

Your gender-stereotypic genes may be giving you a leg up in dating

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Your success at speed-dating might be influenced by your genetic make-up and your potential partner's ability to detect so-called "good genes," or genetic fitness. This is according to a study in Springer's journal *Human Nature* by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, in the US. The research team found that participants who were more likely to be asked on a second date had genotypes consistent with personal traits that people often desire in a romantic partner - social dominance/leadership in men, social sensitivity/submissiveness in women.

The study leader, Karen Wu, wanted to find out if [mate selection](#) could actually be influenced by people's ability to quickly detect socially designated "good genes." Her team turned to speed-dating to test their predictions in a real-life scenario. In such meet-ups, participants only had a few minutes to assess the short- and long-term potential of their speed-dating partners, and to decide whether or not to offer their partners a second date.

Wu's team recruited 262 single Asian Americans to have three-minute dates with members of the opposite sex. After each speed-date, participants were asked whether or not they wanted to offer their partner a second date, and how desirable they found the person as a [romantic partner](#). Participants were notified of a "match" (and thus obtained each other's contact information) only if they both offered each other another date.

When examining the DNA samples collected from participants, the researchers focused on two polymorphisms (on two different genes) that were previously linked to social dynamics. The ?1438 A/G polymorphism is part of the genetic make-up of the serotonin system and has been linked to social dominance and leadership. The A118G polymorphism, which has been linked to social sensitivity, is part of the opioid receptor gene that contributes to people's capacity to experience social pleasure and pain, and their need to have social contact.

Wu's team found that men and women with genotypes consistent with prevailing gender norms were more likely to receive second date offers. They were also seen as more desirable short- and long-term romantic partners.

When it came to ?1438 A/G, men who carried its G-allele variation were rated as more desirable potential mates and were more likely to receive second date offers. In contrast, women who carried this G-allele were more likely to be given the cold shoulder by men.

With A118G, women with the G-allele enjoyed greater speed-dating success. However, their male counterparts weren't as lucky. Men with this G-allele were less desirable to their speed-dating partners.

"These results suggest that personal attributes corresponding to A118G and ?1438 A/G can be detected in brief social interactions, and that having a specific genetic variant or not plays a tangible role in dating success," says Wu. "This highlights the importance of the opioid and serotonergic systems to human mate selection, particularly their potential to enhance or dampen one's allure to potential partners."

She believes that this genetic effect could extend beyond romantic attraction to other social situations, such as job interviews.

The research team notes that the preliminary results need to be replicated to also take into account other ethnic and age groups, and different socioeconomic backgrounds.

More information: Karen Wu et al, Gender Interacts with Opioid Receptor Polymorphism A118G and Serotonin Receptor Polymorphism –1438 A/G on Speed-Dating Success, *Human Nature* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s12110-016-9257-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-016-9257-8)

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