Rating attractiveness: Study finds consensus among men, not women

June 26 2009

Hot or not? Men agree on the answer. Women don't.

There is much more consensus among men about whom they find attractive than there is among women, according to a new study by Wake Forest University psychologist Dustin Wood.

The study, co-authored by Claudia Brumbaugh of Queens College, appears in the June issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

"Men agree a lot more about who they find attractive and unattractive than women agree about who they find attractive and unattractive," says Wood, assistant professor of psychology. "This study shows we can quantify the extent to which men agree about which women are attractive and vice versa."

More than 4,000 participants in the study rated photographs of men and women (ages 18-25) for attractiveness on a 10-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very." In exchange for their participation, raters were told what characteristics they found attractive compared with the average person. The raters ranged in age from 18 to more than 70.

Before the participants judged the photographs for attractiveness, the members of the research team rated the images for how seductive, confident, thin, sensitive, stylish, curvaceous (women), muscular (men), traditional, masculine/feminine, classy, well-groomed, or upbeat the

people looked.

Breaking out these factors helped the researchers figure out what common characteristics appealed most to women and men.

Men's judgments of women's attractiveness were based primarily around physical features and they rated highly those who looked thin and seductive. Most of the men in the study also rated photographs of women who looked confident as more attractive.

As a group, the women rating men showed some preference for thin, muscular subjects, but disagreed on how attractive many men in the study were. Some women gave high attractiveness ratings to the men other women said were not attractive at all.

"As far as we know, this is the first study to investigate whether there are differences in the level of consensus male and female raters have in their attractiveness judgments," Wood says. "These differences have implications for the different experiences and strategies that could be expected for men and women in the dating marketplace."

For example, women may encounter less competition from other women for the men they find attractive, he says. Men may need to invest more time and energy in attracting and then guarding their mates from other potential suitors, given that the mates they judge attractive are likely to be found attractive by many other men.

Wood says the study results have implications for eating disorders and how expectations regarding attractiveness affect behavior.

"The study helps explain why women experience stronger norms than men to obtain or maintain certain physical characteristics," he says. "Women who are trying to impress men are likely to be found much

more attractive if they meet certain physical standards, and much less if they don't. Although men are rated as more attractive by women when they meet these physical appearance standards too, their overall judged attractiveness isn't as tightly linked to their physical features."

The age of the participants also played a role in attractiveness ratings. Older participants were more likely to find people attractive if they were smiling.

Source: Wake Forest University (news : web)

Citation: Rating attractiveness: Study finds consensus among men, not women (2009, June 26) retrieved 17 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-06-consensus-men-women.html

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