

# GENDER ROLE PERSONALITIES AND PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the current study was to explore whether personality dispositions can influence perceived physical appearance. Past research demonstrates that gendered and non-gendered characteristics lead to differential preferences for potential romantic interests among males and females (e.g., Cash & Smith, 1982). These previous studies have not, however, measured direct influence on pulchritude. In the present study, gendered and non-gendered personality descriptions were paired with pictures of average-looking individuals of both sexes to determine the influence of gender roles on perceived physical attractiveness. I hypothesized that males would find androgynous females more physically attractive than gender-typed and non-gender typed females. Similarly, females would find androgynous males more physically attractive than gender-typed and non-gender typed males. Findings indicated that feminine and androgynous personalities significantly increased perceived physical attractiveness of target females for the male participants, whereas undifferentiated and masculine roles significantly decreased perceived physical attractiveness of target males for female participants. Target photographs accompanied by feminine personality descriptions were rated the highest in overall desirability by both sexes.

## **DEDICATION**

For my mother, you have given me endless support in my aspirations and dreams. I hope to be as inspirational and loving as you have shown me to be.

For my family, without your love and support my academic dreams would not be possible.

For all my close friends, thank you for making me laugh when I needed it the most.

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## INTRODUCTION

Previous researchers have evaluated the effect of gendered and non-gendered personality traits on perceived attractiveness and romantic preferences (Bridges, 1981; Cash & Smith, 1982; Green & Kenrick, 1994; McCutcheon, 1988; Orlofsky, 1982). Emphasizing males' and females' preferences for divergent and/or linear gender typed traits, the past studies have yielded inconsistent findings. Some research indicates that abiding by gender appropriate behaviors is perceived as most desirable (Orlofsky, 1982), whereas other research suggests that androgynous individuals (i.e., those possessing both masculine and feminine traits) are perceived as most desirable (Bridges, 1981; Green & Kenrick, 1994; McCutcheon, 1988). Despite inconsistent findings, the results of previous work in this area have demonstrated that one's gender role has the potential to affect perceived desirability and to influence perceptions of physical appearance. The current research attempted to clarify prior studies on gender traits and romantic preferences by directly testing the notion that perceived physical appearance can be altered through gender-based personality descriptions.

### *Attraction to Potential Romantic Partners*

Diverse inclinations when selecting a romantic partner could be distinguished by two sought after notions: personality and perceived physical attractiveness. Regarding perceived attractiveness, extensive research has found males prioritizing physical attractiveness as a coveted attribute in a significant other (Davis, 1990; Feingold, 1990; Nevid, 1984; Sprecher, 1989). Females, along with males, requested their potential partner to be physically attractive; which has been emphasized in lonely hearts advertisements (Davis, 1990; Feingold, 1990). The link between perceived physical attractiveness and desirability as a romantic partner is supported

by the “what is beautiful is good” phenomenon (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Dion et al. demonstrated that individuals correlate positive traits and ideas to physically desirable individuals. Participants were more likely to surmise physically attractive (rather than average and unattractive) individuals to exude an advantageous social life, occupational status, parental success, and marital commitment.

With such prominence placed on pulchritude, are unattractive individuals destined to a life of solidarity? Existing research on the role of personality characteristics in social interactions suggests not. Although physical attractiveness is desired in romantic partnerships, personality characteristics have the ability to alter perceptions of attractiveness (Cash & Smith, 1982; Lampel & Anderson, 1968; Lewandowski, Aaron, & Gee, 2007). According to the Interaction Appearance Theory (IAT; Albada, Knapp, & Theune, 2002), an individual who is not initially perceived as physically attractive may become so through the process of social communication. That is, as social interactions persist, the perceiver may come to see the individual as physically attractive based on the interpersonal exchanges. Indeed, Lewandowski et al. (2007) found that prior perceptions of one’s physical attractiveness increased when average and unattractive individuals demonstrated positive personality traits (such as humorous, decorous, and educated). Personality is multidimensional to each individual, and may be derived from diverse aspects. Thus, one factor in personality development, such as gender, may exhibit unique qualities that others may perceive as desirable or undesirable.



### *Gender and Personality Traits*

In a society often viewed through the lens of gender, certain personality traits have come to be viewed as appropriate for one gender over another (Bem, 1981). For example, traits such as soft spoken, gentle, and understanding are viewed as more appropriate for women; thus these traits are typed as “feminine” traits. Competitive, forceful, and athletic, conversely, have come to be associated with men (Bem, 1974). Traits that are seen as “feminine” exemplify high levels of affection and empathy; whereas “masculine” characteristics illustrate independence and dominance (Bem, 1974). Many individuals are able to identify gender roles, or masculine and feminine mannerisms suitably tailored to one’s gender, during the early stages of childhood (Bem, 1981; Spence & Buckner, 1995).

Utilized in numerous research studies, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) assesses an individual’s gender role by measuring selected personality traits. For example, traits such as dominance, independence, and forcefulness would signify masculine tendencies. Female characteristics illustrate sensitivity, tenderness, and shyness to others. Individuals may exude personality traits congruent with their gender (i.e., men displaying masculine traits and women displaying feminine traits) or incongruent with their gender (i.e., men displaying feminine traits and women displaying masculine traits). An additional role, or androgynous role, entails the individual possessing a combination of masculine and feminine roles (Green & Kenrick, 1994; Spence, Helmrich, & Stapp, 1974). Lastly, a non-gendered role, otherwise known as undifferentiated traits, consists of low instrumental and low expressive characteristics (Bem, 1974).

### *Gendered Traits and Perceived Attractiveness*

Individuals are expected to appropriately exhibit a pattern of behaviors particular to their gender (Seyfried & Hendrick, 1973), which in turn, may be perceived as favorable in a potential partner. Gillen (1981) illustrated this expectation by measuring masculine and feminine roles and how they affected one's perceived physical attractiveness. Participants were asked to assign feminine and masculine personality traits from the BSRI to several photographs of individuals with distinct levels of physical attractiveness. Participants associated masculine traits and higher perceived physical attractiveness in male photographs, whereas feminine traits corresponded to higher perceived physical attractiveness for female photographs. Gillen's study suggests that cultural expectations in gender role behavior do play a significant role in the selection of a romantic partner.

Although one's gender role (masculine, feminine, or androgynous) has presented moderate effects on preferences for gender role and non-gender role qualities in a romantic partner, exactly how gender roles affect selection of a romantic partner has been debated since the 1970s (Spence & Buckner, 1995). For example, some researchers have found that traditional males (masculine) and females (feminine) prefer their complimentary gender role (Orlofsky, 1982; Pursell & Banikiotes, 1978). Other researchers show males and females preferring partners who display divergent gendered traits, such as, females portraying masculine roles (masculine females) or males exuding feminine traits (feminine males) or androgynous roles (equal levels of masculine and feminine traits) (Bridges, 1981; Green & Kenrick, 1994; Korabik, 1982; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Major, Carnevale, & Deaux, 1981; McCutcheon, 1988;

Seyfried & Hendrick, 1973). As illustrated in this section, gender role research continues to display an amalgam of discoveries.

Orlofsky (1982) investigated the relationship between participants' gender role and their consummate partner. To measure this concept, participants were asked evaluate their gender role and select their ideal partner's attributes from the BSRI. Results indicated masculine and feminine males were inclined towards partners that were feminine females; whereas, gendered and non-gendered females desired androgynous and feminine characteristics in potential male partners. Demonstrated by this study, individuals who exude different gender roles may be inclined to prefer other gender personalities that are similar, or diverse, from their own role.

Pursell and Banikiotes (1978) continued to expand on the influence of an individual's gender role and his or her attraction to others' gender role personalities. Evaluation forms from the BSRI (containing masculine, feminine and androgynous roles) were completed weeks before the actual experiment by participants. Afterwards, another group of participants judged the evaluated gender roles from the BSRI by rating their compatibility and desirability towards the individual. These data showed traditional gender males and females preferred appropriate gender role partners. Moreover, androgynous individuals favored androgynous romantic partners. This study continues to confirm conventional gender role stereotypes in attraction; nonetheless, advanced research has observed unique patterns in gender role romantic desirability.

Fundamentally, likeability and friendship are the first successions before delving into a romantic relationship (Lewandowski et al., 2007). Prospective romantic interests may be discovered in friendships with individuals portraying distinct gender roles; previous research

studies have exhibited gender role preferences in this social process. Korabik (1982) considered how gendered and androgynous roles may affect judgments of agreeableness in an observer. Qualities related to feminine, masculine, androgynous roles were given to male and female participants to interpret. Results indicated males had a high preference for feminine females. Masculine males were not preferred by females, however; androgynous and feminine males were. The essential approach of this experiment displays gendered and non-gendered roles can affect social interactions, which in turn, may potentially advance into a romantic relationship.

Additional research indicating a preference for feminine traits in romantic relationships was described by Kulik and Harackiewicz (1979). These researchers queried participants to rate various gendered and non-gendered roles centered on romantic importance and dating. Staying consistent with gender typecasts, results demonstrated males preferring traditional feminine females in romantic relationships, rather than females possessing androgynous or masculine traits. Instead of preferring masculine or feminine males as previously demonstrated, females were inclined to androgynous romantic spouses. Results indicated feminine traits were most preferred by male participants: whereas female participants preferred androgynous roles. This experiment demonstrates the unique preferences males and females exhibit when selecting a romantic partner.

Deviating from gender stereotypes in attraction, Seyfried and Hendrick (1973) encountered individuals romantically favoring gender roles opposite of cultural expectations. Two distinct sets of descriptions consisting of masculine and feminine qualities were given to participants to appraise on the basis of attraction and appreciation. Females subsisted on gender

stereotypical notions by selecting masculine males, rather than feminine males, as more attractive. Surprisingly, masculine females were viewed as more attractive than feminine females to male participants. Likewise, Pendleton (1982) discovered assertiveness in females was recognized as more attractive to males. As listed on the BSRI, assertiveness is categorized as a masculine trait (Bem, 1974), rather than a feminine trait. As this research indicates, individuals do not have to engage in gender appropriate behaviors to attract potential partners.

As previously mentioned, masculine and feminine traits are established by social expectations and biological sex. Rather than individuals abiding by gender ideals, males and females may exhibit both gender characteristics, otherwise known as androgynous personalities. Androgynous individuals may demonstrate the assertiveness and independence of masculine mannerisms, while expressing the compassionate and empathetic attitudes of feminine behaviors. As this relates to potential romantic partners, McCutcheon (1988) found female participants preferring androgynous males more than masculine males. The multifaceted nature of androgynous personalities may facilitate social interactions. Researchers propose that androgynous individuals are best suited in romantic relationships due to their ability to adjust efficiently in new situations (Green & Kenrick, 1994; Major et al., 1981). Hence, androgynous characteristics may present stronger romantic favorability in male and female participants.

Egalitarian views in our modern generation have accepted the notion of the duality of gender traits across interactions. Green and Kenrick (1994) investigated preferences of gender typed, non-gender typed, and androgynous roles across aspects of interpersonal relationships. Participants were asked to determine whether traditional or nontraditional personality

descriptions would be satisfactory and suitable for either of the following relations: a one night stand, date, or marriage. Results indicated both genders exhibiting strong inclinations for androgynous partners, instead of exclusively masculine and feminine ideals, across all three relationships. As exhibited, this experiment reveals that one does not have to abide by stereotypical gender norms to entice a partner.

Additional exploration by Bridges (1981) further supports the desirability toward androgynous qualities in both genders by measuring surmised physical attractiveness. Two descriptions involving gender role and androgynous attributes were given to participants to evaluate the stimulus personality by first impression, favorability, potentiality of dating, and physical attractiveness, though a photograph was not presented. Bridges concluded that androgynous roles in both genders were favored in all variables, excluding physical attractiveness. Females projected stronger preference for androgynous roles, whereas males were indifferent with their partner's qualities. Yet, feminine attributes were perceived as more physically attractive than androgynous roles in both genders. Differential outcomes of this study illustrate how customary archetypes over physical attractiveness and personality still may influence an individual's perception in romantic relationships.

Pursuing this concept, Major et al. (1981) proposed university students would perceive androgynous personalities as more attractive than masculine and feminine traits because androgynous individuals are assumed to adjust in new circumstances. Participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of bipolar characteristics selected from the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence et al., 1974). Subsequently, male and female participants were

more likely to view androgynous roles as more attractive than masculine and feminine roles. This research study indicates engaging in equivalent levels of expressive (feminine) and instrumental (masculine) traits could positively influence romantic attraction.

Previous research has produced inconsistent findings when exploring interpersonal relationship and attractiveness towards gendered and non-gendered roles. Much of the previous research suggests that males are inclined to feminine partners (Korabik, 1982; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Orlofsky, 1982; Pursell & Banikiotes, 1978). Whereas females preferred androgynous and feminine roles in several studies (Bridges, 1981; Green & Kenrick, 1994; Korabik, 1982; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Major et al., 1981). In the past decades, transformations of one's gender identity and gender role preference in romantic desirability may be prevalent because of cultural and social changes (Twenge, 1997). Thusly, this may produce distinct gendered and non-gendered inclinations in potential romantic partners for current participants.

### *Overview of Study*

Although much has been said about the influence of personality traits on desirability of romantic partners, previous experimental analysis has not directly investigated the manipulation of gender and non-gender role characteristics on perceived physical attractiveness. Given that physical attractiveness is exceedingly important in romantic relationships, the current study aims to elucidate these notions by considering the influence of gender and non-gender role traits on perceived physical attraction for heterosexual college students. The experiment entailed participants visually evaluating a photograph both before and after reading gendered and non-

gendered personality traits. As past research demonstrates, gender preferences in romantic relationships introduce an amalgam of reactions and proclivities. Thus, the current methodology investigates the postulation of gender, non-gender, and androgynous characteristics and their unique influence on physical attractiveness. As the rationale of this thesis, Bem (1974) proposed androgynous individuals would be accepted in social circumstances and in ever-changing cultural standards, especially in females. Androgynous roles may efficiently transition in new situations and notions rather than gendered and non-gendered personalities (Bem, 1974; Green & Kenrick, 1994; Major et al., 1981). I hypothesized that males would prefer and presume androgynous females as being more physically attractive than feminine, masculine, and undifferentiated females. Likewise, I hypothesized that females would prefer and find androgynous males to be more physically attractive than masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated males. For the effect of participants' gender identity on gender role preferences, I hypothesized the following: feminine males and females would prefer masculine individuals, masculine males and females would favor feminine partners, androgynous males and females would desire androgynous personalities, and gender neutral participants would prefer gender neutral companions. Lastly, I hypothesized male and female participants would prefer androgynous roles the most in overall desirability, rather than feminine, masculine, and gender neutral roles.



## METHOD

### *Participants*

A sample of 55 male and 61 female undergraduate students from the University of Central Florida (UCF) were recruited to participate in the current study. The ethnicity of the sample consisted of 70 White, 22 Hispanic or Latinos, 12 Black or African Americans, 11 Asian Americans and 1 American Indian participants. Students were compensated with course credit, in eligible psychology courses, for study participation. Heterosexual participants were eligible to partake in the experiment because attractions in opposite sex romantic relationships were being assessed.

### *Design*

The structure of the experiment was a 4 (personality description: masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated) x 4 (participant gender role: masculine, feminine, androgynous, undifferentiated) x 2 (participant gender: male or female) mixed factorial design. The independent variable of personality description consisted of gender consistent, gender inconsistent, androgynous (masculine and feminine), and gender neutral personality descriptions selected from the BSRI. A photograph (depicting someone of average attractiveness) was paired with each personality description. Dependent measures were contrived from participants' evaluations of the descriptions and photographs.

### *Procedure*

First, a pilot study to select the photographs needed for the experiment was conducted. Thirty participants (15 men, 15 women) rated an array of faces on attractiveness, using a 9-point Likert scale (1-not at all attractive; 9-extremely attractive). Eight photographs (4 male, 4 female) that were rated the highest overall mean in attractiveness were selected for the primary study.

For the primary study, participants were able to access the experiment, via internet, through the university's SONA research system. Once the participant was on the appropriate webpage, informed consent was obtained. First, participants were given ten photographs of opposite-sex individuals and asked to evaluate their physical attractiveness, using a 9-point Likert scale (1-not at all attractive; 9-extremely attractive). Four of the photographs that were previously rated with the highest mean in attractiveness were used in each personality description; the additional six photographs served as distractors. Next, participants began reading the first personality description. Personality traits were described as follows:

#### *Masculine Traits*

“James/Amy is: Athletic, self-reliant, competitive, makes decisions easily, dominant, independent, forceful, and has strong leadership skills.”

#### *Feminine Traits*

“Tony/Tracey is: Loyal, shy, warm, gullible, affectionate, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others, and soft spoken.”

### *Androgynous Traits*

“Tom/ Sandra is: Tender, assertive, ambitious, self-sufficient, analytical, compassionate, cheerful, and sympathetic.”

### *Undifferentiated Traits*

“Jack/ Jessie is: Adaptable, conceited, friendly, reliable, jealous, conventional, sincere, and tactful.”

Male and female subjects evaluated these traits with questions derived by Sprecher (1989; see Appendix). The provided questions assessed the participant’s perceived physical attractiveness and overall desirability of the target photograph and/or description.

Next, the four target photographs were paired with one of the four personality descriptions for the participant to evaluate overall physical attractiveness, and desirability.

Following these evaluations, the participant ranked the four pictures with the personality traits from “*Most Favored*” to “*Least Favored*.”

Finally, participants completed the PAQ; this evaluated the participant’s gender role and the possible interaction between their gender traits and romantic gender role preferences.

Participants were debriefed before leaving the study website.

## RESULTS

The analyses in this experiment aimed to illustrate the possible manipulation gender role traits may present when perceiving an individual's physical attractiveness. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical analyses. As proposed, I hypothesized androgynous personalities would successfully influence the attractiveness of photographs for male and female participants. Moreover, male and female participants would desire androgynous roles in potential romantic partners.

### *Pilot Study*

Photographs that exhibited the highest overall mean in attractiveness were chosen for the study because average attractive ratings were not found. Assessments of male participants' ratings of four females photographs are as follows: Tracey ( $M = 3.53, SD = 2.15$ ), Amy ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.97$ ), Sandra ( $M = 3.24, SD = 2.05$ ) and Chelsea ( $M = 3.06, SD = 1.89$ ). Female participants' ratings of four male photographs are displayed: Paul ( $M = 4.67, SD = 1.68$ ), James ( $M = 4.00, SD = 1.81$ ), Joey ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.77$ ), and David ( $M = 2.27, SD = 1.22$ ).

### *Changes in Perceived Physical Attractiveness*

Dependent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether initial ratings of physical attractiveness for the target pictures differed from ratings of physical attractiveness given after the target pictures were paired with personality descriptions. Results for male and female participants were analyzed separately.

Male participants' responses in each personality description were analyzed. From the initial ratings in the feminine personality traits ( $M = 4.80, SD = 1.45$ ), perceived attractiveness

significantly increased after being presented the description and photograph combination ( $M = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ),  $t(53) = -2.66$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Initial assessments in the androgynous characteristics ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) significantly increased in attractiveness ratings after personality descriptions were paired with photographs ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ),  $t(54) = -3.00$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . In the masculine characteristics, initial physical attractiveness ratings ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) did not differ from attractiveness ratings provided after the target photo was paired with masculine traits ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ),  $t(52) = -0.46$ ,  $p = 0.65$ . Initial ratings of the gender neutral traits ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) did not significantly differ from the perceived attractiveness of the photograph after viewing the description ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ),  $t(54) = -0.49$ ,  $p = 0.62$ ).

Observations from female participants in each personality description were assessed. Gender neutral traits were significantly different from the initial ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ) and succeeding distribution of the photograph and description ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(61) = 4.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ., with means indicating that attractiveness decreased. Also decreasing in perceived physical attractiveness, masculine traits significantly changed before the photograph and personality description ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) and after ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(61) = 3.12$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . Initial ratings of androgynous roles ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) did not significantly alter perceived attractiveness of the photograph after the description was presented ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ),  $t(61) = 0.20$ ,  $p = 0.84$ . Lastly, feminine ratings did not significantly change accordingly with the photograph before ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ) and after picture/description arrangement ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ),  $t(60) = 0.77$ ,  $p = 0.45$ ).

### *Effects of Personality Descriptions on Perceived Physical Attractiveness*

To determine the differential effect of personality description on perceived physical attractiveness, we first created change scores by subtracting the picture/description physical attractiveness ratings from the initial physical attractiveness ratings. Creating change scores allowed us to ignore differences in initial levels of perceived physical attractiveness and instead focus on whether personality descriptions differentially affected target's physical attractiveness ratings. Means and standard deviations for each personality description are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Male Participants' Attractiveness:  
 Ratings of Female Targets*

Gender Role Descriptions	Before	After	Change Score	Sig. Level
Masculine	3.92 (1.69)	4.04 (2.05)	-0.12*	.650
Feminine	4.80 (1.45)	5.20 (1.73)	-0.40*	.010
Androgynous	4.38 (1.58)	4.98 (1.73)	-0.60*	.004
Undifferentiated	4.58 (1.69)	4.67 (1.88)	-0.09*	.623

\*Negative numbers indicate increased ratings of perceived attractiveness

Table 2  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Female Participants' Attractiveness:  
 Ratings of Male Targets*

Gender Role Descriptions	Before	After	Change Score	Sig. Level
Masculine	4.16 (1.78)	3.42 (1.84)	0.74	.003
Feminine	4.49 (2.11)	4.31 (2.04)	0.18	.445
Androgynous	2.79 (1.83)	2.76 (1.84)	0.03	.843
Undifferentiated	3.65 (1.87)	2.71 (1.74)	0.94	.000

\*Negative numbers indicate increased ratings of perceived attractiveness

An ANOVA was used to evaluate the 4 (personality description: masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated) x 4 (participant gender role: masculine, feminine, androgynous, undifferentiated) x 2 (participant gender: male or female) mixed factorial design. There was no main effect of either participant sex or gender identity on perceived physical attractiveness; however, there was a main effect for the personality description,  $F(3, 315) = 3.53, p = .015$ . Specifically, perceived physical attractiveness in the feminine ( $M = -0.97, SD = 1.57$ ) and androgynous ( $M = -0.28, SD = 1.41$ ) descriptions increased significantly more than did perceived physical attractiveness in the undifferentiated description ( $M = 0.41, SD = 1.66$ ). Perceived physical attractiveness changes in the masculine description ( $M = 0.35, SD = 1.89$ ) did not significantly differ from other personality descriptions.

#### *Effect of Personality Descriptions on Overall Desirability Ratings*

Analysis of overall desirability consisted of a composite score of all the ratings for the picture and description combinations. All seven questions related to target desirability were used to calculate an overall mean for this score ( $\alpha = .956 - .963$ ). A mixed factors ANOVA (personality description x participant sex x participant gender role) was used to analyze the overall desirability. Additionally, because of differences in initial attractiveness ratings between target pictures, we controlled for initial attractiveness ratings.

A marginally significant interaction of personality description and participant gender role was observed for desirability scores,  $F(3, 315) = 1.76, p = .074$ . For feminine participants, desirability ratings in the feminine description ( $M = 5.82, SD = 1.63$ ) were significantly higher than all other personality descriptions. Desirability ratings in the undifferentiated description ( $M$



= 3.28,  $SD = 1.73$ ) were significantly lower than all other personality descriptions. Ratings in the androgynous ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) and masculine descriptions ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ) did not differ from one another. Masculine participants gave significantly lower desirability ratings in the undifferentiated description ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ) than in the feminine ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) or androgynous ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) descriptions, with the masculine traits not significantly differing from other personality descriptions. Androgynous participants gave significantly lower desirability ratings in the undifferentiated description ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) than in the masculine ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 2.31$ ), feminine ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ), and androgynous ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) descriptions. Undifferentiated participants gave significantly higher desirability ratings in the feminine description ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ) than in all other personality descriptions. Desirability in the masculine description ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ) was significantly different from the undifferentiated description ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ); ratings in the androgynous description ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) did not significantly differ from the masculine or undifferentiated descriptions.

### *Rankings*

A repeated measures ANOVA was used to assess differences in ranking of the four personality descriptions. There was a significant effect of personality description, ( $F(3, 345) = 6.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as an interaction of personality description and participant sex ( $F(3, 345) = 3.04$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Female participants ranked the feminine male highest in overall preference ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 0.922$ ) and ranked the androgynous male as least preferred ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). Holding the mid-range positions, the masculine male was ranked higher ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) than the undifferentiated male ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). Similar to female participants, male

participants gave the feminine female the highest in preference amid all personality descriptions ( $M = 2.02, SD = 1.03$ ). Androgynous females ( $M = 2.44, SD = 0.98$ ) and masculine females ( $M = 3.06, SD = 1.04$ ) followed feminine preferences, whereas undifferentiated females were ranked last ( $M = 3.22, SD = 5.72$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study was designed to investigate gender roles and their possible influence upon perceived physical attractiveness and romantic desirability. I hypothesized that male and female participants would prefer and find androgynous personalities to alter and be seen as most attractive in each of these circumstances. Despite this postulation, results indicated that both male and female participants desiring unique gender roles in each experimental analyses.

Significant changes were observed in perceived physical attractiveness of the target pictures after the personality description was present. With this successful manipulation, feminine and androgynous roles significantly increased the targets' attractiveness for male participants. Androgynous personality traits, following preferred feminine gender roles, were not primarily favored in each personality description as hypothesized. One explanation for feminine gender role preferences may be one's inclination for affection and nurturance when selecting a romantic partner. Unexpectedly, female participants reported changes in perceived attractiveness of the target pictures and description ratings for the undifferentiated and masculine traits resulted in decreased perceptions of physical attractiveness. A possible reason may be masculine traits displaying intimidating characteristics (such as dominance and independence) to the perceiver, therefore making the individual less desirable to date. Another explanation may be the inequality of positive and negative traits chosen from the masculine, feminine and undifferentiated items on the BSRI. For instance, "cheerful" may be considered a positive trait in romantic relationships, whereas "self-sufficient" may interpreted as a negative quality in romantic relationships. Nonetheless, perceived physical attractiveness was successfully manipulated based upon gender descriptions in this experiment.

Although participants' sex and own gender roles did not affect perceived physical attractiveness, the gender role of the target did lead to significant changes in perceived attractiveness. This outcome could reflect the capacity gendered personality may have over one's perceptions. These findings effectively demonstrate how gendered and non-gendered personalities can significantly alter one's perceived physical appearance and desirability.

Participants' own gender identity did interact with target gender identity to affect overall desirability. Feminine and gender neutral participants were inclined to feminine targets; whereas masculine participants desired androgynous targets. Androgynous individuals favored masculine, feminine, and androgynous targets over undifferentiated targets. As demonstrated, feminine traits are desired in three of the four personality descriptions. A preference towards feminine traits is apparent possibly because of the characteristics this role exudes, such as compassion and understanding (Bem, 1974). After feminine preferences, androgynous roles were still favored. This, in part supports, the notion from Major et al. (1981) that partners may prefer an androgynous individual because of his or her ability to adjust accordingly to new situations. Another possible explanation is that androgynous individuals are able to alter their characteristics to match the perceiver's personality, therefore possibly making stronger interpersonal relationships.

Both sexes ranked feminine traits the highest from all other gender descriptions in desirability. To corroborate Korabik (1982) findings, feminine traits (without gender classification) seem to be ideal in interpersonal relationships among both sexes. Conflicting with my initial hypothesis, male and female participants did not rank androgynous roles as most

desired overall; in fact, androgynous roles was ranked least desirable for female participants. Reasoning for this result may be the participant perceiving the listed characteristics as negative traits rather than positive traits. This study did exude new perceptions on gender roles and its manipulation on perceived physical attractiveness; yet, it is imperative to recognize that the outcome of this study did portray some yielding confines.

### *Study Limitations and Future Research*

Though significant findings were discovered, some limitations were present in the experiment. First, outcomes of this study do not reflect the population because observations from university students were measured. Moreover, the small sample size posed a limitation to the data collection of the pilot study. A larger sample size would increase the power analysis of the calculated results. Additionally, there was not a sufficient amount of photographs for participants to arbitrate in the pilot study. A variety of photographs would allow for more average attractive ratings when evaluating this manipulation. This in turn, would give the data more variation because judging one's physical appearance is an indirect perception. Furthermore, significant differences between the initial and subsequent ratings for the perceived physical attractiveness ratings did not illustrate consistent average ratings among all four photographs. Again, dissemination of numerous photographs could elucidate this limitation.

Another limitation to this research was the information listed in each personality description. Each trait was chosen from the gendered and non-gendered listings in BRSI; however, specific relationships may display different perceptions of positive and negative traits were not taken into account. For example, a single individual who displays traits such as "self-

sufficient” and “dominant” may be perceived to exude positive traits; yet, these traits may be perceived as undesirable in a monogamous relationship. To avoid this boundary, a pilot study analyzing the participants’ trait preferences in a romantic partner should be assessed.

Ranking selections presented additional boundaries to the research analyses. Participants were only given the four photographs, without personality descriptions, to order from most to least desired. Amid the experiment, participants were unable to retreat to previous personality descriptions. This may have led participants to decipher preferences by either of the following: memorization of the four photographs and associated personality descriptions or selecting the photograph that was perceived as most physically attractive by appearance alone. Though the study did present some shortcomings, future research is essential in discovering new outlets for this topic.

Alternative explanations of the connection between perceived physical attractiveness and gender role traits may be found. Future researchers should expand this research to more diverse subjects, including sexual orientation. For example, investigating the relationship of gender and non-gender roles on desirability in gay and lesbian individuals may lead to different findings on gendered traits. Analysis on more diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds may exhibit unique inclinations towards gender role characteristics. For instance, some cultures may prefer males to display feminine traits in romantic relationships, instead of masculine roles. Malach Pines (2001) found that cultural differences make a greater impact to the pursuer, rather than gender differences, when selecting a potential partner. Relationship status (such as single, in a monogamous relationship, or married) may also have an influence on cohort and/or generational

effects should be examined. Individuals may be inclined towards a particular gender, or non-gender typed role based on his or her age. Findings from these variables could introduce a broader understanding of romantic gender role preferences.

### *Conclusion*

The focus of this study was to examine gendered and non-gendered personality descriptions and their influence on perceived physical attractiveness, while concurrently assessing overall desirability. Additionally, this experiment aimed to assess the impact one's gender role may have when selecting a romantic partner. The primary objective of this research study was to elucidate the importance of gendered personality traits, rather than actual physical appearance, when selecting a potential partner. Future researchers should investigate different cultures and populations to clarify and recognize the preferences in gendered and non-gendered personalities.



## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

Photograph and Personality Evaluations derived and edited from Sprecher (1989).

1. How desirable is this person?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

*Not at all*

*Average*

*Extremely*

2. How much would you want to date this person based on physical attractiveness alone?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

*Not at all*

*Average*

*Extremely*

3. Please rate how physically attractive you consider this person to be.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

*Not at all*

*Average*

*Extremely*

4. To what degree do you think you would be attracted to this person if you had a chance to meet him/her?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

*Not at all*

*Average*

*Extremely*

5. Based on the description, to what extent do you think you would have a satisfying romantic relationship with this person?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

*Not at all*

*Average*

*Extremely*



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