

Interpersonal Relationships

Week 2 notes

Physical Attraction

Evolutionary Psych - Attractiveness

- Humans search out features that have the most adaptive value
- Ex: features that increase inclusive fitness = desire to pass genes on to next generation

Evolutionary Principles & Perceptions of Attractiveness

- Colour red makes women sexier
- Women prefer to wear sexy clothing during fertile periods
- Women prefer masculine men when ovulating
- Women on the pill prefer more effeminate men
- Feminine women w high-pitched voices rated as more attractive
- Women prefer scent of symmetrical men when ovulating

The Dating Game

- Trivers (1972) “Women and men have a different parental investment and play the game according to diff rules”
- Men place a higher emphasis on physical features (signs of fertility and youth → smooth skin, good muscle tone, lustrous hair, and full lips)
- Women place a higher emphasis on men’s ability to provide resources (food, shelter, territory, and protection) ...also high cheekbones, high-status clothing, and good grooming habits

Study Example

→ Buss (1989)

- Multi-cultural study: Belgium to Zambia
- Found that men prefer younger mates (2.66 years younger on average)
- Men rated good looks as important
- Women rated earning potential as important

Critiques

- Argument is that participants respond with what they think a good romantic partner out to have
- Little correspondence between preferences and actual partners in speed-dating longitudinal study
- Women’s choices more complex

Walster & AI (1966)

- 752 (376 male) students participated in a dating game on a university campus
- 1st, subject were rated by experimenters
- Then, subjects rated their randomly assigned partners
- Physical attractiveness of partner was the only predictor of how comfortable subjects felt on their date and whether they would date again

Ford & Beach (1951)

- Of 100 cultures, 5 preferred a slim body, 5 preferred a medium body, and 18 preferred a plump body, and the rest (72) did not have a preference
- Cultural differences for preferred body parts:
 1. North America: breasts, butts, and legs
 2. Japan: exposed necks
 3. Ancient China: small feet
- Body attractiveness lies not in absolute body type/size but in relative body features

What makes Women Attractive?

- A 0.7 waist-to-hip ratio

What makes Men Attractive?

- A 0.9 waist-to-hip ratio w muscular upper body

What about Gay Preferences?

→ Bailey et al (1997)

- Found that gay men preferred men who look and act masculine and were straight acting
- Lesbian women preferred partners who were female looking (no masculine features, short hair, muscular build and high weight-height ratio)

Facial Attractiveness

→ Cunningham et al (1995)

- Tested men and women from Latin, Asian, and white cultures
- Found that subjects preferred larger eyes, small noses, and a small chin
- Male subjects also favoured narrow cheek, high eyebrows and smiles

→ Men's Features of Attractiveness

- Large eyes, prominent cheekbones, and chin
- High-status clothing and good grooming habits

Recent findings

- Evolutionary psych argue that facial symmetry, averageness, and sexual dimorphism are valued as attractive features between both genders
- Argue that these features signal good health

Face Averageness & Symmetry

- Both signal overall phenotypic quality
- Not the same but both impact physical attractiveness
- Being a good detector of important qualities is most important in mate choice

Does Beauty predict Health?

- Found that participants were blinded by attractive faces when making good health judgements
- No correlation between attractiveness and health
- Low level of attractiveness were associated w poorer health and lower intelligence
- Being able to detect bad genes is more adaptive than detecting the best genes

Prototypes

- Mathematically averaged faces
- Langois et al (1994) found that participants preferred prototypes
- faces included symmetry as well

Cognitive Mechanisms

- Hypothesis: symmetry and prototypes are easier to process therefore less cognitive load
- Prototypes feel more familiar which leads to more liking

Personality

- Attractiveness paints a rosy glow around potential mates
- Leads to perception that attractive people have better personality
- Ex: we judge books by their covers

Attractiveness of Children

- Evidence say that adults give more attractive children preferential treatment
- Children made to look more or less attractive; subjects administered penalties for incorrect responses
- Men; did not discriminate based on looks
- Women; penalized unattractive children more severely

Is Preference for Attractive Faces Innate?

→ Ramsey et al (2004)

- Found that infants as young as 6 months prefer attractive faces
- Some evidence that 15 minute old infants show no preference
- Children as young as 3 prefer attractive children
- Claims that less attractive kids are mean

Is Attractiveness Stereotype Universal?

- Mixed results
- Diff cultures have slight deviations as to what aspects make a person attractive
- Western subs perceive attractive ppl as stronger, more assertive, and dominant
- Korean subs perceive them as more honest, and show more concern for others

Preferential Treatment & Attractiveness

- Studies find that we give less preferential treatment to less attractive people
- Unattractive mental patient; get more severe diagnoses and remain hospitalized for longer
- Attractive defendants are acquitted more often

Meta-Analysis of Attractiveness

- Several meta-studies find that attractive people are perceived as less modest and more vain

What Shapes our Perceptions of Attractiveness?

- Our judgements are not constant and consistent over time
- Factors affecting judgements; context dispositions such as mood and current relationship status

Contrast Effect

- Face perception research indicates that adapting to attractive faces leads to negative perception of an average face
- Our visual system is conducting a comparison between the 2 stimuli
- If adapt to unattractive faces, an average face looks more appealing

Timing of Contrast Effects

- When adaptation occurs or target face is judged after viewing more attractive faces, contrast effect emerge
- When target face embedded among attractive faces, perceived as more attractive
- Implications: get some attractive friends to hang out with you (facilitation)

Personal Dispositions

- Mood influences our rating of others' attractiveness
- In bad mood → lower attractiveness ratings

→ May & Hamilton (1980)

- Induced positive, negative, or neutral mood using music and asked women to rate photos of men
- Congruency effect → positive mood produced more attractive ratings
- Negative mood produced more negative ratings

Being in a Relationship

- Results in people rating others as less attractive
- Evolutionary explanation: mechanism for relationship maintenance to ensure its longevity via reduction of temptation

Being Single

- People become less discriminating the longer they are not in a relationship

Conclusions about Attractiveness and Attraction

- Importance of attractiveness decreases as we age and as couples continue dating
- Matching hypothesis: people seek out romantic partners of similar attractiveness level

→ Berscheid et al (1971)

- Used a computer dance technique where instead of being assigned to a partner
- People got to choose their own partner
- Most picked partners that matched their level attractiveness

Seek out Most Attractive & Settle for Equally Attractive

- Attractiveness may be used for seeking a date
- Matching may be a motive when trying to hold on to a partner

Self-Perception of Attractiveness

- Majority of people do not think themselves as unattractive
- 4% of men and 7% of women think of themselves as unattractive
- Objective attractiveness creates a lower limit on the kinds of people may pair up with
- Subjective attractiveness creates an upper limit on the kinds of partners people seek out