

mxShagpile



The nose knows

Beauty, brains and bucks are desirable traits of a mate, and while human attraction is more scientific than we think, it's important to follow your nose.

Selecting a mate is the most crucial decision of our lives.

We spend a huge amount of time and energy trying to find that special someone. Our appetite for a relationship fuels a billion-dollar industry of personals ads and online dating. Yet we're often not satisfied.

A recent survey of more than 900 people who had used online dating found that three-quarters had not found what they were looking for. We seem as much in the dark as ever about who is a suitable match for us.

Mate selection is a highly complex process. We are consciously aware of only part of it; the rest is either inherently unpredictable or operates outside our awareness, which leads us to the perception that love is about chemistry.

Let's start with the conscious part. There are some things we all find attractive. Men tend to desire women with features that suggest youth and fertility, including a low waist-to-hip ratio and full lips. Studies confirm that women have strong preferences for a virile male beauty – taut bodies, broad shoulders, clear skin and defined, masculine facial features, all of which may indicate sexual potency and good genes.

We also know that women are attracted to men who look as if they have wealth, or the ability to acquire it, and that both sexes strongly value intelligence in a mate.

Preferences for these qualities – beauty, brains and resources – are universal. The George Clooneys and Angelina Jolies of the world are sex symbols for predictable biological reasons.

Of course, we don't all fall in love with super-mates like these. An average person who did would be headed nowhere, because super-mates are inaccessible to all but a few.

What about the less obvious cues of attraction? Fascinating work on genetics and mate preferences has shown that each of us will be attracted to people who possess a particular set of genes, known as the Major Histocompatibility

Complex (MHC), which play a critical role in our ability to fight pathogens. Mates with dissimilar MHC genes produce healthier offspring with broad immune systems. And the evidence shows that we are inclined to choose people who suit us in this way: couples tend to be less similar in their MHC than if they had been paired randomly.

How do people who differ in their MHC find each other? This isn't fully understood, but we know that smell is an important cue. People appear to literally sniff out their mates. In studies, people tend to rate the scent of T-shirts worn by others with dissimilar MHC as most attractive. This is what sexual "chemistry" is all about.

The message here is trust your instincts – except that there is an alarming exception. For women taking the Pill, the reverse is true: they prefer men whose MHC genes are similar to their own so risk choosing a mate who is not genetically suitable. Best to smell him first and go on the Pill afterward.

This is a prime example of how chemical attraction can depend on your circumstances.

Another example? Attraction can fluctuate over the menstrual cycle. Men find women's scents as more attractive when they are near ovulation, and US studies have found that men are more loving toward their partners as ovulation approaches.

Having sex can also complicate the way we perceive a potential partner. After sex, the brain releases oxytocin, which results in that warm feeling of love and cuddliness. Watch out: Sex on a whim can lead to feelings of love for a person who is entirely wrong for you. You've been warned.

■ Source: NEW SCIENTIST/NY POST

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

DR BELLA



"Despite my darling's dishiness, he had a more than passing interest in his own sexual appeal"

Never date a man prettier than you.

This caveat is usually uttered by older women to younger women after one too many (husbands and/or drinks).

Having a honey who outshines you in the looks department is considered a giant gaffe, like texting an ex when drunk. But not dating a bloke because he's too hot? Ridiculous.

My last boyfriend was a much younger, 6'2, Nigerian Adonis. (Being part of trendy race-dating also gave me kudos in the philanthropist department. I consider it my personal contribution to world peace.)

But despite my darling's dishiness, he was somewhat vacuous. He also had a more than passing interest in his own sexual appeal and was, before meeting me, rather promiscuous.

All the standard hallmarks of the traditional bimboy: very pretty, rather dim.

Dr Jean Veevers's research shows that as women become more financially independent, they offer men enticements similar with those older men have historically given younger women.

Sociologist Pepper Schwartz says younger men increasingly find women who have an air of independence and accomplishment a turn on. What are the pros and cons of dating a bimboy: someone younger, hotter and less intelligent?

Unable to contact Demi Moore about her *Punk'd!* bimboy Ashton Kucher, I created my own list.

Although dating a bimboy provided no help with crossword puzzles or stimulating dinner conversations, on the upside, his height meant I

wasn't restricted in terms of shoe choice. Short-boy dating can greatly compromise a well-planned look. There's a reason strippers don't wear Mary Janes, runners or Ugg boots.

My bimboy's libido also bordered on mythical. I didn't have to work very hard in bed. In fact, the only work I had to do was to convince him that sex before sleep, midway through sleep and in the morning was much too much for a woman of my delicate age.

I took much pleasure in walking arm-in-arm with my trophy-boy – the reverse of a thousand scenes in a thousand movies.

But on the downside, once at the party or club, women were all over him.

Drawbacks were also found in the privacy of our own bedroom, or rather his: a futon pushed up behind the couch – very glamorous, I know.

My bim-man's perfect chest, washboard stomach and blemish-free skin accentuated my sagging breasts, chubby tum, and wrinkled, sun-damaged skin. And he took to mirrors like a baby to shiny objects.

Over time I realised I never could love him as much as he loved himself.

As women become more financially secure, the Bimboy will become a phenomenon, popping up in supermarkets, dance-clubs and dinner parties across the country.

In sum, for the cosmopolitan woman, the bim-man provides for a fantastic fling or ego-boost and is an altogether charming postmodern accessory.

But as fashionistas know, sometimes class is better than flash.

NEXT WEEK

mx
FAST, FUN
FAB, FREE

MEET THE MAN WHO'S UNBEATABLE AT PICK UP CHIX