

evolutionary biologists Steven Gangestad and Randy Thornhill. Their study began by measuring seven body points, such as elbows, and ended with the theory that symmetry translates not only to better DNA, and better treatment from parents, but also to better sex.

Men with symmetrical elbow bones are simply more fascinating: they have more fun in the bedroom, more frequently, with more-beautiful partners. Evolutionary biologists have predicted not only sexual prowess on the basis of body symmetry measurements, but also the levels of physical dominance, emotional stability, and day-to-day health, and even the likelihood of fidelity.

Measuring elbows seems like running one of those free Internet background checks: fast, free, with more information than you needed or wanted. But what if there are no overt cues, such as elbows, to measure? Can you be fascinated by beauty, even if you can't actually *see* the person?

Are Beautiful People Still More Attractive with the Lights Off?

Buried deeper in Gangestad and Thornhill's research is an even kookier finding: the beauty bias still applies in the dark. Attractive people, a study found, literally smell different. Or more specifically, better. Even when everything is hidden from view, women will still choose symmetrical males.

A final blow to nonsymmetrical guys everywhere: with highly symmetrical partners, women were found to be more than twice as likely to climax during intercourse (which offers a biological advantage, by funneling sperm into the uterus to promote conception).

For the less symmetrical among us, take heart. While you'll never be able to control certain fascination influences, other influences are more malleable. Attracting potential mates might be as simple as pulling your T-shirt out of the laundry hamper.

The Laboratory Known as a Strip Club

Multiple studies have confirmed that women are more fascinating to their mates while ovulating. When women are especially fertile, their male partners become more attentive, are more vigilant, and engage in "mate-guarding" behavior to keep other men away. To find out more, researchers from the University of New Mexico "examined ovulatory cycle effects on tip earnings by professional lap dancers working in gentlemen's clubs." In other words, they wanted to know how this dynamic played out in the sex laboratory known as a strip club.* The researchers found that the strippers' tips fluctuated depending on their menstrual cycle. While ovulating, fertile strippers earned almost 30% more in tips than they did during other times of the month. However, dancers on birth control pills saw no such boost in tips. Birth control essentially wiped out these dancers' prime earning days. Over the course of a year, using the pill could potentially mean thousands of dollars in lost income.[†] If your genes can be responsible for attraction, and the birth control pill can reverse that attraction, what other fascinations are driving your behavior without your knowledge? The answers often lie in how your brain becomes captivated by communication.

On our journey through flirtation, we've seen how our personal notion of attractiveness is rooted deep within us. We might be irresistibly, magnetically drawn to a certain person without having any idea that our desire is not a conscious choice. It doesn't end with physical attraction—it only starts there. Brands fascinate in similar deeply rooted ways.

* Imagine the conversation between a researcher and a stripper: "Hello there, Kandi, you look very nice this afternoon. Those six-inch Lucite heels make you really, ah, tall. Anyway, in order to get reimbursed by the university for this study, can I please get a receipt for any dollar bills I tip you?"

† A stripper's income rises and falls with the ability to fascinate, and guess what: they're not the only ones. We all use involuntary signals to persuade clients.