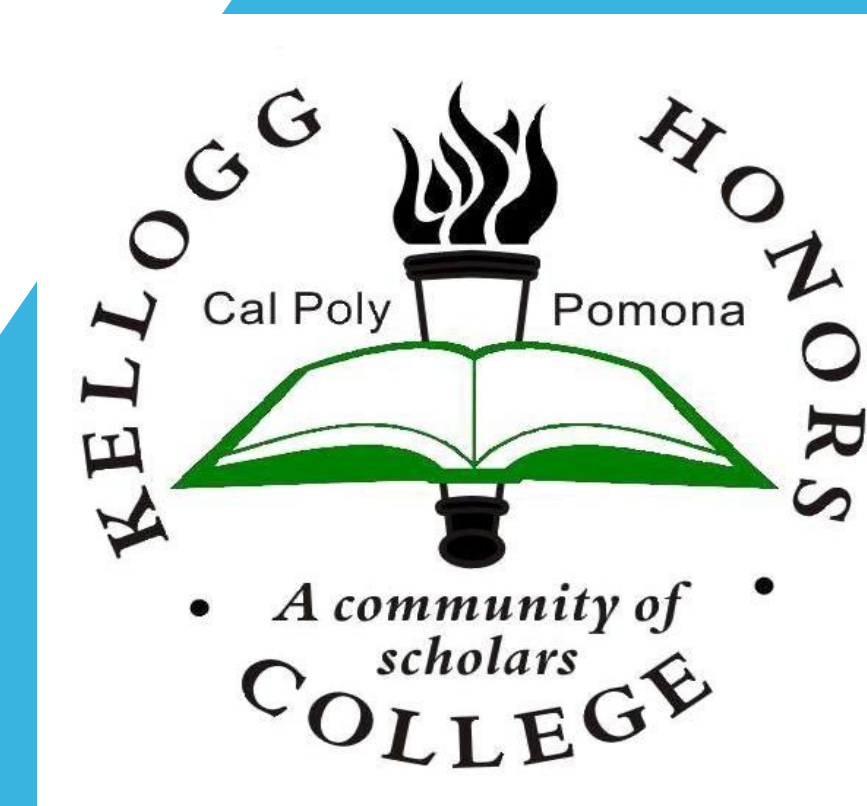


LOVE IN THE TIME OF BREAKUPS

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Introduction

This study is testing a theory proposed by Melvyn Kalb which says that the person who is most likely to initiate a divorce is the person for whom the “view of the alternative, namely, being single” (Kalb, 1983) is most favorable. In other words, when both people in the couple visualize how successful they would be at finding another partner if they were single, there is usually one who is more confident and one who is less confident about future success. The spouse for whom single life would be more successful, according to Kalb, is least likely to fight for a marriage that is failing because they have a relatively high confidence they could easily find a new partner. The current study tested this hypothesis by looking at the degree to which perceived attractiveness influenced the participant's opinions about whether or not a couple should end their relationship. This study also examined whether or not participants find one gender more attractive than the other. There is already a significant amount of research about the differences in attraction between the genders but none of the studies really address if there is one preferred gender. In this study, it is important to know which partner has the better alternative but it is also worth looking at whether or not there is a gender predisposition to having a more favorable alternative.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were all students at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona who were all recruited off of the online participant database known as SONA. There were 35 men and 37 women totaling 72 participants.

Materials

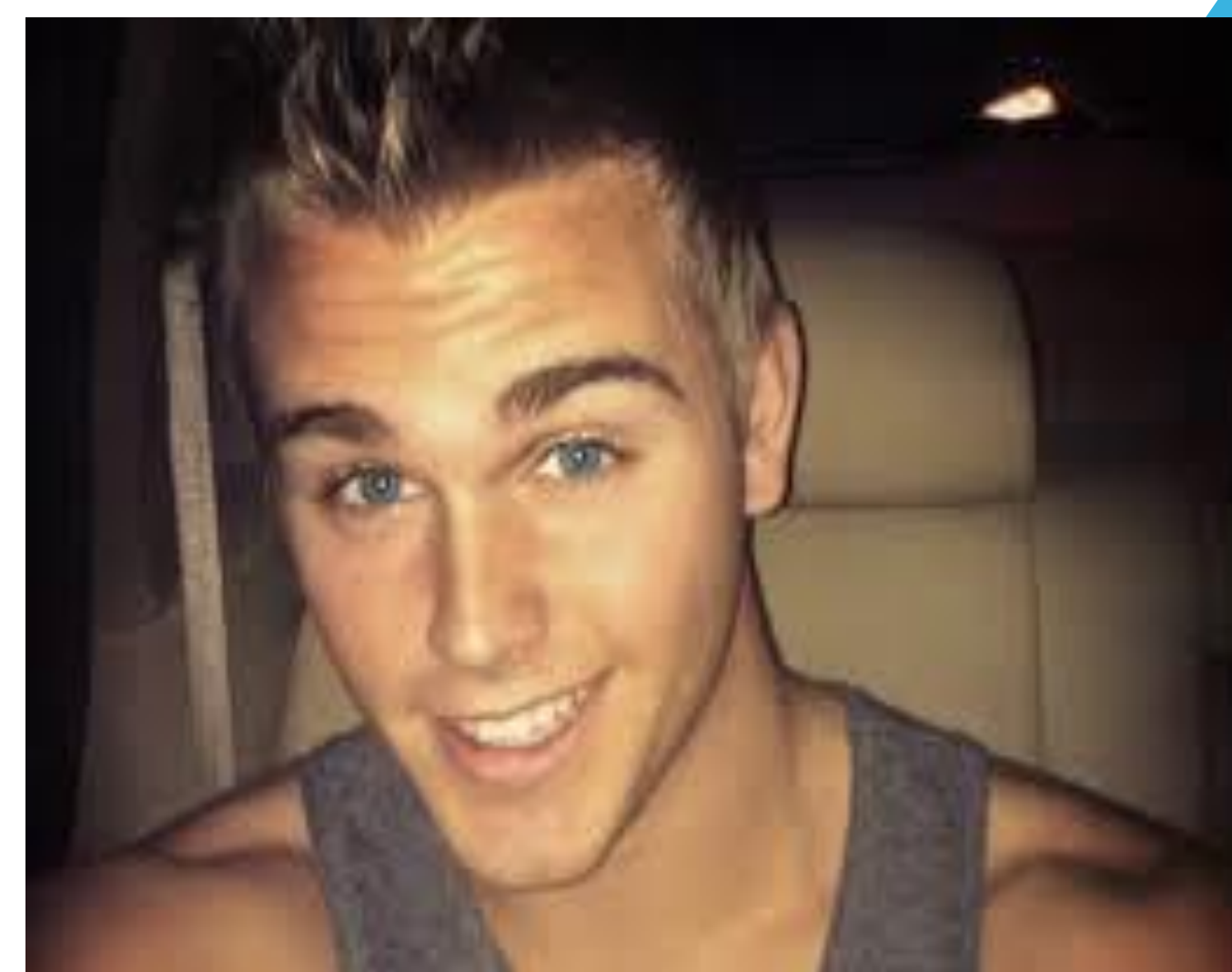
The study was conducted online. All three groups read the same vignette about a couple facing the possible dissolution of their relationship before taking a 15 item Likert scale questionnaire that assessed the level of influence of attractiveness on the participant's recommendation for the couple.

Procedure

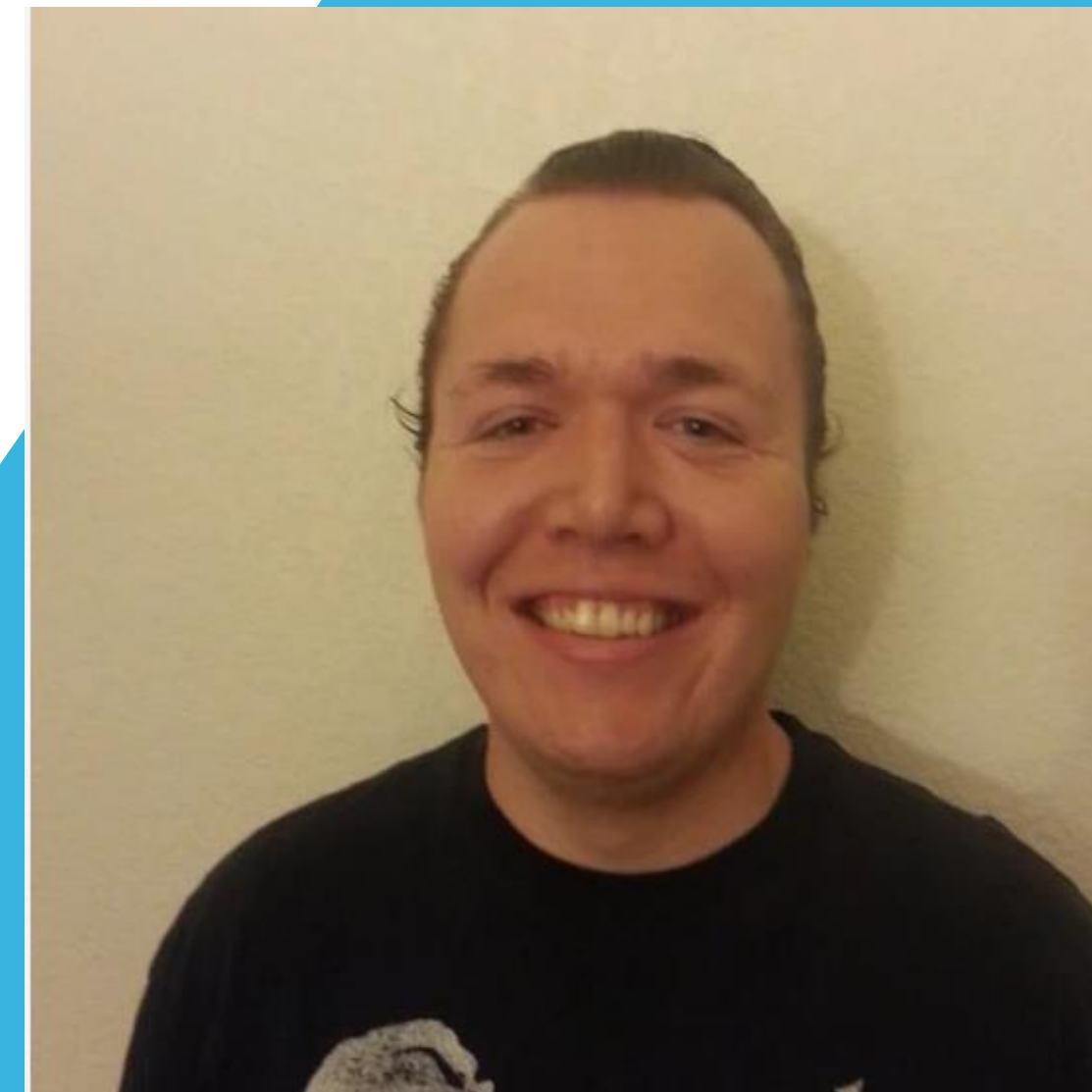
The participants were asked to click on a link to the survey from the advertisement of the survey on SONA. Once the participant had clicked the link for the appropriate survey, the participants were asked to read the vignette describing a fight between a couple that had an ambiguous resolution. In the survey labeled “Love in the Time of Breakups-1” the participants saw one attractive female and one attractive male after reading the vignette. In the survey “Love in the Time of Breakups-2” the participants saw one unattractive female and one unattractive male. The control group, “Love in the Time of Breakups-3”, did not view pictures.

In all conditions, after reading the vignette and seeing pictures where applicable, the participants were asked to fill out a 15 item Likert scale questionnaire that was evaluating their answers to questions like, “I think Catherine should break up with James” based on a 5 point scale that went from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Attractive Pictures



Unattractive Pictures



Results

Using an ANOVA test to compare groups, the only questions that were significant were that physical attractiveness is important in a relationship ($p=.000$), that James is physically attractive ($p=.001$), and that generally the participants find women more attractive than men ($p=.001$). Examining the means showed exactly where the differences were between groups.

There was an interesting pattern to the results of the data because when shown the unattractive pictures, the participants thought that attractiveness was an important part of the relationship ($x=2.59$) but they would be willing to exchange the physical attractiveness for money ($x=3.15$). The unattractive group also thought that women were more attractive than men ($x=3.48$). However, when the groups were asked to rate how attractive James is, the attractive group found him more attractive ($x=3.30$) as well as having the opinion that he should break up with Catherine ($x=3.22$) although this question was approaching significance so a higher sample size might have led to an actual statistical significance.

Discussion

The hypothesis that perceived physical attractiveness would influence the participant's recommendation for a couple to break up was proved to be somewhat true. There was definitely support that the more attractive the partner is, the more likely the participants were to recommend the person would end the relationship. In the attractive condition, when James was perceived to be attractive the participants said he should break up with Catherine. The attractive group also did not think that women were more attractive than men. There was a consistency in the results from this data. However, when the participants saw the unattractive pictures, they were more inclined to think women were more attractive than men, that it was an important aspect of the relationship, and that they would be willing to give up some physical attractiveness for money. In other words, the data would indicate that as long as the person had a male partner they viewed as attractive, they should keep the man regardless of other factors involved in a relationship.