

Preferred traits vary depending on short or long-term relationship

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Mitch Brown, University of Arkansas. Credit: University of Arkansas

A study by researchers at the University of Arkansas confirms previous work showing that women prefer physical strength—upper-body strength, specifically—in short-term contexts, but find that

affiliative—or benevolent—humor is a more attractive trait for success at long-term relationships.

"Our data indicate that strength and [humor](#) are independent in their influence on women's preferences, though we continue to show that women prioritize men's strength in short-term relationships and affiliative humor in long-term contexts," said Mitch Brown, psychology instructor in the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. "These data provide evidence for how women navigate mating markets through various fitness cues."

The [researchers' study](#) was published in *Personal Relationships*.

Brown's research focuses on the use of evolutionary perspectives in understanding motives that shape social perceptions and interpersonal preferences. He studies how people prioritize [physical features](#) and behaviors in determining preferences for short-term and long-term mates. For this study, Brown and psychology students Madeline Brown and Bridget O'Neil sampled the preferences of 394 women, identifying as either heterosexual or bisexual, at a large public university. With a mean age of 19 years, 251 participants identified as single and 143 as partnered.

Historically, [reproductive success](#) has been dependent on the identification of a mate with physical and psychological traits that satisfy relevant reproductive goals. The ideal has been to select a mate who is both physically attractive and possesses positive behavioral attributes. However, the improbability of finding this mate has necessitated prioritization of one set of traits over another.

The researchers sought to determine how women evaluate the desirability of strong men employing affiliative and aggressive humor across short-term and long-term contexts. Affiliative humor was defined

as benevolent, a type of humor that attempts to connect or associate rather than offend or alienate. The latter type of humor, aggressive, was emphatically undesirable for women in long-term contexts.

The researchers found no interactive effects between [physical strength](#) and humor. In other words, strength and humor operated independently in their influence on women's preferences. Overall, Brown said, their results indicated that women's choices in a [male partner](#) are varied and "frequently involve evaluating the costs and benefits of various constellations of traits."

More information: Mitch Brown et al, Contextual desirability of strong men employing affiliative and aggressive humor, *Personal Relationships* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/per.12456](https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12456)

Provided by University of Arkansas

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