

HOW TO DATE SUCCESSFULLY

Hot or not? The question of whom we're attracted to and why has long confounded humankind's greatest philosophers, scientists, and reality-show contestants.

Scads of studies suggest that those of us looking for Mr. or Ms. Right may actually be looking for Mr. Facial Symmetry or Ms. Ideal Waist-to-Hip Ratio (about 0.7 for women). [1, 2] But other research suggests that whether a trait is attractive depends on the type of connection you're looking for. For example, women in one study found men with facial scars more appealing than other men for short-term relationships, but not for long-term ones. [3] In another study, men with beards had an edge among women seeking long-term relationships—a finding that might give clean-shaven guys with scars an idea about how to turn a one-night stand into something lasting. [4] (If all of this sounds heteronormative, it is: Almost all research on attraction involves straight people.)

Should two people seek lasting happiness, they may want to define the relationship, especially if they're already friends. As any Harry or Sally can tell you, while women often mistake males' indications of sexual interest for expressions of friendliness, men consistently mistake females' expressions of friendliness for sexual interest. [5-7] This might help explain why men are more likely to report attraction toward opposite-sex friends than are women. [7] Further complicating matters, University of Virginia and Harvard researchers found that

women were most attracted to men whose level of interest in them was ambiguous. [8]

Those of you playing at home may have noticed that men have more predictable (and physical) definitions of what makes a woman attractive than women do for men. [9] Elsewhere in the “Hey, eyes up here!” school of attraction science, people in one study tended to look at faces if seeking love, and bodies if motivated by sexual desire. [10] In another study, people tended to check out a romantic prospect’s head *and* chest—while they focused on the legs and feet of someone in the friend zone. [11]

If two people can get it together to go out, they are likely to wear red or black, especially common choices on a first date. [12] No wonder: Red makes everyone seem more attractive, both to themselves and to others. [13] What they order matters, too. Researchers have found that a woman is more likely to find a man attractive if she’s eating something that’s spicy rather than sweet. [14] A drink may also help—but only one. In an experiment, people who had the equivalent of a glass of wine were rated more attractive than people who drank either no alcohol or more than a glass, perhaps because they seemed more relaxed, or maybe because they were attractively flushed. [15]

Of course, true hotness lies within, but how do you get someone to discover your inner hottie if you lack come-hither hips or piercing, symmetrical eyes? A red shirt, a glass of wine, and a little curry could be a good start.

The Studies

[1] Little et al., "Symmetry Is Related to Sexual Dimorphism in Faces" (*PLoS ONE*, May 2008)

[2] Singh et al., "Cross-Cultural Consensus for Waist-Hip Ratio and Women's Attractiveness" (*Evolution and Human Behavior*, May 2010)

[3] Burriss et al., "Facial Scarring Enhances Men's Attractiveness for Short-Term Relationships" (*Personality and Individual Differences*, Jan. 2009)

[4] Dixson et al., "The Masculinity Paradox" (*Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, Aug. 2016)

[5] Mons Bendixen, "Evidence of Systematic Bias in Sexual Over- and Underperception of Naturally Occurring Events" (*Evolutionary Psychology*, Nov. 2014)

[6] Haselton, "The Sexual Overperception Bias" (*Journal of Research in Personality*, Feb. 2003)

[7] Bleske-Rechek et al., "Sex Differences in Young Adults' Attraction to Opposite-Sex Friends" (*Evolutionary Psychological Science*, Sept. 2016)

[8] Whitchurch et al., "'He loves me, he loves me not ...'" (*Psychological Science*, Feb. 2011)

[9] Wood and Brumbaugh, "Using Revealed Mate Preferences to Evaluate Market Force and Differential Preference Explanations for Mate Selection" (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, June 2009)

[10] Bolmont et al., "Love Is in the Gaze" (*Psychological Science*, July 2014)

[11] Gillath et al., "Eye Movements When Looking at Potential Friends and Romantic Partners," (*Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2017)

[12] Kramer and Mulgrew, "Displaying Red and Black on a First Date" (*Evolutionary Psychology*, April 2018)

[13] Berthold et al., "The Effect of Red Color on Perceived Self-Attractiveness" (*European Journal of Social Psychology*, May 2017)

[14] Miska, "Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice" (*Psi Chi*, Spring 2018)

[15] Van Den Abbeele et al., "Increased Facial Attractiveness Following Moderate, but Not High, Alcohol Consumption" (*Alcohol and Alcoholism*, May/June 2015)