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BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: SELF-PERCEPTION OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

This study investigated body characteristics and gender differences that contribute to self-perception of physical attractiveness among adolescents. Quantitative data were collected with a questionnaire administered to 430 adolescents aged 15 to 17 years selected through a multistage sampling technique from secondary schools in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The questionnaire included the Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale (PARS) and the Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ). Independent sample t-test, and Multiple Regression Analyses were used for analyses. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. The mean overall attractiveness rating on the PARS was 1.66 (SD = 0.11), with ears and face rated as the most attractive body parts. The mean attractiveness score on the PAQ was 19.34 (SD = 3.47). Male and female participants differed with self-perception of physical attractiveness on the PARS [$t (428) = 3.13$ $p = .003$]; females perceived some body characteristics, namely mouth ($t = 3.52$; $p < .05$), teeth ($t = 3.04$; $p < .05$), nose ($t = 2.40$; $p < .05$), face ($t = 1.98$; $p < .05$), hair texture ($t = 2.41$; $p < .05$), hips ($t = 3.85$; $p < .05$) and thighs ($t = 2.47$; $p < .05$) as more attractive than males. Participants' evaluation of individual body characteristics predicted self-perception of physical attractiveness ($F = 2.85$, $p < .05$, $R2 = 0.16$ and Adjusted $R2 = 0.10$). Study concluded that evaluation of individual body characteristics influenced self-perceived physical attractiveness. Gender influenced the perception of some specific body characteristics and overall physical attractiveness among studied adolescents.

Keywords

self-perceived physical attractiveness, adolescents, gender, Nigeria

Introduction

Physical appearance is a very important feature among human beings. This is because external appearances play key roles in social interactions and to a large extent determine the attention received from others. Today's society gives considerable importance to physical appearance which is considered an inseparable part of daily human existence, with many individuals preoccupied with looking attractive (Juli, 2019). It has been stated that there are three things the human brain cannot resist noticing, these are food, attractive people and danger (Chatterjee, 2014). Being attractive makes an individual easily noticeable and more acceptable for friendships and other forms of association (Mares et al., 2010).

Physical attractiveness is the degree to which a person's physical features are considered aesthetically pleasing or beautiful, while aesthetics is defined as the appreciation or the enjoyment of beauty or a combination of qualities that afford intense pleasure to the senses, intellectual and moral faculties (Reis et al., 2011). Despite a widespread belief that beauty cannot be defined, beauty has been defined as something capable of pleasing the soul through

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the senses that become an object worthy of contemplation (Juli, 2019). The experience of beauty often involves the interpretation of some entity as being in balance and harmony; because this can be a subjective experience, it is often said that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (Tadinac, 2010).

The importance of physical attractiveness in the socialization process has also been emphasized by psychologists. Scholars provide evidence that attractiveness stereotypes and the "halo effect" are prominent in affecting the traits we attribute to others (Peterson & Palmer, 2017). People tend to attribute positive characteristics to physically attractive people without consciously realizing it (Kanazawa, 2011). Physically attractive persons also benefit from their attractiveness in a large range of situations (Lorenzo et al., 2010). Face preferences affect a diverse range of critical social outcomes, from decisions about platonic relationships, mate choices, to perceptions of employment suitability (Johnson et al., 2010, Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2019). Researchers have found that attractive students get higher grades from their teachers (Begley, 2009). There are also speculations that attractive patients receive more personalized care from their doctors (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005), are less likely to be arrested and convicted, and that handsome criminals receive lighter sentences than less attractive convicts (Beaver et al., 2019). On the contrary, unacceptable physical appearance may stigmatize and have a profound negative effect on psychological wellbeing. Unattractive individuals are also more likely to be targets for abuse and victims of bullying (Cash, 2012).

Perception is defined as the process of attaining awareness or understanding of the objects or the environment by organizing and interpreting sensory information (Pomerantz, 2003). Perception of human physical attractiveness refers to the social judgements an individual makes about himself or others. Although not often verbalized, it subconsciously influences judgements of self and others. Various theories have been propounded to explain perception, such as the direct theory of perception (Gibson, 2002), the constructivist (indirect) theory of perception (Gregory, 1970) and the processing fluency theory of aesthetic pleasure (Reber et al., 2004). While there are arguments that perceptual processes are direct, others claim that perception depends on the perceiver's expectations, subjective experience, previous knowledge as well as the information available in the stimulus.

Adolescence is a unique period of physical growth and cognitive development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19 years (WHO, 2016). The period is characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and change that is second only to that of infancy. They are years in which self-consciousness becomes strong as far as appearance is concerned. Adolescents compare their personal physical characteristics to others, usually their peers and based on these comparisons make their judgements of attractiveness (Adler et al., 2016). Sometimes self-perceptions of attractiveness in adolescents are inaccurate and they can be overly concerned with perceived physical defects with those affected reporting emotional and behavioural problems (Meretuk et al., 2018).

Understanding the perception of beauty in others is difficult because beauty is a subjective experience (Holmqvist & Frisén, 2012). What is considered beautiful for someone, is not necessarily beautiful for everyone else, because beauty is characterized by an individual and subjective pleasure (Harth, 2017). Beauty has many facets, and there are biologic, psychologic, cultural and social aspects that influence how beauty is perceived (Boothroyd et al., 2020; Maymone et al., 2019). Previous research has also shown that how people rate their physical attractiveness is only moderately correlated with how they are rated by others, suggesting that some people have little insight into their true level of attractiveness (Greitemeyer, 2020). The mass media platform has also introduced criteria to what establishes beauty and influence how the society adapts to beauty principles (Maymone et al., 2019). The

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beauty ideals spread in the media often reinforce self-doubt and self-insecurity among adolescents (Meretuk et al., 2018).

Studies have reported that various physical body characteristics contribute to judgements of physical attractiveness, these include facial appearance, age or youthfulness, skin colour, hairiness, musculature, flat abdomen, height, weight, posture, body mass index, waist–hip ratio, waist-to-chest ratio, and the leg-to-body ratio (Borelli & Berneburg, 2010; Buggio et al., 2012; Fan et al., 2004; Fink et al., 2012; Frederick et al., 2010; Kiire, 2016; Marques et al., 2009; Sorokowski et al., 2012). However, facial appearance appears critical to physical attractiveness (Shridharani, 2019) with specific facial features such as the eyes, nose, ears cheekbones, or jawline considered important (Buggio et al., 2012; Shamban, 2019).

Whilst what constitutes beauty and the relationship between physical attributes and physical attractiveness have also been extensively studied abroad (Fan et al., 2004; Frederick et al., 2010; Kiire, 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2012), few studies have investigated the subject among adolescents in our local environment (Otakpor & Ehimigbai, 2016; Wang et al., 2015). In Benin City, Otakpor & Ehimigbai (2016) found that about a third of adolescents studied perceived themselves to be physically unattractive. It was therefore thought necessary to understand the perceptions of attractiveness among this very important age group. This study therefore investigated gender differences and body characteristics that contribute to self-perception of physical attractiveness among adolescents. Our study hypotheses were that gender and individual body characteristics will not significantly influence self-perception of physical attractiveness.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design.

Study Population

The study sample consisted of 430 adolescent boys and girls, aged 15-17 years, representing middle adolescence from selected Government approved public and private secondary schools in Ile-Ife. At this stage the majority of changes associated with puberty have taken place, and adolescents at this age are assumed to be very concerned about their physical appearance and believe that others are also concerned.

Sample and Sample Technique

The minimum sample size was determined as 384 using the sample size formula for estimation of single proportion when studying populations > 10,000 as described by Araoye (2003). Considering a non-response rate of about 10%, 422 participants was deemed necessary for the study which was rounded up to 430.

The study sample was obtained through a multistage sampling technique. For the first stage sampling, ten secondary schools were selected by stratified sampling from the list of public and private secondary schools in Ile-Ife. In the second stage of sampling, classes to study were selected by simple random sampling from the senior secondary classes, while in the third stage, individual students were selected by stratified sampling to obtain equal number of boys and girls (215 males and 215 females) for the study. Only adolescents aged 15 to 17 years were selected to participate in this study.

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Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire included the socio-demographic information of study participants and the two scales used, the Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale, the Physical Attribute Questionnaire.

Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale

Physical Attractiveness was evaluated using the Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale (PARS) (Lerner & Karabenick, 1974). The scale presented a list of 24 body characteristics (e.g. face, arms and hips). Participants were asked to rate how attractive each of the 24 characteristics of their own body were and to indicate each response on a five-point Likert scale. Response alternatives ranged from "1" very attractive through "5" very unattractive. Lower scores indicated greater physical attractiveness of the body characteristic.

Physical Attribute Questionnaire

Physical Attractiveness was also evaluated using a 24 item Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ) devised by Thornton and Moore (1993). Five items from the Physical Attribute Questionnaire provided for a composite assessment of Physical Attractiveness. Items were "I am a physically attractive person", "I am envious of those better looking than myself", "I have attractive facial features", "I am not as attractive as most other people". "I like my looks just the way they are". Item responses were made on a 5-point continuum [completely true (1) to completely false (5)]. The three positively worded items were reverse scored. Scores for the five items were summed to give the physical attractiveness score. Higher scores reflected greater physical attractiveness. The internal consistency of the PARS in this study was within acceptable range, Cronbach's α was 0.93. Intra Class Correlation Coefficient was 0.72 for the PAQ.

Data Collection Procedure

Selected participants were requested to complete the study questionnaire individually after instructions were read to them. Incomplete questionnaires were identified immediately and completed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital Complex Ile-Ife (ERC/2017/04/03). Approval to conduct the study was obtained from individual school authorities and the Local Education Office. The study protocol was complied with, assent and informed consent were obtained from participants and their parents. The study objectives, risks and benefits were explained to participants, they were also informed of the freedom to withdraw participation. All data were collected without the identifier (names) of participants. Participants experienced no direct benefit from participation in the study and no compensation was paid.

Method of Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was done with SPSS (version 22.0) for windows. Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Inferential statistics were used to analyse the hypotheses generated for the study. Independent sample t- test was conducted to test gender differences in self-perceived physical attractiveness scores. Multiple Regression analysis was used to examine the contributions of individual body characteristics to self-perceived physical attractiveness. Statistical significance was inferred at $p < 0.05$.

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Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics of participants are as presented in Table 1. The participants ages ranged from 15 to 17 years (mean = 15.84, SD = 0.82). The majority (86%) were of Yoruba ethnicity, 10.9% were of Igbo ethnicity, while 0.9% were Hausas. Other ethnic groups constituted the remaining 2.1%. The majority of the participants practiced Christianity (84%); 42.3% belonged to the high socio-economic class, 24.4 % belonged to the middle class while 32.8% belonged to the lower socio-economic class.

Perception of physical attractiveness

The mean overall attractiveness ratings for all participants on the Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale (PARS) was 1.66 (SD = 0.11). Ratings for individual body characteristics showed that the ears and face were rated most attractive by all participants with mean scores of 1.48, followed by the eyes, with a score of 1.49. The distribution of weight and the hips got worst ratings of 1.88 each (Table 2). A composite score for Perceived Physical Attractiveness was derived from Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ). Scores ranged from 5 to 25 (higher scores reflect greater physical attractiveness). Only one female participant (0.2%) reported the minimum score of 5, while 37 (8.6%) rated themselves with the maximum score of 25. The mean attractiveness score was 19.34 (SD = 3.47).

Gender comparisons of perceived physical attractiveness

Gender comparisons of adolescents' ratings of self-perceived physical attractiveness based on the PAR are also presented in Table 2. Overall mean attractiveness ratings for male and female participants were 1.72 (SD = 0.14) and 1.60 (SD = 0.12) respectively which differed significantly ([t (428) = 3.13 p = .003). For individual body characteristics, male participants rated their eyes as most attractive part of their bodies with a score of 1.51, while their hips got the worst attractiveness rating of 2.08. Females rated their faces as the most attractive parts of their bodies with scores of 1.40, while the distribution of weight got the worst rating with a score of 1.86. Independent sample t-test results showed significant gender differences with the perceived attractiveness of the hips, mouth, teeth, nose, hair texture, thighs and face ($p < 0.05$). Female adolescents rated themselves better regarding these body parts.

Gender comparisons however showed no significant difference in self-perceived physical attractiveness between male (mean = 19.56, SD = 3.47) and female adolescents (mean = 19.13 SD = 3.47) [t (428) = 1.28; p = .20] based on the PAQ (Table 3). The hypothesis that gender will not significantly influence self-perception of physical attractiveness is rejected, because male and female adolescents differed in self-perceived physical attractiveness based on the PAR.

Contribution of individual body characteristics to self-perception of physical attractiveness

Multiple Regression analysis was used to investigate the contribution of individual body characteristics to the self-perception of physical attractiveness. Results are as presented in Table 4. The individual body characteristics were the predictors while the outcome was the composite score for perceived physical attractiveness based on the Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ). Results of ANOVA statistics showing goodness of fit of the model was p = .001, indicating that the model fits the data, and perception of attractiveness of individual body characteristics significantly predicts perception of overall physical attractiveness (F = 2.85, p =

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.001). Model summary gave R^2 value of 0.16, and adjusted R^2 of 0.10. Perception of attractiveness of individual body characteristics accounted for 10% of variability of physical attractiveness. Results showed that the perceived attractiveness of general appearance was the only significant predictor of physical attractiveness (Standardized coefficients B score = -0.16, p = .014). Thus, the hypothesis that individual body characteristics will not significantly influence self-perception of physical attractiveness is rejected.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 430)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	215	50.0%
Female	215	50.0%
Age		
15 years	182	42.3%
16 years	134	31.2 %
17 years	114	26.5%
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	370	86.0%
Igbo	47	10.9%
Hausa	4	0.9%
Others	9	2.1%
Religion		
Christianity	361	84.0%
Islam	68	15.8%
Traditional	1	0.2%
Socio-economic status		
High	184	42.8%
Middle	105	24.4%
Low	141	32.8%

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Mean Physical Attractiveness Ratings of Individual Body Characteristics

	Body Characteristic	Total		Male		Female		t	p value
		MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD		
1	Facial complexion	1.56	0.83	1.52	.828	1.61	0.83	-1.07	.288
2	Ears	1.48	0.82	1.55	0.91	1.41	0.72	1.77	.078
3	Chest	1.60	0.85	1.58	0.90	1.63	0.80	-0.59	.555
4	Profile	1.63	0.96	1.69	1.07	1.56	0.82	1.44	.150
5	Distribution of weight	1.88	1.12	1.90	1.20	1.86	1.03	0.33	.740
6	Eyes	1.49	0.87	1.51	0.92	1.47	0.83	0.44	.658
7	Height	1.70	0.99	1.73	1.09	1.67	0.87	0.62	.536
8	Ankles	1.76	0.99	1.74	1.02	1.78	0.96	-0.42	.677
9	Waist	1.68	0.97	1.76	1.04	1.61	0.88	1.61	.109
10	Arms	1.63	0.96	1.60	0.96	1.66	0.96	-0.66	.500
11	Shape of legs	1.69	1.05	1.61	0.99	1.77	1.09	-1.65	.100
12	General appearance	1.57	0.92	1.65	1.01	1.49	0.80	1.85	.065
13	Hips	1.88	1.07	2.08	1.17	1.69	0.94	3.85	.000*
14	Width of shoulders	1.80	1.01	1.85	1.10	1.75	0.92	1.03	.302
15	Mouth	1.57	0.91	1.72	1.04	1.41	0.75	3.52	.000*

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16	Neck	1.64	0.97	1.72	1.05	1.56	0.88	1.73	.085
17	Teeth	1.76	1.06	1.91	1.16	1.60	0.92	3.04	.002*
18	Nose	1.65	1.00	1.76	1.10	1.53	0.89	2.40	.037*
19	Chin	1.71	0.95	1.78	1.03	1.64	0.85	1.48	.139
20	Hair texture	1.68	1.14	1.82	1.32	1.55	0.90	2.41	.016*
21	Body build	1.68	0.99	1.76	1.09	1.60	0.88	1.58	.115
22	Hair colour	1.51	0.90	1.56	0.97	1.47	0.83	1.10	.272
23	Thighs	1.74	0.99	1.85	1.08	1.62	0.87	2.47	.014*
24	Face	1.48	0.88	1.56	1.00	1.40	0.74	1.98	.049*
	Scale Mean (Across all Items)	1.66	0.11	1.72	0.14	1.60	0.12	3.13	.003*

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test comparison of Perceived Physical Attractiveness by Gender

Group	**N**	**Mean Physical Attractiveness Score**	**(SD)**	**T**	**df**	**p value**
Male	215	19.56	(3.47)	1.28	428	.20
Female	215	19.13	(3.47)			

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of Individual Body Characteristics as Predictors of Perceived Physical Attractiveness

Variables	**Standardised Coefficients B**	**t**	**p**	**F**	**P**	**95% Confidence Interval for B**	
						Lower bound	Upper Bound
Constant		45.41	.000	2.85	.001	21.40	23.33
Facial Complexion	-0.01	-0.15	.884			-0.61	0.53
Ears	-0.08	-1.03	.302			-0.92	0.29
Chest	-0.04	-0.66	.513			-0.67	0.34
Profile	-0.09	-1.35	.178			-0.74	0.14
Distribution of weight	0.00	0.04	.971			-0.34	0.36
Eyes	-0.00	-0.06	.952			-0.49	0.46
Height	-0.08	-1.39	.164			-0.69	0.12
Ankles	-0.02	-0.28	.779			-0.48	0.36
Waist	-0.05	-0.78	.437			-0.66	0.29
Arms	0.04	0.62	.537			-0.32	0.62
Shape of legs	-0.05	-0.69	.492			-0.60	0.29
General Appearance	-0.16	-2.47	.014*			-1.02	-0.11
Hips	0.10	1.43	.154			-0.11	0.72
Width of Shoulders	0.05	0.78	.438			-0.25	0.58
Mouth	0.06	0.95	.341			-0.25	0.73
Neck	-0.03	-0.40	.689			-0.57	0.38
Teeth	0.10	1.58	.116			-0.08	0.75
Nose	-0.03	-0.37	.712			-0.53	0.37

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Chin	-0.10	-1.48	.141	-0.83	0.12
Hair Texture	-0.05	-0.70	.483	-0.58	0.27
Body Build	-0.04	-0.69	.493	-0.56	0.27
Hair Colour	0.04	0.57	.571	-0.34	0.62
Thighs	-0.01	-0.17	.866	-0.48	0.41
Face	-0.08	-1.20	.231	-0.78	0.19

$F = 2.85$, $p = 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.16$ and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.10$

Discussion

The study investigated the self-perception of physical attractiveness and determined the body characteristics that contribute to self-perception of physical attractiveness among male and female adolescents in Ile-Ife.

The mean scores obtained for ratings of physical attractiveness on the Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale (PARS) among male and female adolescents in this study were lower than values obtained in a similar study by Lerner et al., (1976) in East Michigan. The adolescents in our study rated all body characteristics as more attractive. The mean attractiveness scores obtained with the Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ) in this study were also higher than the values obtained by Thornton and Moore (1993) among a group of undergraduates during the development of the questionnaire.

Although the period of adolescence is known to be unique, a time when self-consciousness becomes strong and adolescents can be overly concerned with perceived physical defects (Meretuk et al., 2018), adolescents in this study seemed to have good opinions of their physical appearances. A possible explanation for this is the influence of religion on attitudes and perceptions in Nigeria. Individuals in the Nigerian environment are quite religious, with children growing up into a culture of positive confessions where they are taught to accept themselves as perfect and flawless creations of God. Our interpretation finds support in a related study on the role of religion on self-esteem (Bryant & Veroff, 1982). Religious beliefs have also been noted as a coping mechanism that counters psychosocial problems and improves well-being (Nyamaruze & Govender, 2020). A substantial percentage of our study participants belonged to the high socio-economic class which may also have influenced their self-perceptions. The sub-urban nature of our study environment could however have limited the extent of media-exposure of the adolescents.

The face and ears got the best attractiveness rating by participants in this study. Previous studies have observed that facial appearance appears critical to physical attractiveness (Shridharani, 2019), with the face reported as the most important feature for overall appearance (Mares et al., 2010). Our observations were contrary to the reports of the eyes as the most attractive part of the body by Lerner et al (1976) and the findings of two multinational observational surveys that investigated perceptions of beauty, where respondents rated the eyes and smile as the most pleasing facial feature (Redaelli et al., 2020).

Findings of this study showed that there was a significant gender difference in self-perceived physical attractiveness determined with the PARS. Gender differences were also identified with the evaluation of the attractiveness of some body characteristics namely hips, mouth, teeth, nose, hair texture, thighs and face, with female adolescents rating themselves better regarding these body parts. The gender differences identified with the evaluation of specific body parts is similar to previous reports that features such as long hair, skin colour, skin tone and youthfulness, influence judgements of physical attractiveness in females (Fan et al., 2004; Frederick et al., 2010; Kiire, 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2012). Swami et al. (2007) found significant gender differences in self-estimates of overall facial attractiveness and upper

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body features. Some studies have also found some facial features such as full lips, large eyes, thin eyebrows, small chin, small nose, high or prominent cheekbones, clear and smooth skin, and wide-set eyes particularly attractive in women (Borelli & Berneburg, 2010; Fink et al., 2012).

However, we observed no significant gender difference in physical attractiveness ratings based on the Physical Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ). This is similar to the findings of Thornton and Moore (1993). Furnham and Grover (2020) also reported that males rated both their attractiveness and health higher than females. It appeared that the two scales used to evaluate physical attractiveness in this study functioned differently. Female participants rated themselves better than male counterparts on the PARS but worse on PAQ. Also, while gender differences were observed with overall physical attractiveness ratings and ratings of some individual body characteristics on the PARS, no gender difference was noted with the PAQ. A possible reason for this observation could be that while the PARS focused on giving scores to individual body parts, the PAQ was more focused on global views on personal appearance, satisfaction with personal appearance and comparisons with peers.

Female beauty has always attracted human beings (Buggio et al., 2012) and the issue of gender differences in ratings of physical appearance has remained controversial. Boothroyd et al. (2020) noted that perceptions of physical attractiveness vary across cultural groups, particularly for females. Despite the spread of the western ideals of beauty, divergent preferences based on age, ethnicity, nationality, income, educational attainment, occupation and religious affiliations have been noted. Even within similar ethnic groups, individual subjective preferences which are sometimes unexplainable exist. Some studies have shown that females generally express greater dissatisfaction regarding their physical appearance than males (Christopherson et al., 2009). Explanations have included the fact that women are probably judged on their appearance more than men, and standards of female beauty are considerably higher. Generally, it appears that the society's concern about physical attractiveness is higher for females from childhood with parents laying more emphasis on the girl child's physical appearance than boys. A previous study in Ile-Ife upheld this opinion (Otuyemi et al., 2000). Body sensitivity is also a pervasive phenomenon in traditional Nigerian culture, amongst the Yorubas of south-western Nigeria where this study was conducted, female beauty in particular is inscribed in traditional cultural codes in relation to body parts, complexion, overall physiology and aesthetic appearance (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2007).

With respect to the relative contributions of individual body characteristics to the self-perception of physical attractiveness among adolescents, findings from the study show that perception of attractiveness of individual body characteristics was found to account for only 10% of the variability of self-perception of physical attractiveness. Attempt to explain the reason why individuals rate their physical attractiveness differently, attractiveness ratings of individual body characteristics will account for only 10% of the explanations. However, only the rating of general appearance was found to be a significant predictor of self-perception of physical attractiveness among studied adolescents. We postulate that this could be because the body characteristic listed as general appearance in reality gives a global opinion of oneself, which is similar to the composite score derived for physical attractiveness based on the physical attribute questionnaire. Our result is contrary to previous reports that a number of physical body attributes such as the eyes and nose contribute significantly to perceptions of attractiveness (Fan et al., 2004; Kiire, 2016). Swami et al., (2007) specifically reported that facial attractiveness and body weight were the best predictors of overall physical attractiveness.

This study was not without limitations. Participants were limited to adolescents in secondary schools in Ile-Ife, a sub-urban community in south western Nigeria, therefore the results of the study may not be generalizable to other States of the country. However, in spite

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of this limitation, the implications of this study for the social sciences are that it confirmed the Indirect Theory of Perception postulated by Gregory (1970), that signals received by sensory receptors trigger neural events, and interacts with appropriate knowledge to enable individuals makes sense of the world and the processing fluency theory of aesthetic pleasure (Reber et al., 2004), which postulates that people draw on their subjective experience in making evaluative judgements. Our results corroborate previous reports on the value placed on the face and its features with regards to self-perception of physical attractiveness. The adolescents studied seemed to be preoccupied with their faces as a body part worthy of contemplation. This information makes it imperative for parents and professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, teachers, and health care providers to be mindful about self-perceptions of facial appearance among adolescents, which could be positive or negative. Concerted efforts should therefore be made at maintaining aesthetic facial appearance coupled with the understanding that emotional and behavioural problems may accompany dissatisfaction with these salient features. This study also shows that evaluation of physical attractiveness among adolescents is largely influenced by gender. This information should not be taken for granted by parents and the various stakeholders involved in the provision of care and support for adolescents. In addition, consumer companies engaged in developing products intended for adolescents use and enjoyment may find our reports useful since they give an insight into adolescent self-perceptions, including gender preferences.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings of this study we conclude that evaluation of individual body characteristics influenced self-perceived physical attractiveness. Gender also influenced the perception of some specific body characteristics and overall physical attractiveness among adolescents. Since adolescents' standards of beauty are dictated by perceived physical appearance and gender, attention should be given to the peculiarities of female adolescents with the evaluation of their physical features. We recommend inclusion of Introductory psychology classes in the secondary school curriculum and employment of Developmental Psychologists for individual schools. These will enable the development of culturally appropriate sense of beauty and facilitate interventions for adolescents who are dissatisfied with their physical appearance. Further research to investigate areas such as the influence of family type, birth rank and contrast effects on self-perception of physical attractiveness among adolescents may be beneficial in giving greater insight into their preferences.

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