

Have you got the look?

by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

After the indulgence of the festive season – and even more if you're looking for a new relationship in a New Year – you're bound to have some thoughts about your physical appearance.

The way others see us is something everyone thinks about. We all have our own little insecurities and very few people are 100 % happy with the way they look. So just how important is physical attractiveness when it comes to choosing a potential partner?

Marks out of ten

It's worth thinking about what we ourselves find attractive in others. If you were to write a list of what you're looking for in a partner, stunning good looks are unlikely to be at the top of the list. **In a recent national survey, both men and women tended to rate other factors – such as personality and intelligence – above good looks.** Most people also tend to agree that very attractive people don't necessarily find it any easier to find a partner or to sustain a relationship.

But for all our talk about beauty being only skin deep, we know that our looks have a real impact on other people's perception of us. We tend to make all sorts of initial assumptions based on someone's looks, even before we get to know them properly.

The comfort factor

Research has consistently shown that we also tend to go for people near our own level on the scale of attractiveness. This is not so much because we think we can't do any better, but rather because we want someone we feel comfortable with. It's possible that a mismatch in terms of physical attractiveness could cause problems of resentment and jealousy as a relationship progresses.

But is there some objective and universal scale of attractiveness which scores us somewhere between 0 and 10? Well, some people think there might be. Just look at the studies that have claimed to come up with a blueprint for the perfect face – balanced and symmetrical. In real life, of course, we all have differing tastes and preferences. Some people prefer a more rounded shape, while others go for the slender or athletic type. **Beauty – to some degree at least – really is in the eye of the beholder.**

Mirror, mirror on the wall

So how would we go about rating our own attractiveness on a scale of 0 to 10? A look in the mirror and the comments we receive from other people may give us some idea of how attractive we are. But there can often be some discrepancy between your view of yourself and the opinions of other people. Women are notorious for believing they would be more attractive if they were thinner, but this is simply not true in many cases, while for others it may not make the vast difference they believe it would. And there will always be those lucky (or perhaps unlucky) few who believe they are God's gift ... but who are not quite perceived that way by the rest of the world!

Don't go changing

So when it comes to physical appearance, the old advice 'why worry about things you can't change' probably makes good sense. Think about what makes someone else appear more attractive ... they're nicely dressed, appear to look after themselves and take pride in looking their best. Appearance certainly isn't everything, but by taking some care to make a positive initial impression, you give can send out a very powerful message. It's often about relatively simple things like clothes or hair. Put a little effort into them and you won't have to waste so much time worrying about the things that you really can't change.

Do you have any questions that you would like to see discussed in future editions of the PARSHIP newsletter? Then contact Dr Lukats at drlukats@parship.co.uk.*

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*Any reader questions that appear in the PARSHIP.co.uk newsletter will do so anonymously. Unfortunately, PARSHIP.co.uk and Dr Victoria Lukats cannot enter into personal correspondence on relationship issues raised by readers.

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