



Beauty is in the in-group of the beholder: Intergroup differences in the perceived attractiveness of leaders

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ABSTRACT

Physical attractiveness is most commonly presumed to be an exogenous characteristic that influences people's feelings, perceptions, and behavior across myriad types of relationships. We investigate the opposite prediction in which feelings toward other people influence the perceptions of others' attractiveness. Focusing specifically on subordinates' perceptions of leaders of in-groups and out-groups, we examine whether group membership moderates familiarity in relation to ratings of physical attractiveness. Studies 1 and 2 show that subordinates rate the leaders of their in-groups as significantly more physically attractive than comparably familiar out-group leaders. Our findings have relevance for understanding the interactive roles of physical attractiveness within contemporary organizational environments and help to account for variance in interpersonal perceptions on the basis of group membership. In contrast with research traditions that treat physical attractiveness as a static trait, our findings highlight the importance of group membership as a lens for perceiving familiar leaders' physical attractiveness.

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The notion that attraction between sexual partners evolved in support of reproduction and adaptive bonding has been closely explored (e.g., Diamond, 1997; Eastwick, 2009; Eastwick & Finkel, 2012). In contrast, questions involving attraction between leaders and followers – de facto partners within functional groups – have not been studied with comparable focus. In one example, Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, and Strack (1995) report that men who are primed with power in an experimental setting rate confederate women as more attractive than men in conditions that are power-neutral; however, the opposite dynamic of followers' perceptions of leaders has not been a focus of previous research. Given the importance of followers' attraction to leaders across organizational types, though, the value of understanding this aspect of “followership” (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2011) is clear.

Familiarity of leaders can be reasonably assumed for followers and, consequently, the “mere exposure” literature (e.g., Jones, Young, & Claypool, 2011; Zajonc, 1968) would suggest that followers in freely-formed organizations will find leaders more attractive as a function of exposure. Without considering questions related to leaders and followers, Norton, Frost, and Ariely (2007, 2011) have recently argued that familiarity tends to decrease attractiveness while Reis, Maniaci, Caprariello, Eastwick, and Finkel (2011a, 2011b) have endorsed a form of the “mere exposure” view. In a related set of papers, researchers have considered the degree to which personality traits and relationship variance might moderate the influence of familiarity on the perceptions of others' attractiveness (e.g., Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2011; Eastwick & Hunt, 2014). Surprisingly, those debates have not considered the hypothesis that familiarity's relationship with attractiveness can be moderated by the variable of in-group/out-group membership. To address that

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important question, the present research is designed to examine whether followers' perceptions of leaders' physical attractiveness might be moderated by the alignment of values between followers and leaders within naturalistic groups where familiarity with the leaders of the in-groups and out-groups is prevalent.

Consistent with Bamberger and Pratt's call for studies of "organizations and institutions other than conventional businesses" (2010, p. 665), we present two studies that focus on perceptions of political leaders' physical attractiveness. Significant prior research has been conducted on the importance of political leaders' physical appearance (e.g., Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Atkinson, Enos, & Hill, 2009; Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Leigh & Susilo, 2009; Rule & Ambady, 2010; Spisak, Dekker, Krüger, & Van Vugt, 2012; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005); however, the previous research has not considered the degree to which familiarity with specific political leaders might – as a function of whether one supports or opposes the leaders – influence how the leaders are perceived. In light of the multidisciplinary literatures that we review, our expectation is that subordinates within a group (e.g., political party) tend to view their leaders as more physically attractive when compared with ratings provided by followers of comparably familiar but rival or competitive groups' leaders.

The notion that group membership can significantly influence or filter interpersonal perceptions and dynamics has been demonstrated for other variables including the value that people place upon their relative standing within groups (e.g., Frank, 2012; Kniffin, 2009) and the degree to which gossip is likely to be self- or group-serving (e.g., Kniffin & Wilson, 2005, 2010). In the current research, our approach can be formulated as a moderation hypothesis whereby followers' ratings of leaders' physical attractiveness will be congruent with partisan group affiliations when followers are familiar with leaders but no such effect will be present when leaders are unfamiliar to the followers. Even for short-term activity groups that last for the duration of a single meal, Kniffin and Wansink (2012) focus on perceived appearances and conclude that "it seems plausible that strangers who eat with each other might develop enhanced perceptions of each other's physical attractiveness" after sharing a lunch or dinner.

Hypothesis. Congruence in perceptions of physical attractiveness will exist between the party affiliation of raters and leaders exclusively when the relationship between followers and leaders is familiar.

Perceptions of beauty

The dominant approach to studying physical attractiveness tends to treat physical attractiveness as an independent variable (e.g., Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, & Hunt, 2014) and presumes that there are objectively visible traits such as facial symmetry that are universally regarded as attractive or unattractive (e.g., Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005). Against this backdrop, researchers from multiple disciplines have found robust patterns whereby physically attractive people tend to enjoy better outcomes whether the situation involves interviewing for a new job (e.g., Agthe, Sporrlé, & Maner, 2011; Luxen & Van de Vijver, 2006; Madera & Hebl, 2012), gaining promotions (e.g., Dickey-Bryant, Lautenschlager, & Mendoza, 1986; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003), or political election (e.g., Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berggren, 2009). Similarly, researchers have suggested that the effectiveness of individual educational and group counseling leaders will vary as a function of physical attractiveness (e.g., Pan & Lin, 2004). More broadly, studies have shown that chief executive officers with relatively wide faces (Wong, Ormiston, & Haselhuhn, 2011) or "baby faces" (Livingston & Pearce, 2009) appear to oversee relatively successful firms. Similarly, Rule and Ambady (2011) have reported that managing partners at top-ranked law firms whose faces are rated as "powerful" tend to be the most profitable or productive. The basic assumption of this work is that physical attractiveness is an objective characteristic whose perception is universally shared and favorably valued.

On the basis of recognizing physical attractiveness as an objectively measurable trait, researchers have focused on the inferences that people draw from perceptions of others' appearances. Articulated by statements that include "What is Beautiful is Good" (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010), "You Can Judge a Book by its Cover" (Yamagishi, Tanida, Mashima, Shimona, & Kanazawa, 2003), and *Beauty Pays: Why attractive people are more successful* (Hamermesh, 2011), the common framework is that physical attractiveness functions as a kind of "halo effect" (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) that "unwillingly contributes to person perception" (Vogel, Kutzner, Fiedler, & Freytag, 2010). Previous research suggesting that people can infer a person's competence (Poutvaara et al., 2009), political affiliation (Bull & Hawkes, 1982; Rule & Ambady, 2010), or sexual orientation (Freeman, Johnson, Ambady, & Rule, 2010) on the basis of facial images using "thin slice" stimuli illustrates the range of inferences that seem to be drawn from physical appearances.

Notwithstanding the dominant approach to studying physical attractiveness as a static or fixed trait, there is evidence that contextual variables such as macroeconomic conditions (Pettijohn & Jungeberg, 2004; Rule & Tskhay, 2014), altruistic behavior (Farrelly, Lazarus, & Roberts, 2007; Kniffin & Wilson, 2004), and a rater's own physical appearance (Montoya, 2008) or relationship status (Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990) can modify people's perceptions of others' physical attractiveness. In a more interactive example, Cunningham (1986) focuses on the correlations between myriad physical dimensions and ratings of physical attractiveness; however, he also accepts that the correlations are not necessarily unidirectional – in either of the directions ("Beautiful to Good" or "Good to Beautiful"). An illustration of Cunningham's (1986) article is his partial conclusion that "A wide-eyed, open and happy look may have led to the belief that the target was innocent and friendly and that perception of guileless sociability may have led to the rating of attractiveness" (p. 933). Similarly, in their qualified "What is Beautiful is Good, But ..." review, Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991) suggested that physical appearances "should thus be relatively less important in perceptions of friends, acquaintances, family members, and coworkers than in perceptions of strangers" (p. 122).

With specific regard to the influence of familiarity as a contextual variable, Park, Kraus, and Ryan (1997) find – on the basis of a longitudinal study of college dormitory residents – a “total lack of any apparent increase in consensus [in interpersonal perceptions] with increases in acquaintance” (p. 613). In a longitudinal study of students in a class that required close collaboration, Back et al. (2011) find that individual-level personality traits are important for predicting how people will perceive each other as they become familiar in meaningful, naturalistic settings. And, in a pair of longitudinal studies designed to test the importance of social relations on the perceptions of others, Eastwick and Hunt (2014) report that “among individuals who knew each other especially well, the data revealed very little consensus and large amounts of unique, relationship variance.” Further, Eastwick and Hunt observe that “romantically desirable traits actually appeared to be more relational than trait-like (i.e., consensual).” The gap that our studies address in relation to this thread of previous research involves focusing on the role of whether or not perceptions are moderated by membership in in-groups and out-groups.

Evolutionary views of physical attractiveness

Uniquely among academic communities, evolutionary psychologists have featured the study of physical attractiveness as a primary topic given the relevance of attraction for reproduction and given evidence that physically attractive traits such as facial symmetry reflect “good genes” and good health (e.g., Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005). In contrast with social psychology studies that attempt to identify personality and relationship variance as important predictors for understanding how people perceive others' appearances (e.g., Back et al., 2011; Eastwick & Hunt, 2014; Park et al., 1997), evolutionary psychologists have often focused on measuring the relative influence of specific physical components. Among the stimuli that evolutionary psychologists have used to study perceptions of physical attractiveness are images of faceless bodies and bodiless faces (Confer, Perilloux, & Buss, 2010), sounds of disembodied voices (e.g., O'Connor, Re, & Feinberg, 2011), and mannequins (Karremans, Frankenhuys, & Arons, 2010).

In this article, we develop and apply a naturalistic and evolutionary approach to the variable of physical attractiveness that recognizes the importance of familiarity and context for ratings of leaders. In the same way that inferences drawn from people's faces can be classified as “halo effect” patterns, neither those studies nor our interests should be summarily dismissed or “explained away” since an evolutionary approach that recognizes the importance of our heritage in relatively small groups (e.g., Dunbar, 2010) should embrace the notion that our perceptions of non-physical traits might influence our perceptions of physical attractiveness. In other words, if “halo effects” are part of our naturalistic social environments, then it makes sense that there should be studies of physical attractiveness that recognize and account for their importance – independent of whether the halo might originate from the color of one's clothing (Elliot & Niesta, 2008), membership in a common social group (Escasa, Gray, & Patton, 2010), or the nature of one's contributions to group goals (Kniffin & Wilson, 2004). Towards that end, the present research investigates the degree to which followers within groups might differentially regard leaders of their own groups as more physically attractive than followers of rival groups' leaders.

While our approach does not reject or dismiss the findings produced by research treating physical attractiveness as an independent variable, we do assume that physical attractiveness should not be assumed to always function as an independent trait. Consistent with previous research that has considered the degree to which a person's “goodness” might influence how attractively they are perceived (Gross & Crofton, 1977; Little, Burt, & Perrett, 2006; Swami, Greven, & Furnham, 2007; Wheeler & Kim, 1997), our approach presumes that perceptions of others' physical attractiveness – particularly followers' perceptions of leaders' attractiveness – can be influenced by “good values” independently of any effect of the “good genes” that are conventionally assumed to be relevant by evolutionary psychologists. In our model, organizations are bonded together partly through the dynamic whereby followers develop enhanced perceptions of leaders' physical attractiveness. In contrast with studies that rely on markers such as facial symmetry to



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Credit: Front cover, *Going Rogue* (2009, Harper Collins)

Fig. 1. Seeing through partisan-colored eyes. Participants in each study were presented with official images (examples below) of familiar and unfamiliar politicians and asked to provide physical attractiveness ratings. US President Barack Obama and 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin are among those across our studies who received significantly higher ratings from supporters compared with lower ratings – for physical attractiveness – from opponents.

predict ratings of attractiveness, our prediction is that followers will perceive leaders who display “good values” (i.e., leaders of their own self-selected groups) to be more physically attractive than leaders of rival groups. Most generally, our consideration of evolutionary studies of physical attractiveness in relation to questions of followership and leadership in contemporary political organizations reflects a trend towards relatively greater use of evolutionary perspectives for studying leadership (Antonakis, Bastardo, Liu, & Schriesheim, 2014; Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The current research

In two studies involving individuals with relatively high political commitments, we break from the dominant norm of relying upon ratings of unfamiliar political leaders (e.g., Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Atkinson et al., 2009; Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Leigh & Susilo, 2009; Rule & Ambady, 2010; Spisak et al., 2012; Todorov et al., 2005) and test for the influence of familiarity with partisan alignment as a moderating condition upon perceptions of physical attractiveness. For Study 1, we engaged professional legislative aides whose near-term occupational stability is tied directly to the success of the political leader they choose to serve and whose “live interactions” with elected officials fill the gap identified by Reis et al. (2011b). For Study 2, we tested the extent to which our model of leadership and physical attractiveness might hold in more attenuated relationships between self-identified partisans and their favored political leaders.

Each of our studies was initiated within four weeks of a recent national election in the United States (November 2010) based on the assumption that feelings of partisanship tend to peak during those windows of time and there would consequently be more potential participants. Common across our studies, we used Qualtrics' online survey platform to present participants with photographs to rate. For stimuli in each of the studies, photos for the political candidates were copied from either campaign websites or – for incumbents – their official websites and they were cropped for size and detail so that comparable portions of their faces appeared in the survey. As illustrated in Fig. 1, we presented photographs of the politicians' faces with some – but not the full breadth – of their shoulders visible. While there is some variation in the clothing that candidates wear in the photos that we selected (e.g., with or without a tie), (1) all of the candidates were dressed within the norms that one would expect a major-party candidate to dress for campaign photographs and (2) the design of our studies – to compare the ratings provided by the Republican and Democrat raters for the given candidates rather than rely on absolute ratings – minimizes the importance of strict uniformity across the stimuli.

Studies 1 and 2 employ a basic design that reasonably assumes that politically active individuals are familiar with local and high-profile national political leaders and unfamiliar with local leaders from faraway states. While questions were customized for familiar, within-state political leaders to acknowledge their titles and names, participants were simply asked – for the unfamiliar leaders – “On a scale of 1 to 9, how physically attractive would you rate the person featured below? (1 = very physically unattractive, 5 = average, 9 = very physically attractive).” In each case, we did not modify the photos or otherwise introduce additional text that identified the unfamiliar leaders by name or partisan affiliation. While a different design could have presented the partisan affiliation of unfamiliar candidates, our approach is intended to be ecologically valid (Dhimi, Hertwig, & Hoffrage, 2004; Fiedler, 2000). More specifically, it is naturalistic to expect that partisanship will be known for familiar leaders and unknown for unfamiliar leaders. To address this confound, our analyses consider followers' and leaders' partisan affiliations as well as the relevant interaction variable.

Study 1: influence of partisanship upon perceptions of attractiveness among live interactors

Method

Participants

Professional staff assistants for state legislators in a Midwestern state (Wisconsin) were asked to complete a brief online survey about the importance of politicians' appearances in early December 2010. A total of 49 legislative aides participated in the study over a two-and-one-half week period when the impact of elections was still fresh in their minds. While we discarded 2 self-identified Independents among the staffers, our ratio of 38 Democrat respondents (21 females) to 11 Republican participants (8 females) approximates the partisan ratio that existed in the legislature at the time of the study since the majority party in each chamber of the legislature is provided with additional resources to employ more staff. Legislative staffers in Wisconsin are hired and employed by individual offices; however, they tend to work most closely with other members of their party-specific caucus, tend to volunteer off-duty in support of candidates supported by their party, and recognize that when parties switch control of the legislature, there will be significant changes in the number of staff that each legislator is able to employ.

Procedures

In order to guard against participation in the survey by anyone other than the legislative aides while also guarding against any repeat-voting, we assigned random invitation codes to each aide in the personalized email invitations they each received to participate. In order to maximize participation, we administered two waves of email invitations to each legislative staffer and complemented our emails with telephone calls to personally invite participation in the study.

For the set of 16 familiar politicians that we presented to the participants, we selected incoming and outgoing legislative leaders (e.g., budget committee chairs) as well as the two main candidates for recent competitive elections for Governor and US Senate. For the set of 8 unfamiliar politicians, we presented participants with a series of 5 Republican and 3 Democrat politicians from a faraway state (New York). Our unfamiliar images were balanced towards Republican candidates since (a) their rival Democrat candidates were nationally known incumbents, (b) we wanted to limit our pool of unfamiliar candidates to one state, and (c) our focus on relative

ratings provided by Republican and Democrat raters for given candidates can be tested just as well with Republican as well as Democrat candidates. Just as the intense nature of being a full-time legislative aide generates the reasonable assumption that the staffers have familiarity with the Wisconsin political leaders, our confidence that the upstate New York politicians were unfamiliar to the Wisconsin aides was reinforced by the fact that each of the participants in Study 1 indicated as part of the demographic questions that they “had not lived in the state of New York for any significant period during the past year.”

In order to address the non-independent nature of multiple ratings from each rater, we followed the recommendations of Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, and Lalive (2010) and used a cluster-robust variance estimator for our analysis of ratings for familiar and unfamiliar political leaders. More specifically, we tested for the influence of partisanship for familiar and unfamiliar leaders separately since our model predicts significant effects for the former and no effect for the latter. Formally, our model for subjects or raters i and targets or photographs j can be specified as:

$$\text{Rating}_{ij} = b_0 + b_1\text{Sub_Repub}_i + b_2\text{Targ_Repub}_j + b_3\text{Sub_Repub}_i \times \text{Targ_Repub}_j + b_4\text{Sub_Woman}_i + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where *Rating* is the physical attractiveness score (on a scale of 1 to 9) that our participants provided for each of the images that we presented, *Sub_Repub* is a dummy variable to indicate the rater’s party affiliation (1 = Republican), *Targ_Repub* is a dummy variable to indicate the party affiliation of the political leader being rated (1 = Republican), *Sub_Repub* × *Targ_Repub* is the interaction variable that directly tests our model (i.e., congruence between the party affiliation of raters and leaders) and *Sub_Woman* indicates the rater’s gender (1 = woman). Our model incorporates raters’ gender in light of the possibility of important sex differences in the ratings of others’ physical attractiveness (cf. Eastwick & Finkel, 2008).

Results and discussion

As indicated in Table 1, our results are consistent with the model that physical attractiveness ratings of leaders will vary congruently with raters’ political commitments and that such congruence (*Sub_Repub* × *Targ_Repub*) exists as a function of familiarity since the regression for ratings of unfamiliar political leaders did not show comparable influence of partisan affiliation. More specifically, we conducted a Chow test (Chow, 1960) to compare the coefficients produced by our regression model and the difference between *Sub_Repub* × *Targ_Repub* for the Familiar and Unfamiliar stimuli was significantly higher for the familiars ($X^2 = 8.72, p < .01$). To help visualize the findings of Study 1, Fig. 2 reports the model-generated predictions for *Rating* and the significant interaction effect for partisans’ ratings of familiar political leaders is clear.

In order to provide a closer, descriptive look at the patterns reported in Table 1 and Fig. 2, we conducted ANOVA tests for each of the candidates in Study 1 and we highlight in Table 2 that – consistent with our hypothesized model – 6 of the 12 familiar politicians received significantly different physical attractiveness ratings from the partisan legislative staffers [Vos, Miller, Feingold, Kohl, Biden, and Obama] – all of which were congruent with partisan affiliation – whereas only one of the unfamiliar politicians received significantly different scores from the Republican and Democrat aides. Taken individually, the analyses in Table 2 would be insufficient for reasons including the small sample size; however, the patterns that are visible in Table 2 complement the meaningful findings reported through Table 1 and Fig. 2 since our main analyses leverage the repeated measures that we gained from our sample for each of the leaders.

It is notable that the interaction effect for ratings of unfamiliar leaders is significant; however, as confirmed through the Chow test reported above, it is much less significant than the interaction effect for ratings of familiar leaders. Our expectation is that the relatively slight interaction effect found for ratings of unfamiliar leaders is not meaningful but we do consider it to be plausible that professional legislative aides are more attuned to the kind of facial traits that previous researchers have reported to be specific to Republicans and Democrats (Bull & Hawkes, 1982; Rule & Ambady, 2010). More importantly and consistent with a pattern visible in Fig. 2, we can note that regression analyses for ratings of the familiar and unfamiliar leaders yield a positive main effect for familiarity ($B = 1.35$,

Table 1

Partisanship as predictor of familiar and unfamiliar politicians’ physical attractiveness among professional legislative aides (Study 1).

	Familiar political leaders			Unfamiliar political leaders		
	Coefficient	Cluster robust standard error	<i>t</i>	Coefficient	Cluster robust standard error	<i>t</i>
<i>Sub_Repub</i>	−1.27	.36	−3.54**	−.85	.42	−1.99
<i>Targ_Repub</i>	−.96	.22	−4.43**	.04	.13	.33
<i>Sub_Woman</i>	.07	.24	.29	.01	.28	.05
<i>Sub_Repub</i> × <i>Targ_Repub</i>	2.02	.37	5.42**	.37	.15	2.37*
<i>Constant</i>	5.41	.17	32.50**	3.60	.17	21.23**
<i>R</i> ²		.05			.03	

N = 49.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

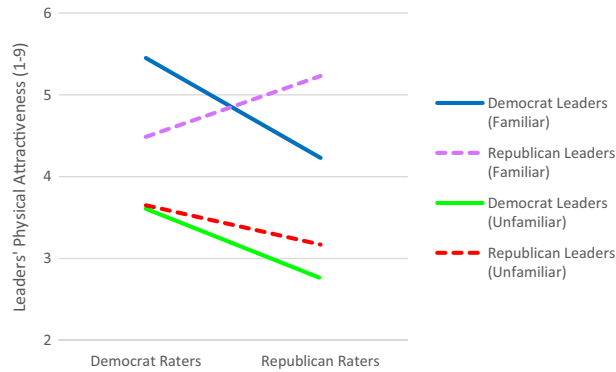


Fig. 2. Model-estimated physical attractiveness ratings from professional legislative aides in Study 1.

$p < .001$). This pattern is consistent with the view that “mere exposure” does contribute to enhanced perceptions of others' physical attractiveness (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Zajonc, 1968) independently of the partisan-based interaction effect that is our primary interest.

Study 2: influence of partisanship upon perceptions among organizational followers

In order to test whether the pattern of perception that we found in Study 1 would hold for people who have less direct relationships with the leaders that they support, Study 2 follows the methods of Study 1 with a sample of registered voters who self-identify as either Republican or Democrat. In contrast with Study 1's sample of people whose employment is at-stake when their employers (i.e., legislators) face re-election, the participants in Study 2 are more distantly supportive of the leaders of their political organizations.

Method

Participants

Participants in a larger set of studies at a public, land grant university in the Midwestern United States (Minnesota) were asked within three weeks after the November 2010 general elections to provide a series of physical attractiveness ratings.

While there were 227 people in the original pool of study participants, we discarded significant portions of the pool for parts of our analysis since (a) only a minority (91 out of 227) self-identified themselves as members or affiliates of the Democrat or Republican parties and (b) a significant number of the self-identified partisans (63 out of 91) reported spending time during the previous year in the East coast state (New York) from which we drew a second set of unfamiliar politicians. Consequently, as a conservative guard against familiarity, we discarded the 63 people who reported spending time in the East coast state in the past year in our tests of the second 12 unfamiliar politicians.

Table 2

Average physical attractiveness reported by supporters and opponents for familiar candidates (top portion of the Table) and unfamiliar candidates in Study 1.

Candidate's office & name	Average physical attractiveness ratings			Candidate's office & name	Average physical attractiveness ratings		
	Democrat raters	Republican raters	F		Democrat raters	Republican raters	F
Republican candidates				Democrat candidates			
WI Gubernatorial candidate Walker	4.13 (2.18)	5.27 (2.10)	2.37	WI Gubernatorial candidate Barrett	5.95 (1.39)	5.00 (2.10)	3.10
US Senate candidate Johnson	4.05 (1.92)	5.27 (1.56)	3.73	US Senate candidate Feingold	6.03 (1.57)	4.82 (1.60)	5.02*
WI State Senator Darling	5.37 (1.98)	5.60 (1.78)	.11	US Senate candidate Kohl	3.95 (1.66)	2.73 (1.35)	4.97*
Incoming WI Assembly Speaker Fitzgerald	4.26 (2.16)	4.90 (2.02)	.70	Current Assembly Speaker Sheridan	6.24 (1.95)	5.90 (.99)	.28
Incoming WI Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald	4.29 (2.45)	5.40 (2.22)	1.69	Current Senate Majority Leader Miller	4.76 (1.82)	3.30 (1.57)	5.38*
WI State Rep. Vos	2.84 (1.64)	4.30 (1.83)	5.99*	WI State Rep. Barca	3.66 (2.00)	3.20 (1.62)	.44
2008 US Presidential candidate McCain	3.97 (1.82)	3.89 (1.76)	.02	2008 US Presidential candidate Obama	6.78 (1.86)	4.78 (2.73)	6.97*
2008 US Vice Presidential candidate Palin	7.03 (1.89)	7.50 (1.51)	.44	2008 US Vice Presidential candidate Biden	6.27 (1.39)	4.13 (2.03)	13.26**
Unfamiliar politicians				Democrat candidates			
US Rep. candidate Phillips	3.45 (1.53)	3.29 (1.38)	.08	US Rep candidate Hinchey	4.42 (1.62)	3.00 (1.29)	4.79*
NY Senate candidate O'Mara	3.22 (1.25)	3.29 (1.11)	.02	NY Senate candidate Mackesey	3.37 (1.38)	2.57 (1.27)	2.05
NY House candidate Reynolds	3.49 (1.35)	2.57 (1.72)	2.50	NY House candidate Lifton	3.00 (1.41)	2.71 (1.25)	.25
US Senate candidate Townsend	4.47 (1.36)	3.57 (1.72)	2.36	US Senate candidate DioGuardi (R)	3.64 (1.36)	3.14 (1.46)	.77

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Among the self-identified partisans whose scores we analyzed for ratings of familiar politicians, 32 (15 females) were Republicans and 59 (22 females) were Democrats. Among the self-identified partisans who had not spent time in New York during the previous year, 10 (3 females) were Republicans and 18 (5 females) were Democrats.

Procedures

Replicating Study 1's approach, participants were asked to assess the physical attractiveness of 16 potentially familiar politicians and 12 local-level politicians from a state on the East coast (New York).

Results and discussion

As indicated in Table 3, our sample of self-identified partisans rated the physical attractiveness of familiar political leaders in congruence (*Sub_Repub* × *Targ_Repub*) with their own partisan positions whereas the same pattern did not hold for ratings of unfamiliar politicians. More specifically, as with Study 1, we conducted a Chow test (Chow, 1960) to compare the coefficients produced by our regression model and the difference between *Sub_Repub* × *Targ_Repub* for the Familiar and Unfamiliar stimuli was significantly higher for the familiars ($X^2 = 6.53, p < .01$). Similarly, Fig. 3 visually plots the estimated means generated by our model and reflects the significant interaction effect for partisans' ratings of familiar political leaders – in contrast with no comparable effect for ratings of the unfamiliar political leaders.

In comparison with Fig. 2's representations of results for Study 1, it is notable through Fig. 3 that Study 2 does not yield a full cross-over interaction effect; instead, Democrat raters tend to show little difference in their ratings of leaders in Study 2 while Republican raters do fit clearly with the hypothesized congruence in relation to familiar leaders' physical attractiveness. With respect to the overall differences between ratings of familiar and unfamiliar leaders, we can report that regression analyses that vary the four reference groups consistently show that there is a main positive effect of familiarity ($B = .77, p < .05$) or “mere exposure” that is independent of the main relationships considered by our analyses. Just as notable, we can highlight that the effect size for familiarity is substantially higher in Study 1 when compared with Study 2 – a difference that we expect reflects the fact that Study 1's participants have more personal familiarity (e.g., through “live interactions”) with the leaders when compared with Study 2's participant–leader relationships.

General discussion

Our studies provide evidence for the general model whereby leaders of a given group (e.g., candidates for elected office from a given political party) are perceived as more physically attractive by followers of their group than by members of competing groups. In this sense, our findings suggest that organizational leaders – the people who represent political parties – are rewarded for their activity by other members of their organizations with increased perceptions of the leaders' physical attractiveness. More specifically, the current research shows that the importance of familiarity for perceptions of physical attractiveness is moderated by in-group membership since familiar leaders of out-groups are perceived to be significantly less physically attractive.

As a clear contrast with studies of strangers rating strangers' physical attractiveness, the relative uniqueness of our samples makes the consistency of our findings especially powerful since Study 1 involves a workplace setting where subordinates are rating de facto supervisors while Study 2 draws upon followers' ratings of leaders with whom they have no employee-to-supervisor relationship. While we do not consider raters' perceived “personal bonds with leaders,” the current research is analogous to findings reported by Steffens, Haslam, and Reicher (2014). In the case of their work, Steffens et al. (2014) found that partisans reported feeling significant higher levels of “personal bond” with one of the two main candidates for US President in 2012 if the candidate belonged to their party and if the rater perceived the candidate to be a prototypical member or representative of their party. Steffens et al. (2014) do not consider physical attractiveness in their research design; however, it is intriguing to consider the expectation – based on the two studies presented here – that they would have found ratings of physical attractiveness to coincide with their measure of perceived “personal bonds with leaders.”

Table 3

Partisanship as predictor of familiar and unfamiliar politicians' physical attractiveness among self-identified partisans (Study 2).

	Familiar political leaders			Unfamiliar political leaders		
	Coefficient	Cluster robust standard error	<i>t</i>	Coefficient	Cluster robust standard error	<i>t</i>
<i>Sub_Repub</i>	.10	.28	.37	.55	.27	2.06*
<i>Targ_Repub</i>	−.04	.12	−.32	−.10	.32	−.32
<i>Sub_Woman</i>	.09	.26	.35	.02	.26	.10
<i>Sub_Repub</i> × <i>Targ_Repub</i>	.59	.19	3.18**	−.50	.53	−.93
Constant	4.06	.14	29.18**	3.29	.19	17.34**
<i>R</i> ²		.01			.02	

N = 91.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

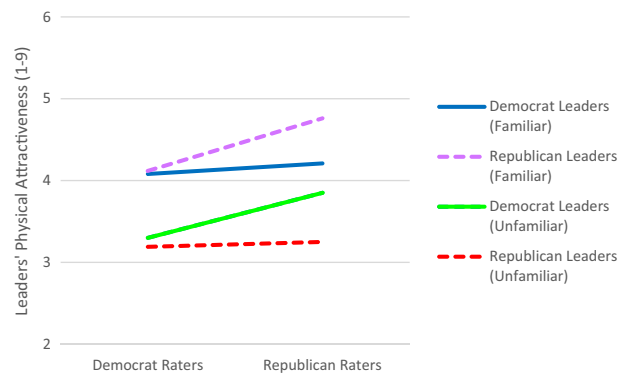


Fig. 3. Model-estimated physical attractiveness ratings from self-identified partisans (Study 2).

Theoretical and practical implications

Our findings contribute to research concerning the importance of physical attractiveness by highlighting the variable's interactive nature and its potential relevance for bonding organizational followers and leaders. Specifically, our reliance on a naturalistic approach provides important context for studies that aim to understand the influence of physical attractiveness – as an independent and dependent variable – in relation to social interactions involving groups. Our article also contributes to research concerning the “ultimate” question (cf. Vigil, 2010) of why people endure the costs of leadership since our studies suggest a non-obvious, non-monetary benefit of being a leader (i.e., people tend to view leaders of their organizations as relatively more physically attractive).

Beyond helping to address the question of why people accept the costs of leadership, our findings also warrant consideration of why followers might have a tendency to view their organization's leaders as more physically attractive. Particularly given that the two samples that we considered rely upon voluntary associations demonstrated by partisan-based employment (Study 1) and voting (Study 2) choices, it seems reasonable to expect that followers will view their leaders as more physically attractive as part of general in-group biases (e.g., Brewer, 1979). In this sense, our findings appear to illustrate a non-obvious mechanism for in-group development and maintenance whereby followers see their leaders in more favorable lights than people who belong to rival organizations. While researchers focused on “follower-centric” theories have discussed the “romance of leadership” (e.g., Haslam et al., 2001; Meindl, 1995; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) as a figurative reference to the generally favorable but not necessarily specific nature of being in charge, our findings show that followers' affection for organizational leaders appears to include – non-figuratively – enhanced perceptions of their leaders' physical attractiveness. Given that people tend to enjoy the company of physically attractive others (e.g., Madera & Hebl, 2012), an enhanced view of one's organizational leaders should help to maintain organizational followers' engagement.

Practical implications of our studies include a better understanding of the dynamics behind so-called office romances in which subordinates develop affection for organizational leaders whom they might not otherwise consider to be physically attractive (i.e., if they were strangers). To the extent that it is not uncommon to see news reports of political leaders engaged in romantic relationships with subordinate employees/followers, our findings suggest that followers likely have relatively high perceptions of their leaders' physical attractiveness when compared with ratings from followers of rival leaders. While there are certainly differences between political operations and more traditional business dynamics, it is possible that greater self-awareness would minimize the adverse effects of romantic relationships within work organizations if there were broader awareness of the findings presented in this article.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that some of the previous research concerning the physical appearance of political candidates has drawn attention to concerns that voters appear to be irrationally influenced or biased by superficial features (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009). While those concerns are warranted for stranger-to-stranger relationships such as many hiring or recruitment contexts, the main concern generated by our studies involves the finding that partisans appear to “see” parts of the world that others consider to be objective through significantly different lenses. Partisans routinely disagree about policy matters; however, our findings of different perceptions of physical attractiveness for familiar leaders as a function of group membership break new ground.

Limitations and future directions

Among the limitations of our studies, it is important to acknowledge that the current studies did not specify the partisanship of the unfamiliar political leaders due to previous research showing that people tend – surprisingly enough, perhaps – to infer the partisan affiliation of unfamiliar political leaders simply on the basis of facial images (Bull & Hawkes, 1982; Rule & Ambady, 2010). Future tests of the model presented in this article should assess ratings for unfamiliar political leaders with their partisan affiliation specified to help ensure that each rater knows whether or not the politician is part of their in-group. While our conservative approach avoids priming raters with the partisan affiliation of the unfamiliar leaders, our expectation is that future tests that include partisan

identifications will yield significant interactions that can be more explicitly interpreted to be a function of the interactions that we discuss in this article.

Generalization of our studies is also limited by the fact that both were conducted within the month following hotly contested local elections. Future research involving political leaders and followers should be conducted during other times of the election cycle as a means of determining whether there are important time-within-political-cycle effects. Our expectation is that the interaction effect that we report will be robust among partisans who are heavily invested as members or followers of a given party (e.g., as full-time professional aides). On the other hand, it seems plausible that partisans who are not heavily invested as members or followers of a given party will vary across the political cycle with respect to how much their own political partisanship colors their perceptions of familiar leaders.

In addition to a broader set of snapshots during the political cycle, future research should assess more control variables. In the current studies, we collected raters' age and did not include it as part of the model since we did not expect raters' age to influence ratings of physical attractiveness. We can report here, though, that regressions that we conducted that included raters' age did not change the significance of the interaction effect for ratings of familiar leaders in either of the studies.

Conclusion

In contrast with studies that presume that physical attractiveness is a static personal characteristic that influences how people perceive each other and as a complement to previous work that considers individual-level relationships as important predictors for interpersonal perceptions, we present evidence that group membership moderates followers' ratings of familiar leaders' physical attractiveness. While our article sheds suggestive light on the ultimate question of why people endure the costs of leadership and reinforces the concern that partisanship colors how people perceive an otherwise objective trait such as a person's physical appearance, there are also constructive and encouraging implications that future research can consider outside of the political domain. In effect, we find evidence that people are capable – for better or for worse – of judging covers by their books whereby the cover of physical appearance is viewed partly and significantly through the lens of organizational membership.

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