

# **Bringing sexy back: What Australian men and women find attractive in a potential mate**

May 19 2021

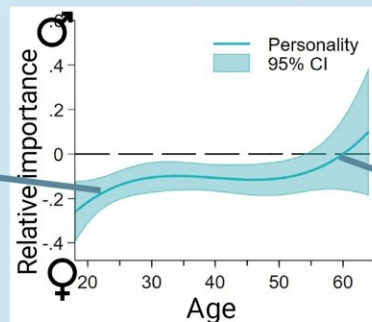
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# What factors matter in sexual attraction for men and women of different ages?

## For young adults (18-25) Personality factors

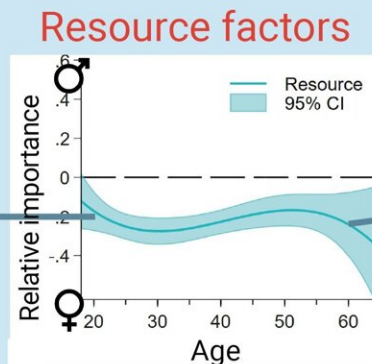
Women ranked personality factors as much more important than did men



## For older adults (60+) Personality factors

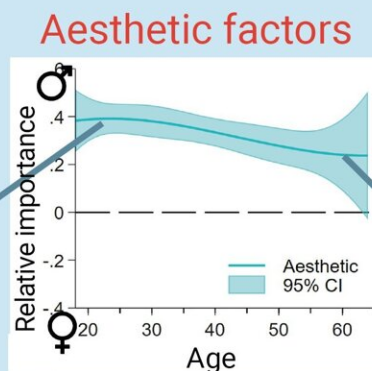
Men rated personality factors as slightly more important than did women - a reversal of the pattern

Women ranked resource factors as somewhat more important than did men



Women ranked resource factors as much more important than did men, an increase in the sex difference gap

Men ranked aesthetic factors as much more important than did women



Men continued to rank aesthetic factors as more important than did women, though the sex difference decreased

Whyte S, Brooks RC, Chan HF, Torgler B (2021) Sex differences in sexual attraction for aesthetics, resources and personality across age. PLoS ONE 16(5): e0250151. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250151>

What factors matter in sexual attraction for men and women of different ages?  
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When it comes to sexual attraction, women rate age, education, intelligence, income, trust, and emotion connection higher than men who put a greater priority on attractiveness and physical build says new research from QUT.

The importance of such characteristics does change with age though, with both men and women looking for the personality traits of openness and trust as they get older. *Sex Differences in Sexual Attraction for Aesthetics, Resources and Personality Across Age* has just been published by international journal *PLOS ONE*.

QUT behavioural economist Dr. Stephen Whyte says the study explored how male and female sexual attractiveness [preference](#) changes across age, using data collected from more than 7,000 people aged between 18 and 65 who participated in a national online Australian Sex Survey in 2016.

"Sexual [attraction](#) is a key driver of human mate choice and reproduction. Our results indicate distinct variations within sex at key life stages which is consistent with theories of selection pressure," Dr. Whyte said.

"Micro level decision making on sex, reproduction and relationship formation influences a wide variety of macro trends and [social norms](#), including [gender roles](#) and equity, labour market dynamics, [fertility rates](#)

, wider sexual liberalism, politics, religion and the broader institution of marriage.

"Numerous scientific disciplines have long demonstrated the human preference for attractive mates and the ability to quickly identify attractiveness in others reflect a preference to reproduce what are considered good genes. And while both sexes prefer a physically attractive mate or potential partner, males have been shown to report stronger such preferences for attractiveness.

"Females are more selective about other characteristics because their time for reproduction is more limited so they can't risk choosing poorly.

"However, most studies on sexual attractiveness rely on limited age distribution skewed to the younger population. We have taken data from a much larger age range to judge how the pattern of sexual preferences may differ with age."

Dr. Whyte said their analysis was based on participant responses to nine different versions of the same question format about the level of attraction individuals expect in the aesthetic, resource, and personality characteristics of potential mates.

"We asked participants to rate the importance of nine characteristics associated with [sexual attraction](#)—age, attractiveness, physical build/features, intelligence, education, income, trust. Openness and emotional connection," he said.

"Firstly, we found males regard both attractiveness and physical build as more important characteristics for sexual attraction relative to all other traits compared to women.

"Both sexes, meanwhile, regard income as the least important factor but

females do place a higher importance than men on education and intelligence although men regard openness as slightly more important than the females surveyed.

"It is as men and women age their preferences come closer together, with both sexes placing greater importance on openness and trust while the relative importance of [emotional connection](#) is as important for males and females across all age groups.

"Interestingly, for both men and women across the years of peak fertility and income earnings (18-50 years) participants who stated extremely high preference for one trait, likely stated extremely high preference for multiple traits."

**More information:** *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0250151](#)

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