

Men and women are programmed differently when it comes to temptation

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Temptation may be everywhere, but it's how the different sexes react to flirtation that determines the effect it will have on their relationships. In a new study, psychologists determined men tend to look at their partners in a more negative light after meeting a single, attractive woman. On the other hand, women are likelier to work to strengthen their current relationships after meeting an available, attractive man.

Men may not see their flirtations with an attractive woman as threatening to the relationship while women do, according to findings from a study in the July issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association.

Researchers found that women protect their relationship more when an attractive man enters the picture but men look more negatively at their partner after they've met an available, attractive woman. Men can learn to resist temptation when trained to think that flirting with an attractive woman could destroy their relationship, said lead author John E. Lydon, PhD, of McGill University in Montreal.

Researchers conducted seven laboratory experiments using 724 heterosexual men and women to see how college-aged men and women in serious relationships react when another attractive person enters the mix.

In one study, 71 unsuspecting male participants were individually introduced to an attractive woman. Roughly half the men met a "single"

woman who flirted with them. The other half met an "unavailable" woman, who simply ignored them.

Immediately after this interaction, the men filled out a questionnaire in which they were asked how they would react if their "romantic partner" had done something that irritated them, such as lying about the reason for canceling a date or revealing an embarrassing tidbit about them. Men who met the attractive "available" woman were 12 percent less likely to forgive their significant others. In contrast, 58 women were put in a similar situation. These women, who met an "available" good-looking man, were 17.5 percent more likely to forgive their partners' bad behavior.

"One interpretation of these studies is that men are unable to ward off temptation. We do not subscribe to this. Instead, we believe men simply interpret these interactions differently than women do," said Lydon. "We think that if men believed an attractive, available woman was a threat to their relationship, they might try to protect that relationship."

Using virtual reality scenarios in the last experiment, the researchers wanted to see if 40 men could learn not to flirt when mingling with attractive women if they formed a plan or strategy beforehand. The researchers prompted half the male subjects in this experiment to visualize being approached by an attractive woman. They were then instructed to write down a strategy to protect their relationship. These men were more likely to distance themselves from an attractive woman in the subsequent virtual reality scenarios.

Lydon says women, on the other hand, don't need to be trained to withhold any reactions when approached by attractive men. "Women have been socialized to be wary of the advances of attractive men," says Lydon. "These findings show that even if a man is committed to his relationship, he may still need to formulate strategies to protect his

relationship by avoiding that available, attractive woman. The success rate of such strategies may not be 100 percent but it is likely to be significantly higher than if the man was not made aware of the specific consequences of his actions."

Citation: "If-Then Contingencies and the Differential Effects of the Availability of an Attractive Alternative on Relationship Maintenance for Men and Women", John E. Lydon, PhD, Danielle Menzies-Toman, PhD, and Kimberly Burton, PhD, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Chris Bell, PhD, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 95, No. 1.

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