

# Attitude to the appearance of the spouse, depending on the marriage satisfaction

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the problem of attitude to the appearance of the spouse, depending on the satisfaction with marriage and interpersonal communication in a married couple. The question of which psychological parameters of the marital relationship are the most important in the process of constructing a visual image of a partner remains open today. At the same time, there are studies indicating that relationships within a married couple can have a significant impact on how the spouses perceive the appearance of each other. The presented study suggests that the attitude to the appearance of the spouse in a married couples significantly differs depending on the specifics of interpersonal communication and the degree of satisfaction with marriage. The study found that the spouses are satisfied and dissatisfied with marriage, having different indicators of understanding, trustful communication, similarities of views, and ease of communication, point out different attitudes to the appearance of their spouse and different satisfaction with them.

## 1 Introduction

Interest in the study of attitudes towards a person through the interpretation of his "external self" has long been present in both popular science and research papers. This concept combines a wide range of elements of appearance and expression, which allows you to build an attitude towards the holistic image of a communication partner (Labunskaya V.A.) Even more important, the problem of attitude to the appearance of another acquires when spouse.

In recent years, domestic psychology has increased the number of studies that examine satisfaction, concern about the appearance of people of different ages, and especially young people [1-5], mainly these studies are aimed at identifying the parameters that determine the attitude towards one's appearance. At the same time, consideration of how the interpretation of the external appearance of the "other" can change depending on the relationship between people is an equally important area of research in the psychology of appearance [6].

The question of what psychological parameters of marital relations are the most important in the process of constructing a visual image of a partner remains open today [7]. At the same time, there are studies indicating that relationships within a married couple can have a significant impact on how spouses perceive each other's appearance [6, 8-10]. It is

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known that lovers see each other “in rose-colored glasses”, attribute to each other the characteristics of their appearance, emphasizing beauty and attractiveness, even if they are not. Something similar can happen in couples in which relationships are characterized by mutual understanding, trust, and marriage is perceived as happy (Satir V., 2000, A.Ya. Varga). In this case, the spouses can not only idealize their partner in terms of psychological parameters, but also shift this attitude to the attitude towards his appearance.

A number of works (Labunskaya V.A., Kapitanova E.V., Andrienko T.A., Bzezyan A.A.) also present an approach that analyzes the dynamics of the significance of appearance depending on the spheres of life, provides information about the place of an attractive appearance in the hierarchy of value orientations [1-3, 11].

Based on research data, we can say that satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the appearance of your partner become a regulator of emotional states, behavior of spouses and, in general, affect the development and functioning of family relationships (Parfenov V.N.). In some works, an important connection is noted between the system of human relations and the emotional and semantic attitude to one's appearance and the appearance of another [2, 7, 12 -15].

Thus, in marriage-satisfied couples, spouses construct their idea of their partner's appearance based on their perception of their relationship with him. At the same time, the attitude to the external appearance of the spouse may change following the change in attitude to his personality, to the relationship with this person in general, the change in satisfaction with these relationships. Consequently, spouses who have a trusting relationship and a high degree of mutual understanding in communication can consider the appearance of their spouse to be more harmonious, interesting, outstanding, and even younger.

Such a phenomenon affects a deep understanding of marital satisfaction. According to S.I. Hunger satisfaction with marital relations means a subjective assessment by spouses of their relationship within a couple, which is formed as a result of the realization of ideas about the family and the consistency of these ideas in a married couple [16].

The “internal atmosphere of marriage”, based on the compatibility and harmony of the spouses, is also of great importance here. In marriage, partners solve joint problems related to raising children, housekeeping, and the distribution of free time and family leisure. If the solution to these problems is agreed, the spouses will be satisfied with the relationship [17]. Summarizing a number of works, Yu. E. Aleshina designates satisfaction with marriage as a characteristic of the subjective assessment by each of the spouses of the nature of their relationship [8].

The term “dissatisfaction with marriage” is also of great importance. In particular, E. G. Eidemiller and V. Justickis distinguish two types of dissatisfaction with marital relations: conscious and poorly conscious dissatisfaction [10]. In a situation of conscious dissatisfaction, one can see the acceptance by the spouse that family relations do not satisfy him. A marker of such recognition may be an indication of the global nature of dissatisfaction - that family life does not meet even the most minimal expectations. Such dissatisfaction is manifested in statements such as: "My family life failed", "I was not lucky with him (her)", "I made a mistake and do not feel happy in this relationship." Often the spouse justifies the continuation of the relationship by some important circumstance that prevents them from breaking up (children, housing and household difficulties, etc.). Conscious dissatisfaction, as a rule, does not lead to conflicts between spouses, but at the same time, there may be aggressive notes, direct indications that the spouse is the cause of dissatisfaction with family life [8, 10].

As a rule, in this case, the spouse loses not only internal attractiveness, but also external one, and is perceived as unpleasant, various elements of his physical self and appearance begin to annoy (even if before that they seemed cute and attractive). Moreover, in the

perception of the external appearance of the spouse, shortcomings that were not previously noticed may come to the fore.

As you know, the external appearance changes following the change in the inner world of a person. In this case, we are talking about the fact that the attitude towards the external appearance of another may change following a change in attitude towards his personality, towards relations with this person as a whole, a change in satisfaction with these relations.

Thus, satisfaction with the external appearance of the spouse becomes an integral part of the subjective experience of the current situation in which the relationship is in a married couple, and is a generalized characteristic of the type of these relationships and satisfaction with them.

## **2 Methods**

The purpose of this study was to study the features of the relationship to the external appearance of the spouse in families with varying degrees of mutual understanding in communication. The empirical object of the study was 34 married couples, 68 in total, of which 34 were men and 34 were women aged 22 to 66 years.

As a hypothesis of the study, it was suggested that there may be differences in the characteristics of attitudes towards the appearance of the spouse in families with varying degrees of mutual understanding in communication, and varying satisfaction with marriage.

The empirical objectives of the study included: the study of satisfaction with the marriage of spouses, the determination of the characteristics of communication in married couples; study of the relationship to the external appearance of the spouse in families with different levels of satisfaction with marriage; a comparative analysis of attitudes towards the appearance of a spouse in families with varying degrees of satisfaction with marriage and mutual understanding in communication.

The reliability of the data obtained was ensured by using such a mathematical procedure as comparing data by Student's t test using the computer program "SPSS for Windows".

In order to determine the degree of satisfaction with marriage among the studied spouses, we used a test questionnaire of satisfaction with marriage (V.V. Stolin, T.L. Romanova, G.P. Butenko). This test allowed us to determine the degree of satisfaction-dissatisfaction with the marriage of the subjects.

To diagnose the features of interpersonal communication of spouses with different satisfaction with marriage, the questionnaire "Communication in the family" was chosen (Yu.E. Aleshina et al., 1987). Thanks to this questionnaire, we were able to measure the confidence of communication among spouses, similarity in views, common characters, mutual understanding of spouses, ease and psychotherapeutic communication (characterizes how interpersonal communication of spouses contributes to the creation of a comfortable and intimate atmosphere in the family). The scale of ease of communication showed how easy it is for spouses to establish contact with each other, start and end a conversation, how freely spouses feel when communicating with each other.

The study of attitudes towards the appearance of the spouse was carried out using the method "Evaluative-content interpretation of the components of the external appearance", developed by V. A. Labunskaya and E. V. Belugina. This technique allowed us to determine how spouses evaluate the appearance of each other and to establish the degree of satisfaction with the appearance of spouses with different satisfaction with marriage.

### 3 Results

In order to determine the satisfaction with marriage in married couples, we used the Marriage Satisfaction Test Questionnaire (V.V. Stolin, T.L. Romanova, G.P. Butenko). Based on the data obtained, it is determined that 27.94% of all participants in the study have a low degree of satisfaction with their marriage. This is evidenced by the low scores scored during testing. Participants in this group rated their marriage as dysfunctional. Basically, they answered that people who live close, as happens in family life, they inevitably lose mutual understanding and sharpness of perception of another person, feelings have weakened. The spouses consider that one of the problems of modern marriage is that everything is "bored", including sexual relations. The subjects would like to change the character of the spouse. Study participants also chose neutral answers. For example, "It is difficult to say or find it difficult to answer."

Participants with average marital satisfaction were also diagnosed (28 people, 41.17%). Participants in this group rated their marriage as rather prosperous. Here, the participants answered that the company of the spouse is a pleasure, there were many happy moments in family life. They answered that the spouse (wife) has such advantages that compensate for his shortcomings. They are proud that such a person as a spouse (wife) is next to Them.

30.88% were spouses with high marital satisfaction (21 people). Members of this group rated their marriage as successful, i.e. prosperous. Here they said that, the feelings with which they married only intensified, they are proud that such a person as their husband (wife) is next to them, life without a spouse (wife) would not be complete. Marital relations bring them only joy, and if they turn back time, they would not exchange their spouse for anyone else. Relatives and friends consider the marriage successful.

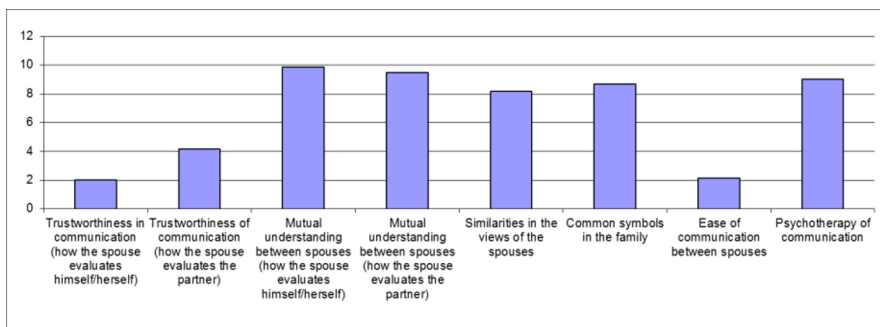
As a result of the study of the characteristics of interpersonal communication in families with different satisfaction with marriage, the following data were obtained. According to the results of the primary analysis, all married couples were conditionally divided into spouses with low and high degree of marital satisfaction. The group with high satisfaction with marriage included spouses who, according to the results of diagnostics, had the status of "rather prosperous" and "prosperous". After that, all the data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis, which made it possible to establish the significance of differences in indicators on individual scales. There were no significant differences in the structure of communication between "prosperous" and rather prosperous" families. In this regard, the association of these married couples into one group is considered quite justified.

**Table 1.** The results of a comparative analysis of the parameters of mutual understanding in the communication of spouses.

	Indicators of mutual understanding in communication	Significance of differences by Student's t-test between the groups	
		The advantaged and the disadvantaged	The advantaged and the rather advantaged
1.	Trustworthiness in communication (how the spouse evaluates himself/herself)	6.222	1.101
2.	Trustworthiness of communication (how the spouse evaluates the partner)	3.922	2.275
3.	Mutual understanding between spouses (how the spouse evaluates himself/herself)	1.779	0.314
4.	Mutual understanding between spouses (how the spouse evaluates the partner)	4.572	1.287
5.	Similarities in the views of the spouses	4.542	2.205
6.	Common symbols in the family	1.436	0.524
7.	Ease of communication between spouses	7.839	2.508
8.	Psychotherapy of communication	0.551	0.999

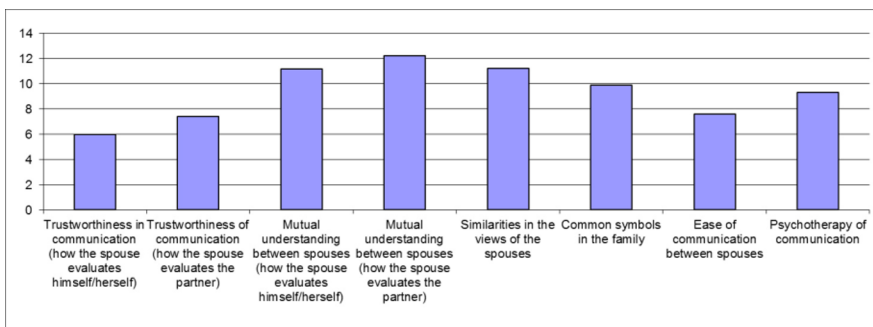
Significant differences were found in the trustworthiness of communication ( $t=6.222$ ), similarities in views ( $t=4.542$ ), mutual understanding in the process of communication ( $t=4.572$ ), ease of communication ( $t=7.839$ ) in married couples of the two groups. All these parameters are expressed significantly higher among spouses from the second group (with a high level of mutual understanding in communication).

Spouses with a low level of satisfaction with marriage from the first group demonstrate low levels of trusting communication. They talk very little about their relationships with other people. If they happen to make any mistake, they do not tell their spouse about their failures. They also believe that they are not very frank with their spouse, they have secrets from each other. Spouses communicate little with each other, they do not have a sense of community, complete mutual understanding. They can feel when their spouse is offended or annoyed by something, even if they do not want to show it. Married couples without words can understand what mood their spouse (wife) has. These families lack the sense of "WE".



**Fig. 1.** Expression rates of various communication parameters in the families of group 1 (with low level of mutual understanding in communication).

For married couples from the second group, confidential communication is typical. They are married couples who love each other. They have a mutual understanding, a sense of community. It is easy for spouses to communicate, they understand each other without words, they can feel when one of the spouses is in a bad mood or is upset about something. In such families, there are favorite phrases, expressions that mean the same thing for both. Spouses can predict what their spouse likes, very rarely there are disagreements about relationships with relatives. In the families of the subjects there is trust, support, they are frank, share various news with each other, do not hide anything from each other (they have no secrets). These families have a sense of "WE".



**Fig. 2.** Expression rates of various communication parameters in the families of group 2 (with high level of mutual understanding in communication).

As a result of a study of attitudes towards the appearance of a spouse in families demonstrating a different level of mutual understanding in communication, the following data were obtained.

**Table 2.** Indicators of average values of satisfaction with the appearance of the spouse.

	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Standard error</b>
Spouses unsatisfied marriages, with a low level of mutual understanding (group 1)	272.0000	47.35797	10.86466
Spouses satisfied marriages, with a high level of mutual understanding (group 2)	456.2381	30.07641	6.56321

Significant differences were found in relation to the external appearance of the spouse in families with different levels of mutual understanding in communication ( $t=14,835$ ). Spouses with a high level of mutual understanding evaluate the appearance (face, physique, expressive behavior) of their partner significantly higher than spouses from families dissatisfied marriage.

In families with a low level of mutual understanding in communication, the appearance of the spouse is assessed as not beautiful enough, the partner's face and physique are not well-groomed, expressive and attractive enough for the opposite sex. It is typical for them to believe that the appearance of the spouse (wife), hairstyle, clothes are nondescript, uninteresting, typical and ineffective. They believe that the expressiveness of behavior (gestures, facial expressions, gait, gaze, etc.) cannot be called graceful, expressive, harmonious, natural and attractive to the opposite sex.

For married couples with a high level of mutual understanding in communication, a high assessment of the appearance of the spouse is characteristic. They have a positive attitude towards their facial features and physique. They believe that the appearance of the spouse (wife) and its design correspond to gender and age roles. For this group of married couples, it is also common to believe that the expressiveness of the behavior of their spouse is graceful, harmonious, individual, natural and attractive to the opposite sex. Most of the subjects are not bothered by the manifestation of external signs in the spouse (wife) of aging. Spouses who are satisfied with the appearance of the spouse (spouse) believe that the spouse (spouse) looks younger than most people of their age. All surveyed couples are confident that the appearance of the spouse (wife) corresponds to their professional role.

For this group of couples, it is characteristic that the appearance corresponds to the role of "woman - mother", "man-father", "woman - wife", "man-man" and does not correspond to the role of "woman - lover", "man-lover ". Without exception, all participants believe that the expression "you won't understand whether it's a man or a woman" does not fit the appearance of a spouse (wife).

## 4 Discussion

The results obtained during the empirical study allow us to conclude that there is a relationship between satisfaction with marriage and satisfaction with the external appearance of the spouse in married couples.

The results of our study confirm the hypothesis that attitudes towards the appearance of the "other" depend on the socio-psychological parameters of relationships and relationships, and supplement the ideas and connections of the external and internal in studies devoted to the psychology of appearance (A.A. Bodalev, 1982; V.N. Panferov V.A. Labunskaya, 1999; A. Yu. Panasyuk, 2009; G. G. Pocheptsov, 2009 and others) [18]. In

addition, the study shows that the evaluative and meaningful interpretation of the external appearance in married couples can undergo changes following changes in the structure of their communication. Data have been obtained that violations in the structure of communication in married couples, lack of mutual understanding and low satisfaction with marital relations lead to the fact that the partner loses not only internal, but and external attractiveness. Thus, the idea of the various parameters of the external appearance of the spouse can be considered part of the integral system of relations in a married couple.

In many socio-psychological studies, it is noted that the image of a person, his behavioral (both verbal and non-verbal) features, his personality is an important component for establishing contact and establishing effective communication. At the same time, this study shows that both the characteristics of communication and the relationship of those who communicate are an equally important parameter influencing the attitude towards the appearance of their partner. It is the interpretation of the spouse's personality that launches the evaluative-meaningful interpretation of his appearance and satisfaction with her.

## 5 Conclusions

Thus, the conducted study allows us to conclude that satisfaction with marriage is important in the perception of one's partner in a married couple, and can influence the attitude towards his appearance. The results of the study showed that satisfaction with marriage can, as it were, “embellish” one’s spouse, attribute to him traits that describe him as young, harmonious, attractive to the opposite sex, etc. An important role is played by the process of communication and the degree of mutual understanding in a married couple, since the attitude to the external appearance of the interaction partner largely depends on the degree of satisfaction with communication. From how harmonious communication is, how deep it is and allows each of the spouses to constantly open up and improve in a couple, the vision of him as beautiful, young and well-groomed or inexpressive, plain and uninteresting can also depend.

Satisfaction, both with one's appearance and with the appearance of another, acts as a subjective experience of the situation, the characteristics of which are the types of relationships. Thus, the external appearance not only forms the socio-psychological image of a person, but also the socio-psychological image of the relationship with this person can determine the attitude towards his external appearance. Moreover, the formed idea about the appearance will include ideas about the gender, age identity of the partner, cause sympathy or trust. In this regard, we can talk about the attitude to the external appearance of a person as a complex psychological formation, which is part of the system of relations between spouses.

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