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Abstract: *The goal of mate selection is to choose a partner that will contribute to one's reproductive success. This contribution can be found in two possible ways: either through genetic quality or parental investment. These qualities are generally visible by the expressed phenotype of an individual and found to be more or less attractive based on their value to reproduction. Those features found to be attractive between the sexes are generally the same although, their proportions may vary. Indicators of attractiveness include waist-hip ratio, body mass index, facial and bodily symmetry, as well as other physical attributes. These phenotypic markers indicate the fitness of a potential mate and the attraction experienced by a person of the opposite sex is as a result of the value they place on them.*

The reproductive success of an individual is based not only on their genes and ability to invest in an offspring, but also on these same characteristics in their mate. The genetic quality of a potential mating partner can generally be seen through their expressed phenotype. These physical features must be understood and responded to properly for enhanced reproductive success (RS). To avoid a depressed RS, undesirable characteristics in a mate must be avoided and desirable characteristics must be sought out. Visual cues regarding mate preference and RS differ between the sexes and include symmetry of the face and body, facial feature proportions, age, waist-hip ratio (WHR), body mass index (BMI), as well as other features. All of these traits are the reflection of the fitness of a potential mate as well as their genetic quality. This paper will examine these attractiveness cues, compare and contrast differences between male and female attractiveness, and explain why certain features are more attractive than others.

Facial and bodily symmetry are important indicators of a person's health and potential fitness. Deviations from bilateral symmetry, also known as fluctuating asymmetry (FA), are the results of

an organism's inability to effectively cope with environmental or developmental pressures. A person's exposure to adverse conditions and their level of FA provides an index of their ability to resist these effects (Tovee *et al.* 2000). It is therefore important for an individual that characteristics increasing RS and fitness are found to be attractive in a potential mate. Symmetry is associated with genetic heterozygosity and this may signal an outbred mate, a person with non-closely related parents, or the individual's defense against parasites (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002). The greater the degree of FA, the lower the potential fitness that person has. Fluctuating asymmetry can be correlated with many undesirable factors including inbreeding, premature birth, psychosis, and mental retardation (Livshits & Kobylianski 1991).

As a result of the positive health and genetic associations with symmetry, the more symmetrical a person is, the more attractive he is to the opposite sex. Several studies have set out to add credence to this belief (Tovee *et al.* 2000). Most studies have found results that suggest symmetrical faces are more attractive than those that are asymmetrical. Some have found the opposite to be true, but methodological concerns have been raised over these studies. Rhodes *et al.* (1998) took these issues into consideration and found attractiveness to be positively correlated with facial symmetry. Other studies have focused on bodily symmetry and have shown similar results. The more symmetrical a male is, the more lifetime sexual partners he will attain. These males are also more likely to be involved with extrapair copulations and are more likely to bring a woman to orgasm. Specifically regarding female bodily symmetry, symmetrical breasts are viewed as more attractive by males are correlated to health and fertility (Tovee *et al.* 2000).

Another important feature for facial attractiveness is averageness. Features that depart from average proportions as observed in the population in terms of shape, such as the ears or nose, often reflect maldevelopment and possible psychiatric syndromes (Jones & Hill 1993). Averageness, like symmetry, can provide an index to an organism's genetic quality and response to developmental stressors. It is therefore advantageous for individuals to choose partners with low deviations from the average so as to maximize RS. Many studies have created computer composites of faces and found that the blended faces were judged more attractive than most of the original. These faces had facial features in average proportions that were found to be highly desirable.

In no society, especially for females, are signs of aging considered to be sexually attractive (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002). Generally, characteristics expressing youth and vigor are seen as

attractive and desirable in a mate. Youthful characteristics are more highly correlated with fertility and reproductive success. As a whole, males prefer many neotenous, juvenile facial features in females; such as large eyes, small noses, and small chin and jaws (Jones & Hill 1993). In the same publication, Jones and Hill indicated that in several recent studies, men not only are attracted to these juvenile features, but also to some uniquely adult ones as well. Mature traits, such as high cheekbones and narrow cheeks are favored in females by males. This combination of juvenile and adult traits helps to distinguish female faces from male faces and are those found most attractive by males. Males undergo a more complete restructuring of the face during maturation. There is a larger expansion of the nose, mid-face, brows, chin, and jaw which are all counter to features found attractive in females (Jones & Hill 1993).

These facial features and the restructuring processes are caused by hormones during development. In males, the main developmental hormone, testosterone, actually suppresses the immune system while masculinizing the body. Individuals with these traits are generally of high quality genetically because of their ability to cope with high levels of testosterone even with its suppressive effects on immune function (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002). With the onset of puberty, the prominent developmental hormone found in females, estrogen causes many of the adult female features to form. These features correspond to youth and fertility and decline with age as estrogen levels drop. Therefore, women are generally seen as less attractive as they get older due to decreased ratio of estrogen to testosterone. High estrogen levels are linked with smooth skin and relative hairlessness, but as these levels drop these features fade and women appear more masculinized (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002).

There are also other hormonal markers that determine male attractiveness for females. For long-term relationships, females prefer males with more feminized features. Feminized features are possibly linked with prosocial characteristics in males. These characteristics include increased parental investment and actions that tend to benefit others by the male (Singh 2004; Fink & Penton-Voak 2002). For short-term relationships, sometimes coinciding with long-term relationships, and especially during ovulation, females prefer more masculine males (Penton-Voak et al. 2004). These males are of higher genetic quality and can therefore increase her offspring's survivorship, especially if raised with a feminized male offering parental investment.

Males with higher levels of testosterone have more sexual partners, a younger age, on average, of first copulation, and generally low levels of parental investment. They are viewed as being less warm,

less honest, and more dominating; all of these possibly as a result of their increased testosterone levels (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002). Studies have shown that the higher a female perceives her own attractiveness, the more highly she favors masculine traits in her partners (Penton-Voak *et al.* 2004). These females, due to their attractiveness, can get sexual exclusivity of masculinized males more often than less attractive females because of their increased indicators of youth and fertility. In general, females must make a decision between mating with masculinized or non-masculinized males with both strategies having costs and benefits. Masculinized males have higher genetic quality due to their ability to resist diseases and other adverse conditions, but will offer little parental investment. Feminized males will offer increased parental investment, but not high quality genes. Generally, males do not need to make similar trade-offs when selecting female mating partners. Attractiveness in females is not only linked to youth and fertility, but to prosocial personality characteristics as well. These characteristics include interpersonal, communication, and social skills that all lead to increased RS (Singh 2004).

Ideal body shapes are also different between the sexes and are found attractive in differing proportions. Many studies have focused on BMI and WHR and have discovered that both are extremely important for female attractiveness. WHR is the ratio of the circumference of the waist compared to the hips. This ratio is an indicator of the distribution of body fat and is correlated to female health and reproductive status (Singh 1993). In the same publication, Singh states healthy ranges for female WHR is from .67 to .80. Values outside of this range can many times be related to pre-pubertal status, ill-health, or reproductive problems. However, there were many methodological problems with Singh's studies (Puhl & Boland 2001). His use of line drawings poorly represented the female form and lacked realistic qualities and detail of the female form. Other results, also, did not match his proposed findings. Since WHR is linked to health and fertility, a heavy woman with a low WHR should still be viewed as more attractive than a slender woman with a high WHR. The opposite of this was found to be true and, therefore, overall size seemed to negatively affect perceived attractiveness more than WHR (Puhl & Boland 2001).

Several studies have been carried out and have found body mass index (BMI) to be a better predictor of female attractiveness than WHR. BMI is simple to calculate and is the weight in kilograms divided by the height in meters squared. Optimal BMI, for both health and fertility, is around 19. A BMI below this number negatively affects fertility strongly, causing many females to be amenorrhoeic. BMIs higher than 29 have negative effects on both health and fertility (Tovee

et al. 1999). Therefore, changes in BMI away from the optimal have strong impacts on fitness. Studies conducted by Tovee *et al.* (2002) using photographs have found that BMI is a better predictor of female attractiveness than WHR is. Females with varying WHR's and an optimal BMI were often seen more attractive than those with an optimal WHR and varying BMI's.

Singh (2004) agrees with many of the criticisms of his earlier studies as well as to the importance of BMI, but not to the lesser importance of the role of WHR in determining female attractiveness. The main difference in male and female body shape has to do with fat distribution. Testosterone limits fat accumulation for males in the lower body and increases its placement in the back and shoulder area. Estrogen decreases fat accumulation in the upper body and increases its placement in the hip, thigh, and buttocks regions. Therefore, women with an optimal accumulation of fat around these lower regions indicate their health and fertility. Singh (2004) has found that a female with a WHR of .7 and a normal BMI, was viewed to be most attractive by study participants. Females with a lower than normal BMI and a WHR of 0.7 were still viewed as attractive; not as much as those with an optimal BMI. Females with an overweight BMI and a WHR of .7, were judged to be unattractive. Thus, BMI or WHR alone cannot explain female attractiveness.

With all this said, it is important to note that BMI and WHR may represent different indicators of female fitness. WHR may be more important for specific fertility cues and pubertal status and BMI may indicate good overall fitness and fertility (Tovee & Cornelissen 2001). Also, different racial groups may have different ideal BMI's to cope with different environmental pressures (Tovee & Cornelissen 2001). This may then lead to different optimal BMI's between groups for maximal health and longevity.

Female preferences for male body types seem to be less complicated. Male bodily proportions deemed as attractive can be largely explained by their waist-chest ratio (WCR). Males with a narrow waist and broad shoulders are viewed as more attractive. This inverted triangle shape is indicative of male upper body strength and muscle development (Maisey *et al.* 1999). Male optimal BMI is the same for females in terms of health. Males on the other hand differ in ideal WHR; 0.9 for optimal health and fitness. However, a body shape that indicates physical strength seems to be more important than both BMI and WHR. (Maisy *et al.* 1999)

One's own perceived attractiveness is also extremely important to mate selection. A person's own mate value and quality affects their preferences and generally leads to the selection of a partner

of similar quality. The more attractive a person is viewed by the opposite sex, the more potential copulations are possible. Attractive people, because they possess highly favored traits, can be choosier, more demanding, and less compromising in relationships (Singh 2004). All of this is because they have more mating possibilities due to their increased value as a partner and can, therefore, more easily replace mates.

Many have argued that attractiveness is culturally determined, but these features are generally those that are easily modified (Fink & Penton-Voak 2002), such as body decorations, hair, and clothing styles. Most features considered attractive are found cross-culturally. Symmetry, age, BMI, and WHR are all correlated with health and fertility in humans. The attractiveness of persons with ideal features has many evolutionary advantages, and therefore, these features should be sought after in a mate. The healthier and higher quality genes a mate has, the higher the reproductive success will be. At times, there are trade-offs between genes and parental investment, but again each strategy has its adaptive value.

Male and female perceptions of attractiveness vary between the sexes to some degree, but the goal is the same. Both sexes want to maximize reproductive success. Years of human evolution have caused certain characteristics to be found more desirable in a mate as a result of its adaptive advantage. Attractive partners are more advantageous to future generations and as a result are those that are sought out. Outward physical features are fitness indicators and the attraction is a result of their genetic desirability or compatibility.

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