The mediating role of attention in the link between perceived attractiveness and accuracy

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1 Introduction

→ Perceptions can be decomposed into two independent components:
  → *Normative accuracy:* the extent to which one perceives a target as similar to the average person;
  → *Distinctive accuracy:* the extent to which one correctly recognizes the unique traits of a target.
→ Accuracy of first impressions can have lasting effects (Human, Sandstrom, Biesanz & Dunn, 2012).
→ Past work suggests that attractive individuals tend to be perceived with greater distinctive accuracy (Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010).

Research Question: What mechanism accounts for the positive association between perceived attractiveness and distinctive accuracy?

→ According to the Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM), accurate judgments require perceivers to pay careful attention towards targets (Funder, 1995).
→ Past research suggested that people attend more to more physically attractive individuals (Langlois et al., 2000).
  → i.e., People tend to look longer at pictures of attractive faces of their preferred gender (Maner et al., 2003).
→ Is it that greater physical attractiveness attracts perceivers' attention?

Hypothesis: The positive association between perceived attractiveness of a target and distinctive accuracy is mediated by the perceiver's attention.

2 Method

Participants:
→ *N*= 249 (72% females)
→ Age: *M* = 21, *SD*= 2.3

Procedure & Measures:

Before coming to the lab, participants were asked to complete an online pre-measure assessing demographic information (e.g., gender, relationship status, gender one is most romantically attracted to).

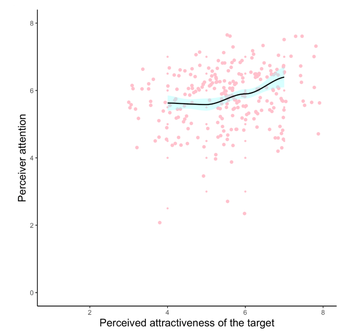
At the lab, participants viewed an introductory video (~1.5 minutes) of an attractive target who was supposedly another participant. Participants expected a live interaction with this target later in the session. In reality, a confederate had pre-recorded the video.

After watching the video, participants provided ratings of personality, perceived attractiveness of the target, and attentiveness while watching the video.

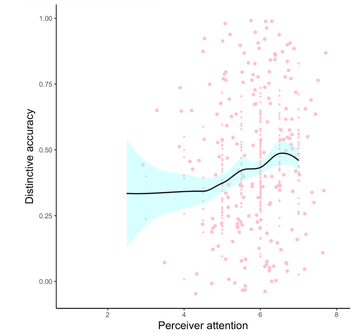
3 Results

Analytic Strategy:
- Distinctive accuracy was assessed using Social Accuracy Modeling (SAM) procedures (Biesanz, 2010).
- Normativity was controlled for in the analyses.

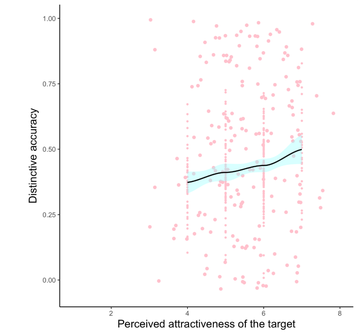
Association between perceived attractiveness of the target and perceivers' attention



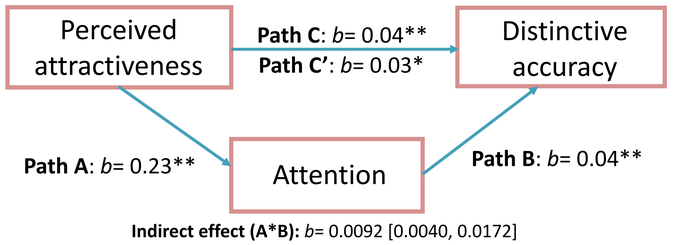
Association between perceivers' attention and distinctive accuracy



Association between perceived attractiveness of the target and distinctive accuracy



Note: Shaded areas represent the 95% confidence intervals.



Note: *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$.

- Consistent with our hypothesis, the link between perceived attractiveness of the target and distinctive accuracy was mediated by attention of the perceiver.

4 Discussion

→ The present research conceptually replicated the link between perceived attractiveness and distinctive accuracy, further supporting the results reported by Lorenzo and colleagues (2010).
→ In line with Funder's (1995) RAM, findings suggest that attractiveness captures the attention of perceivers, which is predictive of more accurate judgments of personality.
→ By using an experimental design to show participants the same video of an attractive individual of preferred gender, we eliminated potential extraneous variables, such as different degrees of expressivity of the targets, which could potentially influence distinctive accuracy.
→ Future studies should seek to uncover potential moderators of this mediation. For instance, people who are in a committed relationship tend to spend less time browsing pictures of attractive others (Miller, 1997). Hence, the mediating effect of attention on the link between perceived attractiveness and distinctive accuracy might function differently for people who are in a committed relationship compared to those who are single.