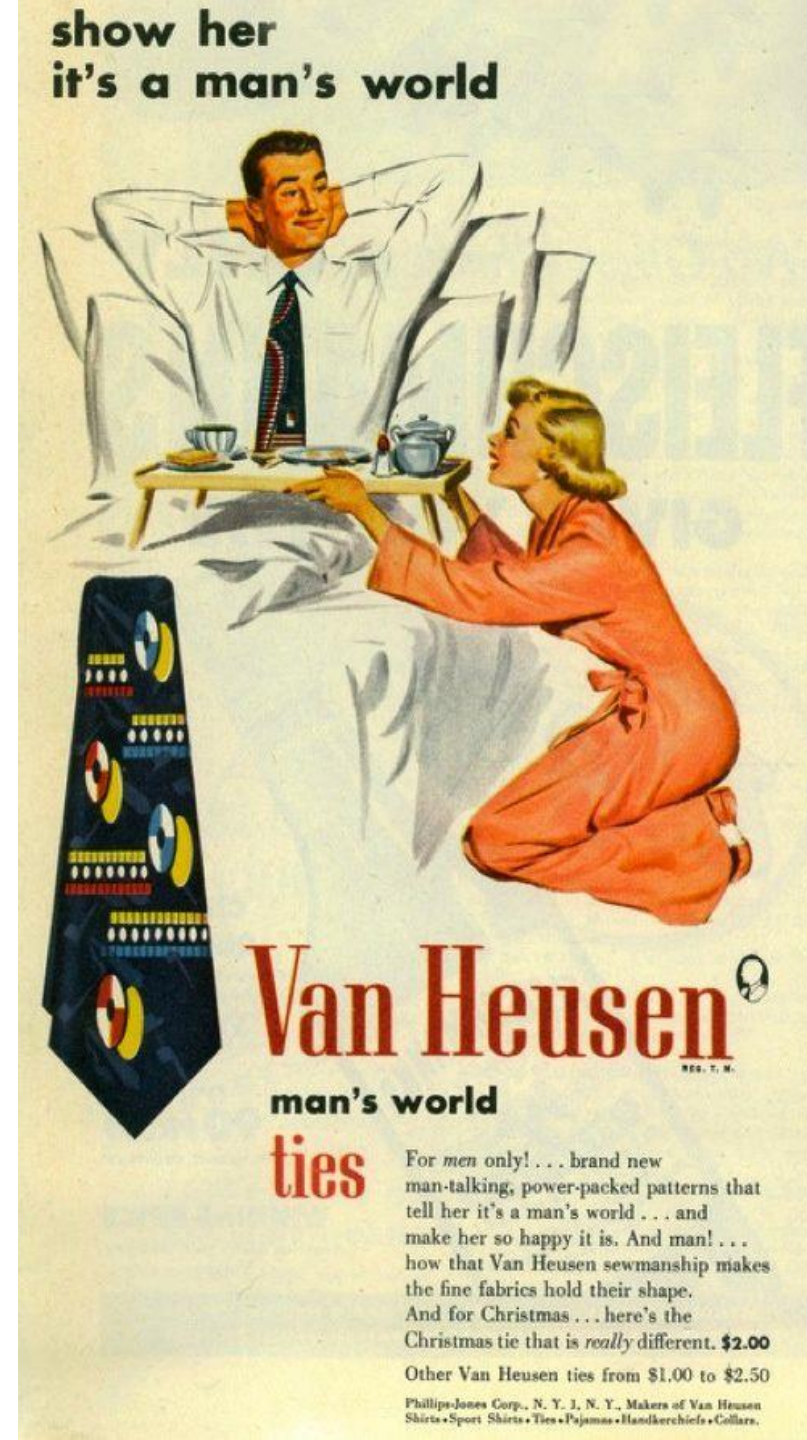
A03: Supportive evidence for the Halo Effect

A strength of the explanation of the **halo effect** is that there is supporting empirical evidence.

Palmer and Peterson (2012) asked participants to rate attractive and unattractive people in terms of how politically competent and knowledgeable they believed them to be. It was found that attractive people were consistently rated higher on these characteristics compared to unattractive ones.

This effect persisted even when they were told the 'knowledgeable' people had no expertise.

This has useful real world application as it suggests even politicians may be selected for their looks rather than ability.



A03: Individual differences?



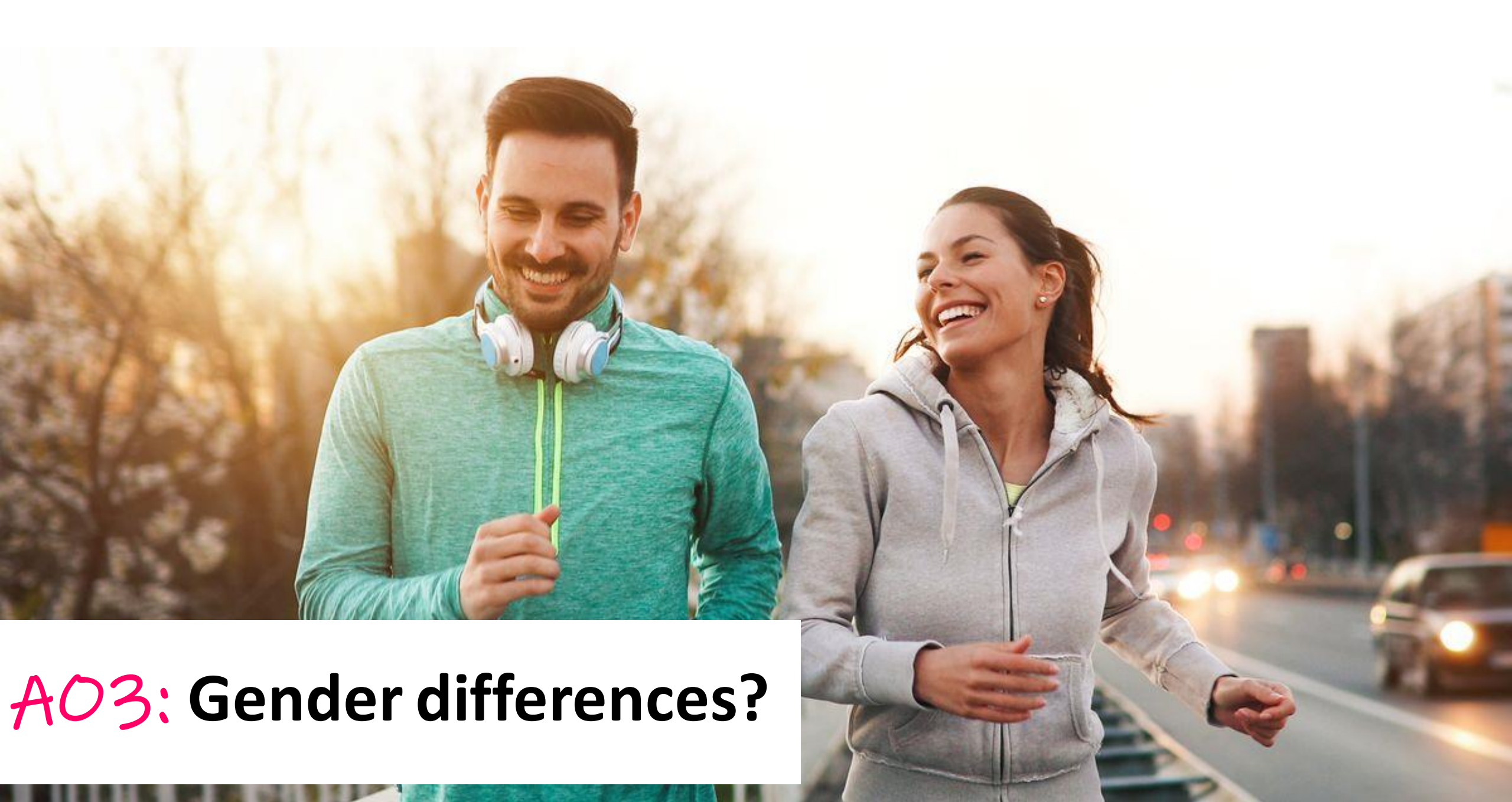
A03: Individual differences

A limitation of the idea that physical attractiveness is important in romantic relationships is that there are significant individual differences in terms of the importance that people place on physical attractiveness.

Touhey (1979) gave participants photos of strangers and some biographical information about them. Participants were asked to rate how much they liked the people on photographs. **Touhey** found that physical attractiveness was more important for participants who displayed sexist attitudes (measured by a questionnaire).

This suggests that, depending on the individual, physical appearance may or may not be a significant factor in attractiveness, while the matching hypothesis suggests it is always the main one.

There are significant individual differences in terms of the importance that people place on physical attractiveness in terms of relationships and a nomothetic explanation may not be appropriate.



A03: Gender differences?

A03: Gender (beta) bias

On the other hand, a limitation of the matching hypothesis is that it may be suffering from a beta-bias, as it assumes that men and women are very similar in their view of the importance of physical attractiveness.

Research suggests that this may not be the case. For example, **Meltzer et al. (2014)** found that men rate their long-term relationships more satisfying if their partner is physically attractive, while for women their partner's attractiveness did not have a significant impact on relationship satisfaction.

This shows that there are significant gender differences in how important appearance is for attraction.

Therefore explanations based on an idiographic approach, without trying to generate universal rules may be more appropriate for studying romantic relationships.

A03: Not a complete explanation

Another limitation of the matching hypothesis is that it mainly focuses on short-term relationships.

When choosing a partner for long-term relationships, people tend to focus more on similarity of values and needs satisfaction, rather than physical attractiveness. This questions the validity of the matching hypothesis, as it will only describe a limited number of relationships.

Furthermore, the matching hypothesis ignores the fact that people may compensate for the lack of physical attractiveness with other qualities, such as intellect or sociability.

This compensation explains repeatedly occurring examples of older, less attractive men being married to attractive younger women; something that the matching hypothesis cannot account for.



Cunningham et al. (1995) found that white, Asian and Hispanic males, despite being from different cultures, rated females with prominent cheekbones, small noses and large eyes as highly attractive.

What does this suggest? Use the words.

Universality

Sexual selection

nature-nurture debate

A03: Universal finding of 'attractive'

A strength of the matching hypothesis is that physical attractiveness seems to be an important factor in forming relationships across cultures.

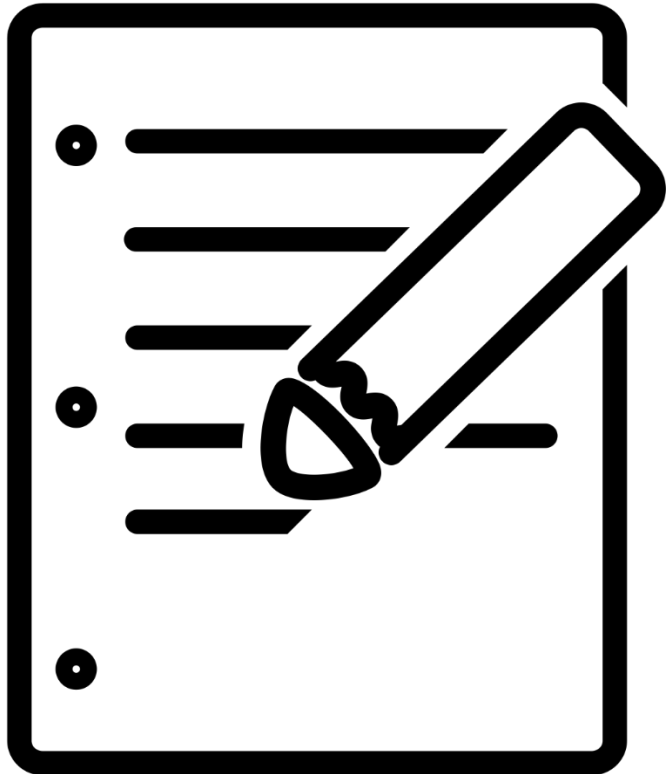
For example, **Cunningham et al. (1995)** found that white, Asian and Hispanic males, despite being from different cultures, rated females with prominent cheekbones, small noses and large eyes as highly attractive.

This universality of findings suggests that using attractiveness as a decisive factor in choosing a partner might be a genetically reproduced mechanism, aiding sexual selection.

This gives support to the nature side of nature-nurture debate as it shows that human behaviour is mainly a result of biological rather than environmental influences.

Essay Plan

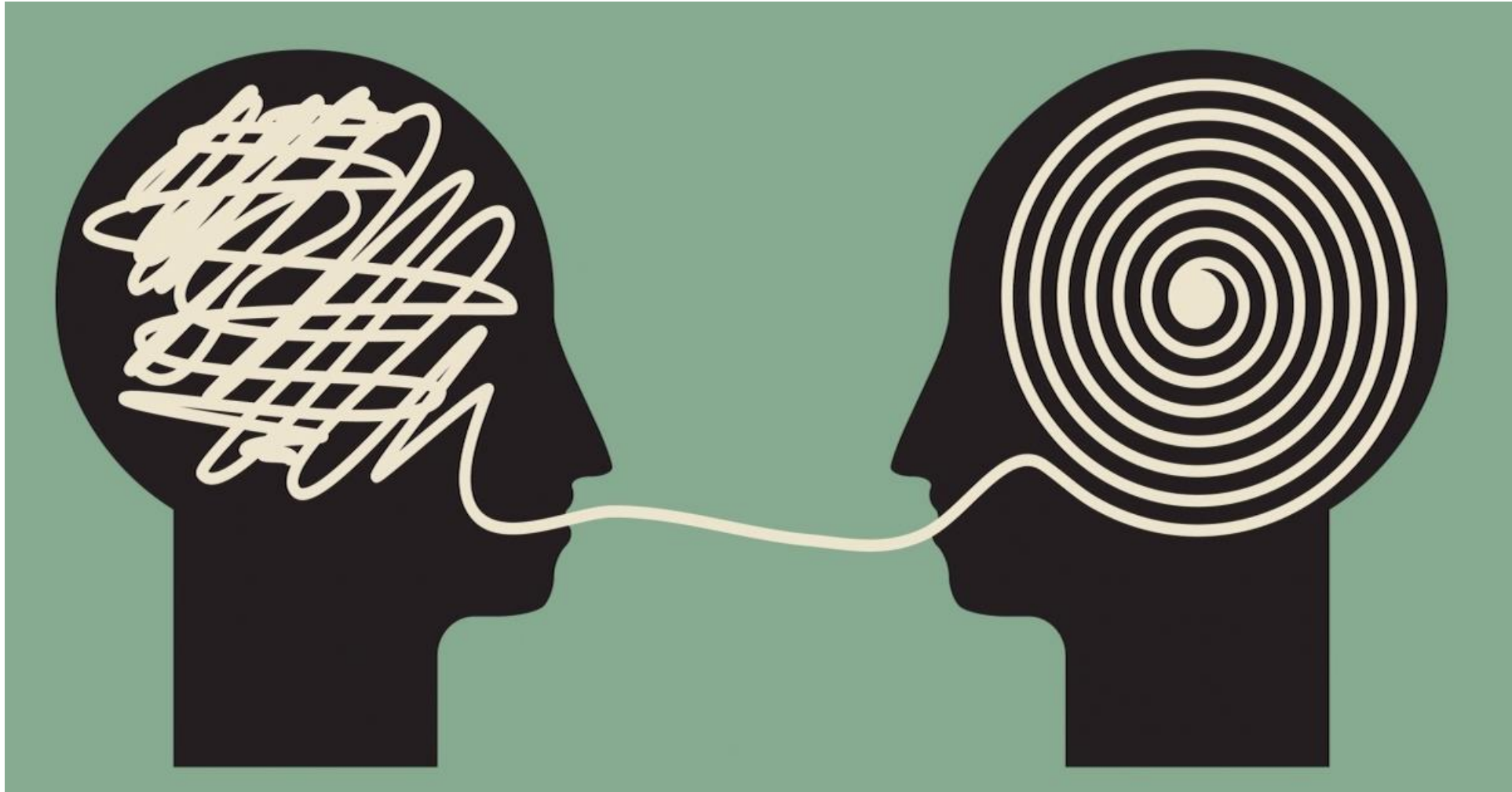
Discuss physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships (16 marks)



A01

A03

Knowledge *Organiser*



Discuss physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships (16 marks)