

We date and marry people who are attractive as we are, new analysis finds

June 27 2024, by Eric hamilton



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In good news for our egos, both men and women were pretty accurate at rating their own physical attractiveness, according to a new study. Couples also tended to be well-matched on their attractiveness,

suggesting that we largely date and marry people in our own "league," at least as far as beauty is concerned.

These findings come from a new analysis of nearly 1,300 opposite-sex couples and 27 individual studies led by Gregory Webster, Ph.D., the R. David Thomas Endowed Professor of Psychology at the University of Florida. Webster and his collaborators at Yale University and the State University of New York at Fredonia have [published their findings](#) in the *Personality and Individual Differences* academic journal.

Not only were men and women fairly good at judging their own attractiveness, but couples also tended to have similar views of their own beauty. For example, men who rated themselves as attractive tended to date [women](#) who had similar self-ratings.

The data came from studies that asked members of couples to rate their own physical attractiveness. Their pictures were then shown to strangers who provided objective measures of their beauty.

Webster's team re-analyzed a landmark meta-analysis, originally performed in 1988, which gathered data on 27 different studies that asked how attractiveness correlated within couples. In the past 34 years, researchers have developed new methods to analyze data from couples, providing the perfect opportunity to reassess the previous study in a new light.

"There's an extensive line of research on meta-analysis. There's an entire line of research on how to analyze data for couples. But they haven't really been put together before," Webster said.

That means the original data goes back even further, to as far as 1972. But the findings are still meaningful in 2024, Webster said.

"It's possible that some aspects of attraction have changed over time, such as with the rise of online dating, where all you have at first are pictures," Webster said. "On the flip side, the fundamentals of what humans consider to be attractive across cultures and across time are pretty consistent."

The [meta-analysis](#) allowed Webster's group to ask how these self-ratings change over relationships of different durations. Some studies focused on young, dating [couples](#), while others were geared toward long-married spouses. The researchers discovered that among people who had been together longer, men were more accurate at judging their own attractiveness—perhaps as the overconfidence of youth waned and men started viewing themselves more realistically.

"Men might be getting more realistic," Webster said. "Nobody's usually getting more attractive over time."

More information: Gregory D. Webster et al, Dyadic secondary meta-analysis: Attractiveness in mixed-sex couples, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2024.112730](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112730)

Provided by University of Florida

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