

## Does attractiveness buy happiness? “It depends on where you’re from”

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### Abstract

Previous studies document that attractiveness predicts life outcomes, including well-being and social connectedness. This study investigates whether the attractiveness–outcomes link is especially strong in settings, such as many urban areas, that promote relationship constructions as a product of personal choice. This link may weaken in settings, such as many rural areas, that promote less voluntaristic-independent relationship constructions. Analyses of survey data from a national representative (United States) sample supported these hypotheses. Attractiveness (operationalized as waist-to-hip ratio) predicted well-being and social connectedness among urban ( $n = 257$ ) but not rural ( $n = 330$ ) women. Social connectedness mediated the urban–rural moderation of the attractiveness/well-being link. Findings suggest that frequently observed attractiveness effects are the product of particular, modern social contexts that promote relationship choice.

Weight Watchers, Slim Fast, body-shaping apparel, body-contouring surgery—Americans spend billions of dollars every year on these and other attractiveness-enhancing products. Why do people go to such lengths (and sometimes endanger themselves) to increase attractiveness? In short, attractive people experience better social and psychological outcomes than unattractive people do (see Langlois et al., 2000, for a meta-analytic review). Research suggests that attractiveness enhances social connectedness such that attractive people experience more popularity and social interaction and less loneliness than less attractive people do (Feingold, 1992). Perhaps

reflecting implications of attractiveness for social connectedness, research also suggests a positive relationship between attractiveness and aspects of hedonic well-being (i.e., subjective appraisal of life quality; see Ryan & Deci, 2001) such as life satisfaction and positive affect (Argyle, 1987/2001; Umberson & Hughes, 1987; but see Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995). Likewise, research suggests an association between attractiveness and aspects of eudaimonic well-being (i.e., positive psychological functioning centered on self-realization; Ryan & Deci, 2001) such as feelings of control and positive self-view (Langlois et al., 2000).

Accounts of these attractiveness effects attribute them to greater parental investment in attractive children (Buss, 1999), an evolutionary tendency to use attractiveness as an indicator of health and reproductive potential (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999), and differential beliefs about and treatment of attractive and unattractive people (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). Without denying these explanations, we suggest that attractiveness effects are also a product of particular

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relationship constructions—that is, social structural factors and associated cultural understandings that underlie the experience of interpersonal connection—that vary greatly across sociocultural contexts (see also Dion, Pak, & Dion, 1990). Specifically, we propose that attractiveness effects are stronger in settings, such as urban areas, that promote relationship constructions in which personal choice figures prominently, and are weaker in settings, such as rural areas, that promote relationship constructions in which personal choice figures less prominently (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004; Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008). Accordingly, because urban environments constitute a relatively recent addition to the human repertoire, attractiveness effects may be relatively modern phenomena resulting from these particular, choice-full sociocultural contexts.

#### *The sociocultural grounding of relationship*

Work in the field of cultural psychology suggests that many apparent “laws” of psychological functioning (including interpersonal connection) are not just natural but instead reflect implicit structures for the mind that pervade the sociocultural worlds that inform scientific imagination. An important feature of these worlds is the extent to which sociocultural factors—including affluence, mobility, and open networks—promote the disembedding of psyche from context: the sense that personal choice, not circumstances of birth (e.g., place, class), determines one’s experience (Giddens, 1991). This disembedding of experience is associated with *voluntaristic-independent* relationship constructions as tenuous agreements between inherently separate selves (Adams et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2008). These constructions suggest a “free market” of relationship populated by “free agents” who feel at liberty, but also compelled, to choose their own connections (Fiske, 1991).

We propose that voluntaristic-independent relationship constructions provide the fertile context in which attractiveness effects take root. To the extent that people experience relationships as the product of free

choice, personal preference (as a determinant of choice), and attraction (as a basis for preference), these become important factors in the creation and maintenance of interpersonal connections (Rosenblatt & Cozby, 1972). Accordingly, in such settings, people with attractive attributes have greater success in securing and maintaining connections (Sangrador & Yela, 2000) and—given the strong association between social connectedness (e.g., interaction quality, friendship, social contact, social support, lack of conflict, and integration into community) and increased well-being (Argyle, 1987/2001; Ryan & Deci, 2001)—experience greater well-being.

In contrast, our research suggests that attractiveness effects appear less strong in settings associated with interdependent selves, densely interconnected networks, and relatively limited mobility that promote *embedded-interdependent* relationship constructions as an environmental affordance (Adams et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2008). To the extent that people experience relationships as something inherent in the structure of everyday life, personal choice, personal preference (as a determinant of choice), and attraction (as a basis of preference) become somewhat irrelevant for the creation and maintenance of rewarding connections. Accordingly, attractiveness does not yield much advantage (and unattractiveness does not pose much disadvantage) for social connection and associated well-being.

To summarize, in settings that promote relationship constructions as personal choice, attractiveness acts as a sorting mechanism and provides a competitive advantage for securing connections, yielding well-being benefits for those who possess it and costs for those who do not. Conversely, in settings that promote relationship constructions in which personal choice is less relevant, the relative security of relationship life means that attractiveness assumes less importance as a determinant of social outcomes and therefore exerts less influence on well-being.

### *Urban and rural background*

The different structures of social relations associated with urban and rural environments provide a unique opportunity to test these ideas. In general, features of everyday life in urban settings promote relationship constructions in which personal choice figures more prominently than in rural settings. Urban settings afford social mobility whereby people have contact with a larger pool of potential partners with whom they share less overlapping social networks. Urban inhabitants are less involved than rural inhabitants in non-voluntary extended kin ties, and kin relations that do exist in urban areas have become more voluntary (Fischer, 1982). In contrast, population density is lower in rural (Hart, Larson, & Lishner, 2005) and recently growing rural–urban “fringe” areas (Sharp & Clark, 2008), and thus people have known each other longer and are more likely to see the same people across settings (e.g., school, church). This limits the number of partners with whom one can associate, resulting in smaller and more overlapping networks (Beggs, Haines, & Hurlbert, 1996). Due to these differences in social mobility, people in urban areas are free to choose (and report) more close friends than people in rural areas (Fischer, 1982; Palisi & Ransford, 1987). These divergent patterns even extend to the use of social networking Web sites. Rural residents have fewer online “friends” than urban residents do, and those “friends” (especially “strong ties”) live closer to home (Gilbert, Karahalios, & Sandvig, 2008).

These differences between urban and rural settings suggest the following hypotheses. First, given that relationship constructions as the product of choice are more prominent in urban than rural settings, urban–rural background should moderate associations of attractiveness with (a) social connectedness and (b) well-being (with positive associations more evident in urban than rural settings). In addition, the previous discussion suggests a mediated moderation hypothesis. Given that social connectedness leads to better well-being, if attractiveness matters more for securing social connection in

urban areas than in rural areas, then social connectedness should mediate the moderating effect of urban–rural background on the relationship between attractiveness and well-being. In other words, one reason why urban–rural background moderates the relationship between attractiveness and well-being is that urban (but not rural) environments enhance the importance of attractiveness for social connection—a major source of well-being.

## **Method**

### *Sample*

We analyzed data from the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS; MacArthur Research Network on Successful Midlife Development), a national probability sample of noninstitutionalized, English-speaking U.S. residents in households with telephone service. Among participants selected, 70% agreed to a telephone interview, and 87% of them completed a mail survey (overall response rate = 61%). We retained data only from nonpregnant women in rural and urban areas who reported waist and hip measurements ( $N = 587$ ; 257 urban, 330 rural) from the original sample of 3,485. Ages ranged from 26 to 75 years ( $M = 51.0$ ,  $SD = 12.9$ ).

### *Measures*

The MIDUS examined factors related to psychological, social, and physical health. To evaluate our hypotheses, we selected the following measures.

#### *Attractiveness*

Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) served as the measure of attractiveness. Numerous studies have documented an association between low WHR and positive judgments of female attractiveness (Henss, 2000; Schmalt, 2006; Singh, 1993; Streeter & McBurney, 2003) independent of body weight (Singh & Randall, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Participants followed survey instructions to measure waist and hip size. We

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1. Whether WHR or body weight (e.g., body mass index [BMI]) better predicts attractiveness judgment

calculated WHR by dividing waist size by hip size.

### *Urban–rural background*

Participants chose the response—*rural, small town, medium-sized town, suburbs, city, moved around*—that best described their origins. Analyses included only participants who indicated *city* or *rural*.<sup>2</sup>

### *Well-being*

We selected measures of both hedonic (subjective) and eudaimonic (psychological) well-being. Because life satisfaction and positive affect are central to subjective well-being, and because environmental mastery and self-acceptance (in contrast to other measures of eudaimonic well-being) correlate moderately with hedonic well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002), we included these four measures

in our well-being aggregate. As further criteria, we selected measures for which there is evidence of associations with attractiveness (discussed above) and social connectedness. Research indicates that friendship is associated with life satisfaction, satisfaction with self, and feelings of mastery (see Argyle, 1987/2001), as well as positive affect (including time spent with, satisfaction with, and number of friends; see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). We did not include negative affect in our well-being composite because it has a less consistent relationship with sociability (Emmons & Diener, 1986) and attractiveness (see Diener et al., 1995).<sup>3</sup>

The first measure of well-being was a single-item indicator of present life satisfaction rated on a scale of 1 (*worst possible life you can imagine*) to 10 (*best possible life you can imagine*). The second measure, positive affect, was the mean of participants' ratings of the extent to which they experienced six positive feelings during the past 30 days (using a scale from 1 = *none of the time* to 5 = *all of the time*; Cronbach's index of internal consistency, or  $\alpha = .91$ ; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). The third and fourth measures were means of participants' responses (using a scale from 1 = *strongly agree* to 7 = *strongly disagree*) to three items gauging self-acceptance (e.g., "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far";  $\alpha = .59$ ) and three items gauging environmental mastery (e.g., "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live";  $\alpha = .52$ ; Ryff, 1989; see Ryff & Keyes, 1995, regarding the relatively low internal consistency of these scales).

### *Social connectedness*

We included all available measures of social connectedness that according to existing research (see above) we could reasonably expect to be related to attractiveness and to well-being. The first of four measures of social connectedness was a single-item indicator of contact with friends rated by participants on a scale of 1 (*several times a day*) to

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is beyond the scope of this article. Previous research has concluded that WHR is both superior (Furnham, Swami, & Shah 2006; Schützwohl, 2006) and inferior (Furnham, Petrides, & Constantinides, 2005; Swami, Caprario, Tovée, & Furnham, 2006) to BMI in determining attractiveness. We statistically controlled for BMI in order to assess the impact of WHR above and beyond BMI. Analyses that substituted BMI for WHR produced similar (although weaker) results.

2. We decided to treat urban–rural background as a categorical rather than a continuous variable for two reasons. First, towns of any size may exist in rural areas or on the fringes of large cities, therefore undermining the assumption that smaller towns are more rural and larger towns are more urban (see Hart et al., 2005). Second, and more importantly, we do not expect a monotonic relationship of this variable with choice (e.g., affluent suburbs may promote more voluntaristic-independent relationship constructions than cities). Similarly, we used participants' appraisal of the type of area they come from instead of current residence for two reasons. First, doing so avoids any imposition of definitions for "rural" or "city" based on an imperfect rural–urban taxonomy (see Hart et al., 2005). Second, and more importantly, this approach resonates better with our conception of urban–rural background as a sociocultural setting—such that history of engagement with different settings promotes different relationship constructions as a way of being—rather than a simple demographic variable. In any case, results of the study do not change if we retain only those 57% of rural participants who indicated "rural" and currently live in a zip code defined as nonmetropolitan core and those 84% of urban participants who indicated "city" and currently live in a zip code defined as metropolitan core.

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3. Including negative affect in the composite does not alter results.

8 (*never or hardly ever*). The second measure was the mean of participants' responses (using a scale of 1 = *strongly agree* to 7 = *strongly disagree*) to three items gauging social integration (e.g., "I feel close to other people in my community";  $\alpha = .72$ ; Keyes, 1998). The third and fourth measures were means of participants' responses (using a scale of 1 = *often* to 4 = *never*) to four items gauging support from friends (e.g., "How much do your friends really care about you?";  $\alpha = .88$ ) and four items measuring lack of strain from friends (e.g., "How often do they criticize you?";  $\alpha = .79$ ; Schuster, Kessler, & Aseltine, 1990). We reverse scored items so that greater numbers correspond to higher levels of each construct.

Our measure of social connectedness emphasized connections for which choice (and therefore attractiveness) is most relevant (Adams & Blieszner, 1994; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Anderson et al., 2008). Nonetheless, the MIDUS data set included a contact with family variable and a family support variable (measured in identical fashion as contact with friends and friend support) that permitted a test of hypotheses about differential effects of attractiveness for these relationship types. To the extent that family relationships afford less experience of choice, attractiveness effects should be weaker than for more choice-full connections such as friendships.

#### *Demographic covariates*

In order to control for variables that might impact WHR (or the relationship between WHR and the dependent measures), we included information on age, household income, and marital status in all analyses (see Langlois et al., 2000; Singh, 1993). In addition, we included body mass index (BMI; a measure of body fat calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared) to demonstrate effects of WHR as a measure of attractiveness above and beyond body weight (Streeter & McBurney, 2003).

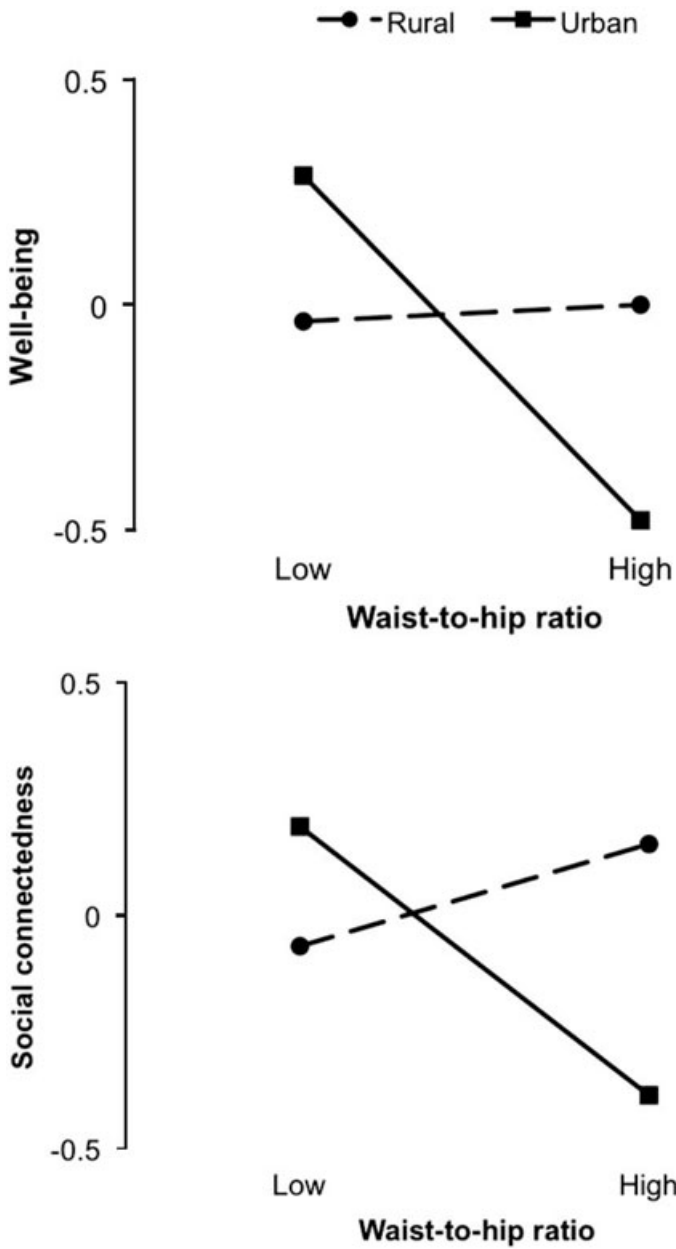
## **Results**

### *Urban–rural background as a moderator of the attractiveness–outcome relationship*

We first created indices of well-being and social connectedness by computing means of standardized scores for the four measures of each construct. We then used hierarchical linear regression analyses to analyze the data. In the first block, we entered covariates (age, income, marital status, and BMI). In the second block, we entered background, WHR, and their interaction. We excluded data from four respondents who reported extreme and improbable WHR, waist, or hip measurements. We centered the continuous predictor variable, WHR, and dummy coded background (rural = 0, urban = 1; Aiken & West, 1991).

The guiding hypothesis was that background moderates the relationship between WHR and well-being such that the frequently observed association between attractiveness (low WHR) and well-being is present in urban settings but absent in rural settings. We observed support for this hypothesis in the form of significant WHR  $\times$  Background interactions on well-being, standardized multiple regression coefficient, or  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t(576) = -3.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , and social connectedness,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $t(572) = -4.10$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) confirmed that the relationship of attractiveness with well-being was significant among urban participants,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $t(576) = -3.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not among rural participants,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $t(576) = 1.04$ ,  $p > .10$ . The relationship of attractiveness with social connectedness was also significant among urban,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t(572) = -3.91$ ,  $p < .0001$ , but not rural,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $t(572) = 1.52$ ,  $p > .10$ , participants (see Figure 1). Analyses of individual subscales produced similar results as analyses of composite measures (see Table 1). Moreover, repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with subscales as within-subjects factors revealed no interaction of Subscale  $\times$  WHR  $\times$  Background for either the social connectedness or well-being measures ( $F_s < 1$ ), indicating no variation in relationships with attractiveness across individual subscales.





**Figure 1.** Relationship of waist-to-hip ratio to well-being and social connectedness for urban and rural respondents.

*Note.* Well-being and social connectedness are mean composites of the four z-scored dependent measures associated with well-being and social connectedness, respectively. “Low” and “high” correspond to noncentered values of .7 and 1.0. Lines represent relationships without covariates.

**Table 1.** Interactions and simple slopes resulting from hierarchical linear regression for individual measures

Measure	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE(b)</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> <sup>a</sup>
Life satisfaction	Background × WHR	−4.91**	1.69	−.15	−2.90
	Rural	0.60	1.16	.03	0.52
	Urban	−4.30***	1.32	−.21	−3.25
Positive affect	Background × WHR	−1.86**	0.71	−.14	−2.62
	Rural	0.66	0.49	.08	1.35
	Urban	−1.20*	0.56	−.14	−2.15
Self-acceptance	Background × WHR	−3.02**	1.09	−.15	−2.76
	Rural	0.75	0.75	.06	1.00
	Urban	−2.27**	0.85	−.17	−2.66
Environmental mastery	Background × WHR	−2.30*	1.09	−.11	−2.11
	Rural	0.27	0.75	.02	0.35
	Urban	−2.04*	0.85	−.15	−2.39
Social integration	Background × WHR	−3.41*	1.39	−.13	−2.45
	Rural	1.56	0.96	.09	1.62
	Urban	−1.85‡	1.09	−.11	−1.70
Contact with friends	Background × WHR	−4.79**	1.63	−.16	−2.94
	Rural	0.02	1.15	.01	0.21
	Urban	−4.55***	1.27	−.23	−3.60
Friend support	Background × WHR	−1.57*	0.64	−.14	−2.47
	Rural	0.41	0.44	.05	0.93
	Urban	−1.16*	0.50	−.15	−2.35
Lack of friend strain	Background × WHR	−1.24**	0.48	−.14	−2.61
	Rural	0.39	0.33	.07	1.18
	Urban	−0.85*	0.37	−.15	−2.30

Note. Results shown are controlling for age, household income, marital status, and body mass index. WHR = waist-to-hip ratio.

<sup>a</sup>Degrees of freedom range from 566 to 574.

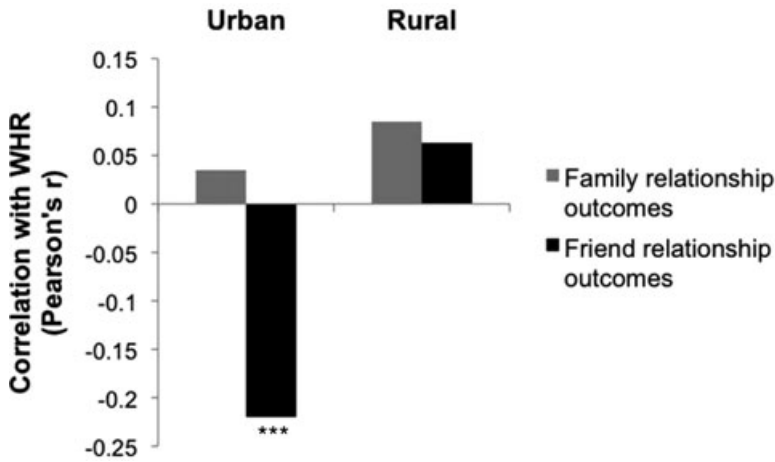
‡  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

If the observed effects are associated with voluntaristic relationship constructions, then these effects should be stronger for relatively voluntary (friend) than for less voluntary (kin) relationship types. In contrast to results for friendship, regression analyses revealed no WHR × Background effects on contact with family or family support ( $ts < 1$ ). Moreover, repeated measures ANOVAs with relationship type (friend or kin) as the within-subjects factor yielded a significant Type × WHR × Background interaction for contact items,  $F(1, 566) = 9.56$ ,  $p = .002$ , and a similar trend for support items,  $F(1, 573) = 2.60$ ,  $p = .108$ . Follow-up analyses confirmed the hypothesized pattern. Although limited to urban settings, attractiveness effects were

further limited to outcomes in relatively voluntary (i.e., friend, but not family) relationships (see Figure 2).

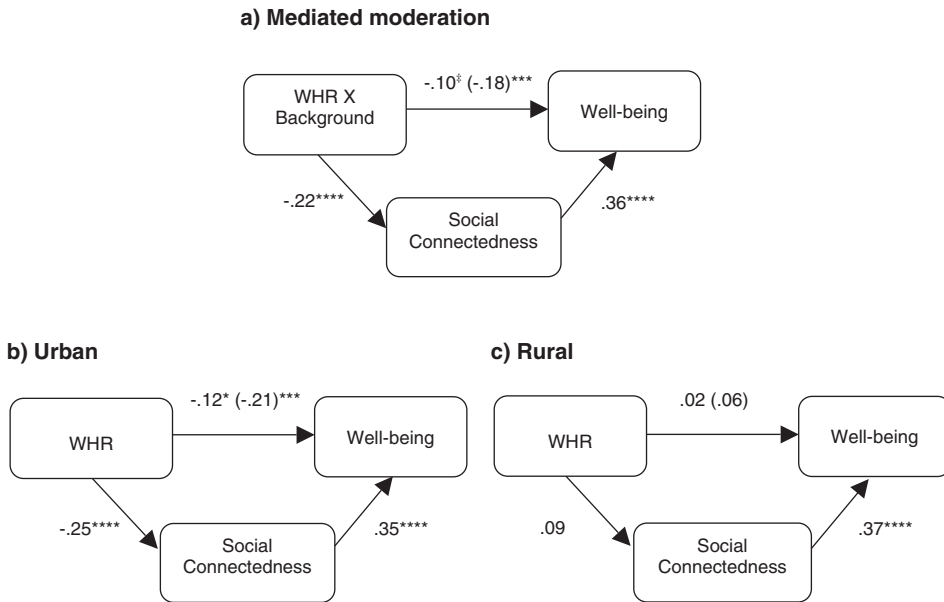
#### *The pivotal role of social relations*

We propose that low WHR is associated with better well-being in urban settings (but not rural settings) because it is also associated with better social connectedness in urban settings (but not rural settings). In other words, we hypothesize that social connectedness mediates the moderating effect of background on the relationship between WHR and well-being (i.e., the WHR × Background interaction). To test this hypothesis, we regressed well-being on the demographic



**Figure 2.** Correlation of waist-to-hip ratio and family and friend relationship outcomes by urban–rural background.

*Note.* “Family relationship outcomes” refer to the average of the standardized variables, contact with family, and family support. “Friend relationship outcomes” refer to the average of the standardized variables, contact with friends, and friend support. WHR = waist-to-hip ratio. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



**Figure 3.** Mediated moderation (a) and relationship between WHR, social connectedness, and well-being for urban (b) and rural (c) subsamples.

*Note.* Values are standardized regression coefficients. The value outside parentheses represents the coefficient controlling for social connectedness, and the value inside parentheses represents the relationship without controlling for social connectedness. WHR = waist-to-hip ratio. <sup>‡</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .



covariates (Block 1); WHR, background, and their interaction term (Block 2); and social connectedness (Block 3; see Baron & Kenny, 1986). In support of the hypothesis (and meeting criteria for mediated moderation; see Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005), the effect of the interaction term was significant before, but not after, controlling for social connectedness (Sobel's  $Z = -3.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Figure 3a).

To illuminate this effect further, we conducted simple mediation analyses for urban and rural subsamples. These analyses confirmed attenuation of the relationship between WHR and well-being among urban participants when controlling for social connectedness (Sobel's  $Z = -3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Figure 3b). Among rural participants, there was no relationship between WHR and either social connectedness or well-being, and hence no mediation (Figure 3c).

The MIDUS data set also permitted an examination of some individual difference variables as mediators. Notably, sequentially conducted regression analyses revealed that neither the concern about becoming less attractive, personality characteristics (such as extraversion, neuroticism, communality, conscientiousness, agency), or openness to experience, nor the interaction of WHR with these variables, accounts for the moderating role of background.

#### *Does attractiveness benefit or does unattractiveness cost?*

How is one to characterize the moderating effect of background on the relationship between attractiveness and well-being? Does the "free market" of social life in urban settings allow attractive people to create more satisfying connections than are available to them in rural settings? Alternatively, does the relative security of social life in rural settings contribute to overall well-being by assuring people, especially unattractive individuals, better connections than they could enjoy in urban settings? Regions of significance analyses provide some insight into these questions (Aiken & West, 1991). Relative to rural participants, well-being for

urban participants was significantly better at mean-centered WHR values below  $-.07$  and significantly worse at values above  $.04$  (corresponding to noncentered WHR values of  $.76$  and  $.87$ , respectively). Again, relative to rural participants, social connectedness for urban participants was significantly better at mean-centered WHR values below  $-.09$  and significantly worse at values above  $.01$  (corresponding to noncentered WHR values of  $.74$  and  $.82$ , respectively). Taken together, these results indicate that the structure of relationships in urban settings does allow very attractive (i.e., very low WHR) women to have better outcomes than they could in rural settings. This "free market" world of relationships also has costs, however, such that even moderately unattractive (i.e., moderately high WHR) women—indeed, for the outcome of social connectedness, those with WHR ratios only slightly higher than the mean—have significantly worse outcomes in urban settings than they would have in rural areas.

## **Discussion**

Results provide strong and consistent support for our hypothesis that the well-documented association of attractiveness with both social connection and well-being outcomes varies across contexts. Among urban participants, greater conformity to cultural ideals of attractiveness (i.e., lower WHR) predicts better well-being, partly through its relationship with positive social connectedness. No such relationships exist among rural participants. We interpret these findings as evidence for our theoretical framework regarding the sociocultural grounding of relationship (Adams et al., 2004; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Anderson et al., 2008). According to this framework, urban settings (but not rural settings) promote a "free market" of relationships (Fiske, 1991) in which attractiveness, a basis for personal choice, is an important determinant of social and psychological well-being.

One caveat to these conclusions concerns indicators of attractiveness. Because we relied on preexisting survey data, we could not investigate our hypotheses with other

indicators of attractiveness besides WHR (e.g., facial or self-perceived attractiveness). Even though WHR did not predict well-being among women in rural areas, it remains possible that another indicator of attractiveness might. As a result, the present research leaves unresolved whether the failure of WHR to predict well-being signals that attractiveness matters less or that people do not consider high WHR to be unattractive in rural settings. Likewise, we could not test our hypotheses among men because WHR is not a consistent predictor of male attractiveness. Although our attractiveness measure helps avoid some pitfalls of self-reported attractiveness (see Feingold, 1992), WHR measurements are subject to self-report error and hence to threats to reliability. Furthermore, researchers continue to debate the meaning of WHR for attractiveness (Tassinary & Hansen, 1998). Finally, as with any correlational study, a yet unidentified variable may account for observed effects. These constitute important directions for future research.

Likewise, some of the health implications of the research remain unclear. At least with regard to social connectedness and well-being, results suggest that rural settings protect women from the negative effects of higher WHR (i.e., lower attractiveness) found in urban settings. Yet, to the extent that higher WHR leads to physical health problems, the lack of social reinforcement of lower WHR in rural settings may ultimately have negative consequences for physical health. Implications for urban settings are clearer. The “free market” nature of relationships does offer very attractive (i.e., low WHR) women opportunities to maximize social connection and well-being. Nonetheless, urbanization poses clear risks for social and psychological health (and undue pressure to achieve high attractiveness) for women only slightly above average in WHR and not at high risk of negative consequences for physical health. Results suggest that, unlike their counterparts in rural areas, these descriptively normal women cannot depend on propinquity, network density, and other environmental forces to foster relationship support and fulfill belongingness

needs regardless of attractiveness. Instead, they must solicit these benefits in a highly competitive market in which slight deviations from the unrealistic attractiveness ideal yield large decrements in relationship outcomes.

In conclusion, despite some shortcomings, the primary contribution of this study is to suggest that the importance of attractiveness in everyday life does not simply reflect human nature. Instead, foundations of this psychological pattern lay in particular, relatively recent realities that promote relationship choice. Despite its importance in psychological theory and research, attractiveness may be less relevant in sociocultural environments that promote relationship experiences in which personal choice is less relevant. Accordingly, interpretation of the presence (or absence) of attractiveness effects in psychological research requires consideration of sociocultural context.

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