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Lily Palmer

Clark University, lipalmer@clarku.edu

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The Association between Appearance Schemas and Felt Intimacy In Romantic Relationships

Lily Palmer, Psychology, '23

Graduate Student Mentor: Setareh Rossman, MA & Faculty Mentor: James Cordova, Ph.D.



What are Appearance Schemas?

Appearance schemas are the core beliefs an individual has for the importance of appearance to their life, as well as within their sense of self (Cash & Labarge 1996; Cash, Melnyk & Hrabosky 2003; Ledoux et al. 2010).

Appearance schemas and maladaptive appearance behaviors emerge in the context of the objectification, internalization of body standard ideals through exposure from media, peer and family groups, and relationships (Vartanian 2022; Sanchez & Kwang 2007; Sanchez & Broccoli 2008; Befort et al. 2001; Kashubeck-West, Zeilman, and Deitz 2018; Morrison, Doss, & Perez, 2009; Clark & Tiggeman 2007).

There are two subscales within the measure of appearance investment. The first is Self-Evaluative Salience (SES), which relates to an individual's appearance self-schema and is the degree to which they derive worth from their appearance. The other is Motivational Salience, which is the degree to which an individual's behavior aligns with a strong importance of appearance (Cash & Labarge 1996; Cash, Melnyk & Hrabosky 2004; Cash & Smolak 2012).

Purpose & Rationale

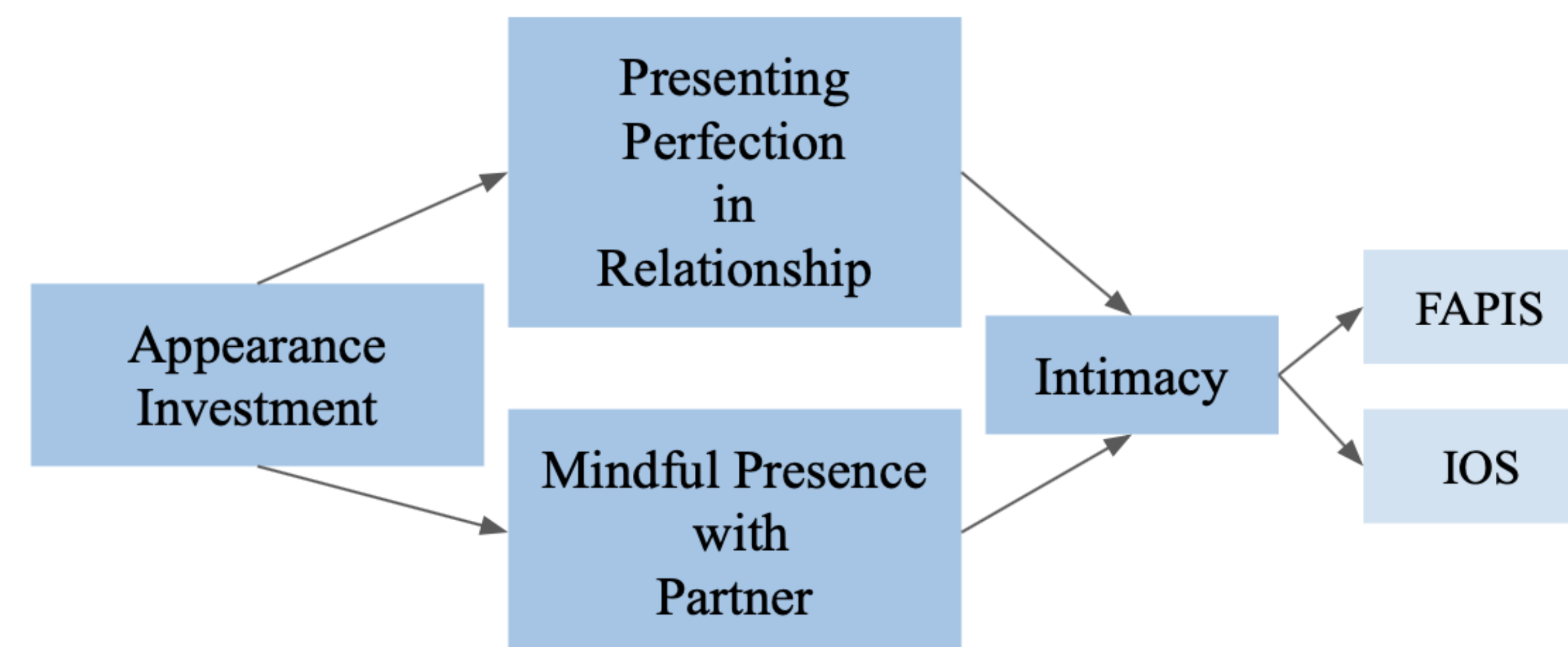
- This study will examine the relationship between appearance investment and intimacy, mediated by presenting perfection and mindful presence, within romantic relationships.
- Romantic relationships contribute to many individuals' quality of life, physical and mental health, and overall well-being (Dush & Amato 2005).
- Intimacy is a cornerstone of romantic relationships and is a behavioral process that occurs over time as individuals experience events in which their behavior is open to interpersonal punishment by their partner (Schaefer 1981; Olsen 1975; Cordova & Scott 2001).
- Intimacy has been conceptualized and measured in many ways and includes components such as acceptance of the self and other, self-disclosure, feelings of closeness, and feelings of safety, among other items (Schaefer 1981; Olsen 1975; Descutner & Thelen 1991; Leonard et al. 2014).

- Examining qualities that allow or prevent individuals in developing intimacy within a relationship is important for this reason, as closer relationships result in higher satisfaction (Dandeneau & Johnson 1994; Yoo 2013; Goodman 1999; Greeff & Malherbe 2001; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud 2007).
- This research will lead to a greater understanding of appearance schemas as a contributing factor to building intimacy in romantic relationships.

Research Questions

- 1) Does appearance investment predict the amount of felt intimacy an individual experiences within their romantic relationship?
- 2) Is the potential relationship between appearance investment and intimacy mediated by presentations of perfections within the relationship?
- 3) Is the potential relationship between appearance investment and intimacy mediated by a lack of mindful presence within the relationship?

Proposed Model



Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1A: Appearance investment will have a significant negative correlation with intimacy.

Hypothesis 1B: Appearance investment will have a significant positive correlation with presenting perfection in the relationship.

Hypothesis 1C: Appearance investment will have a significant negative correlation with mindful presence in the relationship.

Hypothesis 2A: Appearance investment will have a significant negative correlation with intimacy through high presenting perfection in the relationship.

Hypothesis 2B: Appearance investment will have a significant negative correlation with intimacy through lack of mindful presence in the relationship.

Methods

- The study will take place as an online, anonymous Qualtrics survey
- Participants must be 18+ and currently in a relationship lasting at least 3 months.
- We intend to survey a minimum of 250 participants
- We will conduct a cross-sectional analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Measures to be administered :

- Appearance Schemas Index Revised (ASI-R) (Cash, Melnyk & Hrabosky 2004)
- Version of the Perfectionist Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS) adapted for romantic relationships (Hewitt et al. 2003)
- Relational Mindfulness Measure (RMM) (Kimmes et al. 2017)
- Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965)
- Functional Analytic Psychotherapy, Intimacy Scale (FAPIS) (Leonard et al. 2014)
- Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS) (Aron, Aron & Smollan 1992).