Modern Attractions

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Just like every other living organism on planet Earth, humanity’s ultimate goal is survival. Sexual selection is important to encourage healthy reproduction. Attraction is a necessary and exciting part of the human experience. Some say that every human impulse is driven by sex, and they may not be that far off.

Attraction, as defined by Clint Kelly, assistant professor of ecology, evolution and organismal biology, is “the satisfaction or meeting of certain preference criteria in another individual.” This means we seek potential mates by assessing their ability to provide superior, healthy offspring.

“Female humans are attracted to males that provide good genes and abundant resources. Therefore, females find symmetrical faces, greater height, v-shaped torso and facial features related to dominance attractive because they signal good genes … Male humans prefer fertile mates and pay attention to traits and signals that convey this information. Thus, males pay attention to youthful looks, low waist-to-hip ratio and full breasts,” Kelly says.

Besides physical traits, females frequently look for other traits in males. Females desire resources from men. Long ago this may have been berries, hides, meat and other valuables early humans could provide. In the present day this resource is money and its purchasing power. Luxurious cars and clothing, along with other signs of material wealth, are inherently attractive to females. But what about art? Art is neither a physical trait, nor is it necessarily a sign of resources. And yet it plays a huge part in attraction. It’s a well-known fact that girls like guys that play the guitar. Kelly explains that even this attribute has been a part of the human game of attraction for quite a while.

“Possibly as early as 100,000 years ago we started painting our bodies with red ochre and then graduated to putting pictures on rocks. This was probably done mostly by men in an effort to woo discriminating and choosy females. In most animals it is the male that works to woo the choosy female using colorful traits, complicated songs and vigorous displays,” Kelly says. “These traits and behaviors tell the female something about the male as a mate: what the quality of his genes are, whether he was raised under good conditions, what kind of parent he will be, etc. So, similarly, sexual selection likely favored the ability to create art and music in men in order to communicate information to the potential mates about their quality as a mate.”

Attraction is not limited to other human beings. The ocean, mountains, flowers, birds and other natural wonders are found beautiful in our eyes. Associate professor of landscape architecture Michael Martin believes this sense of natural beauty, like many aspects of the human psyche, is formed by both nature and nurture.

“Maybe it’s very basic and related to survival, in an atavistic sense … I also imagine that how you feel about a certain environment might relate to how or where you grew up. I still find the Midwest to be uncomfortably ‘open,’ because of the flatness and the preponderance of open fields. But I grew up in North Georgia, which by comparison is very hilly and wooded – a landscape of much more intimately-scaled spaces. I love being in the woods; other people find dense woods to be confining and scary,” Martin says.

All of these facts can give us important information about ourselves and the opposite sex. Men, while it’s true that women naturally prefer more masculine and wealthy males, don’t forget about an important factor: confidence and artistic talent are redeeming qualities. Women, yes it’s true – men do think about sex quite frequently, and their sense of attraction lies heavily on physical appearance. From this formula, it would only make sense that the richest men find the most attractive women, which is easily confirmed by looking at our culture. For the rest of us, don’t get discouraged. We as humans are gifted with very large brains – as long as both sexes take some time to use theirs, we’ll be fine.