

The Beauty Bias: Can People Love the One They are Compatible With?

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Physical attractiveness is important in choosing whom to date. Good looking people are not only popular targets for romantic pursuits, they themselves also tend to flock together with more attractive others. Does this mean then that more attractive versus less attractive people wear a different pair of lens when evaluating others' attractiveness?

Columbia University marketing professor, Leonard Lee, and colleagues, George Loewenstein (Carnegie Mellon University), Dan Ariely (MIT) and James Hong and Jim Young (HOTorNOT.com), decided to test this theory in the realm of an online dating site. The site HOTorNOT.com allows members to rate others on their level of physical attractiveness.

Lee and colleagues analyzed two data sets from HOTorNOT.com— one containing members' dating requests, and the other containing the attractiveness ratings of other members. Both data sets also included ratings of members' own attractiveness as rated by other members.

The results, which will be published in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, are revealing. Consistent with previous research, people with similar levels of physical attractiveness indeed tend to date each other, with more attractive people being more particular about the physical attractiveness of their potential dates.

Furthermore, people prefer to date others who are moderately more attractive than them.

Compared to females, males are more influenced by how physically attractive their potential dates are, but less affected by how attractive they themselves are, when deciding whom to date. Also, regardless of how attractive people themselves are, they seem to judge others' attractiveness in similar ways, supporting the notion that we have largely universal, culturally independent standards of beauty (e.g. symmetric faces).

These results indicate that people's own attractiveness does not affect their judgment of others' attractiveness. People of different physical attractiveness levels might instead vary the importance they place on different desirable qualities in their dates. Lee and colleagues conducted a follow-up speed-dating study in which more attractive people placed more weight on physical attractiveness in selecting their dates, while less attractive people placed more weight on other qualities (e.g. sense of humor). Much like the famous line from Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, people find a way to love the ones they can be with.