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Psychologists reveal the secret of successful wooing

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new University of Sussex study shows that,without being consciously aware, we change our judgment of a person's attractiveness based on what they do, not their physical characteristics.

Psychologist Dr Beena Khurana set up an experiment in which participants first rated the attractiveness of a set of faces presented on a computer screen. They were then asked to detect the presence of a target dot that appeared on either the left or right side of the screen. Before the target appeared, either a male or female face appeared looking either to the left or right. Participants were told to ignore the faces, but were later asked to rate faces for attractiveness again.

The results showed that faces of the opposite sex were more effective at directing participants' attention. In other words, women pay more attention to where men look and vice versa. The faces that gave accurate cues as to where the target dot appeared increased in attractiveness, but significantly more for the opposite sex.

Dr Khurana says: "The more traditional finding is that the more we find a face attractive the more we pay attention to it. Here we show that we can cause a face to become attractive as a function of the way it behaves. Note that we changed attractiveness ratings after one simple session of eye gaze cueing, so imagine what must be going on in real encounters. We think that perceived attractiveness is both dynamic and responsive to the behaviour of people."

Dr Khurana co-authored the study with Sussex psychologists Ruth Habibi (DPhil student), Joanna Po (undergraduate project student) and Dr Daniel Wright. The paper,' Jane versus John: Facial evaluation as a function of informative eye gaze' is published in the journal, Social Cognition, February 2009.

Provided by University of Sussex

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