

Human Attractiveness
Appalachian State University
Patrick W Young

Humans are one of a kind in the higher realm of the animal kingdom. Humans or Homo sapiens are bipedal, meaning they walk on two legs, relatively hairless except for patterns found predominantly on males, and have a cooling system allowing perspiration. Together these make humans good at one thing: long-distance running. We have other things that make us unique, like large brains. With thought and the development of tools, we created a society, war, technology, and ways to attract the opposite sex.

Sex is fundamentally hardwired into each and every creature. Most animals instinctually procreate. Ones with attributes that are strong and would best promote the species in its niche have a higher chance of mating. Humans are the same and different in many ways. Our brains and the capacity for complex thought introduce a plethora of distinct problems: love, consent, lust, loss, hate, and rape. They have also created a complex system for how we determine attractiveness.

Physical attributes and sociological conditions affect what we find attractive. These effects are different across cultures, ethnicities, genders, and ages. Commonality does exist. Height is an attribute for males that is preferred in every culture. Height, though it does not affect the cognitive function of the individual, does grant him status. Height is associated with dominance and power in male figures. We have a tendency to remember people who are tall. This feature is found attractive by the opposite sex, who may believe tall men are healthy and protective and capable of providing for their potential families. In Western culture, height has a high sex appeal. In a historical context, height presents the idea of leadership and capability. In the United States, only three short people became president. Humans who are tall

most often have bodies larger than average but receive less negative feedback from it than obese people.

Weight is a taboo in modern culture. Being overweight used to be a sign of prosperity and wealth—a sign of status or ability to provide for one's family. In modern Western culture, it has a negative relationship with physical appearance and health. It is harmful to both men and women, and it is the most lied about feature when described in pounds. Overweight women are among the most discriminated against. Discrimination takes place in the workplace, public places, and family settings.

Skin color has been a source of discrimination throughout human history. Differing from culture to culture, this discrimination came from established groups who used the difference to subjugate people of skin color. Colorism was discrimination within a particular group's culture. An example from the class was the brown bag club, where people whose skin was darker than the bag would not be admitted though all the participants were African American.

People from Asian countries like India, China, Japan, and South Korea produce hi-melanocyte levels, making them appear darker than others in their cultures. To them, this darkness is a social symbol for being working class, for being in the sun all day, making them darker. So, many individuals in these cultures undergo skin bleaching to produce lighter skin. In Western culture, light skin is becoming more unwanted. Many of our opportunities for work are inside, and with a population that is becoming less homogeneous, fashion prescribes a great tan to look good.

Hair color presents an opportunity in Western culture for stigmatization. Blonds are dumb and fun, redheads fiery and scary, brown is the girl next store, and black is the witch of the

group. These stigmatizations primarily in the sense of color apply to the woman who partakes in dyeing and manipulating this feature for public display. Men are primarily judged on the length of hair, which dates to Roman times and war provisions. Other cultures hide or discriminate against the public display of women's hair due to the perceived softness and length. Men's facial hair is also viewed differently from culture to culture, but bearded men appear to be rugged and stern, sometimes capable, while shaven men have an appearance of youth and cleanliness.

In western culture, clothing is an ever-changing multi-billion dollar industry where it seems less is becoming more. Clothing is seen as an expression of self and a form of protection, even a symbol of expression of sexual attractiveness. This expression has rules for when and where certain motions are appropriate. In a work setting, members of the organization will most likely dress similarly and mimic their counterparts. Some organizations might require their employees to wear uniforms. Other settings, for example, clubs, have fewer social rules, but the expectation is for the wear to be clothed in articles that extenuate their natural physical attributes. These again are evaluations of western culture.

Inside culture, more specifically in group identity, status and rank are often found sexually appealing. Power presents the concept of safety in one's position and authority over other members of the group. Inside these groups, states can be identified by clothing. Lower members of an organization may be in uniforms, while those of higher status may be in a similar uniform, but of higher quality. The deduction of higher rank may be adorned badges or artifacts such as rings, necklaces, badges denoting service, or other removable articles denoting value and worth.

To this point, one has discussed physical attributes. In nonverbal communication physical attributes tend to be the most important cues. Primarily in the first impression others may have

on an individual. Having an initial perception of human attractiveness is a natural reaction of sizing one up. Attractiveness is judged in three categories: physical, social, and task.

Physical attractiveness is the listing and categorization of the attributes listed above. These attributes will vary from culture to culture, also by sex and age. An example would be how movies and media culture contain highly attractive people in their fantastical stories.

Social attractiveness is determined by the extent to which you find someone attractive because he/she will raise your social standing, popularity, or movement. One may stand with the host of the party to meet new people via an introduction, which is like an affirmation of character from the host to a potential new friend.

Task-oriented attractiveness is the extent to which you find someone attractive for their ability to complete a task. One might choose a partner for a project because they wear glasses and answer questions in class. Alternatively, someone may be picked last for dodgeball because he or she wears glasses and answers questions in class, but is small in stature and athleticism.

Attraction is dependent on both time and, as discussed, culture. Time refers to the era of the evolution of human culture. Our morals and taboos have changed, as well as what we find sexually explicit. An accessible examination would be the progression away from conservative Protestantism in America to a free progressive people for whom former social constraints do not determine the basis for love and expression. These are also two different cultures, though the one we inhabit now was originated in part by the Protestants. Let's compare modern Western culture to Middle Eastern culture. The religious values are much stronger in the Middle Eastern homogeneous culture whereby women are to wear full body cover except for their eyes. This intensifies the feminine features, which are the brow, nose and eyes, and where attractiveness

can be discerned. In Western culture, a woman's eyes are a true symbol of femininity, so there is an extensive cosmetic market around preserving their age and vibrancy as well as highlighting them and making them stand out boldly.

Attractiveness affects interactions in many forms. When making greetings, good standing may be established just by being attractive. People may be less inclined to become angered or turn away because of one's attractiveness. People are also more likely to find a mate who shares a similar level of perceived attractiveness. Moreover, attractiveness levels will affect one's ability to persuade others. For example, this past week, Appalachian State University hosted a job fair where companies sent representatives to solicit students for jobs. Every one of the representatives would be considered attractive or had attractive members as team leaders. This was a technique used to draw attention to the parent organization and display its attractiveness. It advertised why students should work for said organization and provided the persuasion needed to make it seem appealing.

Attractiveness in Western culture is, in part, decided on body type, which functions on a continuum. There are three basic body types in our species: endo, meso, and ectomorphic. Endo is considered to be a circle and is associated with funny, happy, and jolly men. Endomorphic women are seen as angry and scorned. Jack Black is an example of the endomorphic body type and always shows specific traits and actions. He is rarely seen as a leader and often is the butt of jokes.

Mesomorphic body types are traditionally the upside-down triangle, or bodybuilders. They have high muscle definition and are associated with having positive attitudes, responsibility, and capability. An actor who could represent this is The Rock, a large man with muscles that are

highly defined. Unlike Jack Black, The Rock plays severe roles and is seen as an authority, often a father figure.

Parallel lines represent the ectomorphic type, a skinny, non-muscular person. They are seen as annoying and highly effective in completing tasks. A decent example would be Michael Cera, an actor whose roles are often nerds. He is capable of completion of tasks but is socially awkward and does not fit snugly within society.

Attractiveness is a relative term and changes from person to person, time, and culture. What we find attractive today may be altered in coming generations. However, it will be aimed towards one or another natural feature of the human body.