

# A picture worth a thousand words: New research links visual cues to male sexual memory

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A new study published in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* finds that college-aged men are very likely to remember a woman's initial sexual interest (attraction or rejection), especially when the woman in question is thought to be attractive, is dressed more provocatively, and expresses positive sexual interest.

In the study the men were shown full-body photographs of college-aged women who expressed cues of sexual interest or rejection. The participating males represented mixed sexual histories, and a capacity for varying degrees of sexually [aggressive behavior](#).

The ability to discriminate accurately between photos that the males had and had not seen previously indicated good memory for women's sexual interest. Throughout the study they were presented with previously viewed photos and new photos of the same women in which they communicated the opposite cue (e.g., rejection instead of sexual interest). The average young man showed excellent memory for whether women initially displayed sexual interest or rejection. However, males showed better memory for the woman's sexual-interest when the woman was broadly more appealing to him: she initially expressed positive sexual interest, was dressed more provocatively, and was thought to be attractive.

College-aged men at risk of displaying sexual aggression toward female

acquaintances show worse memory for college-aged women's sexual-interest and rejection cues. Lead author Teresa Treat observes, "Misremembering a woman's level of sexual interest could prompt some men to make an unwanted sexual advance and become frustrated when a woman doesn't respond as anticipated. Conversely, college-aged men who report more frequent serious [romantic relationships](#) with women show better memory for college-aged women's sexual-interest and [rejection](#) cues. This suggests that tracking and remembering a partner's emotions may play a role in the initiation and maintenance of a serious romantic relationship."

The long-term significance of the findings will depend on whether the memory of sexual interest impacts the male's subsequent behaviour, experiences, and social decisions when cues of sexual interest are presented in a more lifelike manner (i.e., in videotapes or real-life interactions). However, numerous factors other than [memory](#) for a partner's emotions play a central role in developing both positive and negative sexual experiences among young adults.

Provided by Wiley

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