

Stepping up the sexy: Research reveals our visual system is a 'sensitive lie detector'

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Queen's University professor Nikolaus Troje (Psychology, Biology, School of Computing) believes that it is the consistency of the whole appearance rather than the attractiveness of the parts.

"Most previous work on attractiveness focused on the effect of isolated features." says Dr. Troje. "The current study demonstrates how

important it is that these features fit together well."

Participants were shown schematic point-light displays that depict a person using 15 moving dots. The representation conveyed both the individual characteristics of a person's movements and their individual body shape.

Dr. Troje's team isolated these two areas and separately measured the attractiveness of individual [movement](#) styles as well as individual body shapes based on ratings obtained from his research participants. The researchers then combined the movement style of one person with the body shapes of another person and collected attractiveness ratings from these "hybrid walkers".

Based on this data, the researchers asked the question: Is the attractiveness of the isolated movement and the attractiveness of the isolated [body](#) shape sufficient to predict the attractiveness of the hybrid walker?

It is not; the hybrid walkers are deemed less [attractive](#) than predicted by the movement and the shape used to make them.

"We found that attractiveness depends on internal consistency - whether the movement and the shape match each other or not," says Dr. Troje. "Our visual system is a sensitive lie detector that perceives even the slightest inconsistencies and responds negatively to them."

The results call for re-examination of earlier research that looked at attractiveness in a piecemeal way.

"They can also be used to formulate advice to people who are working on improving their own appearance," says Dr. Troje. "What works for one person may not work for another one. If in doubt, just be yourself."

Provided by Queen's University

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