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## Secrets Between the Sexes

by [Jill Harness](#) - May 21, 2010 - 8:48 AM

Men and women are in a constant struggle to better understand the complex inner workings of one another's minds. Science has done its part to help us separate the fact from fiction, and some of the results may surprise you. Do men actually like skinny women with long legs? What makes a woman like a man who appears masculine over a feminine-looking man, or vice versa? Read on to find out.

### Does (Body) Size Matter?



While some women think men are obsessed with skinny, waifish women, men seem to be more attracted to curvy girls like Christina Hendricks and Marilyn Monroe. This has been backed up by a number of studies, including one performed by [Scotland's St. Andrews University](#) that showed men don't like skinny women nearly as much as more average-sized women, and many seemed to think size zero women look unhealthy.

As for curvy women, it seems that men's brains respond to hourglass figures like they are a drug. While it has long been said that shapely hips have been attractive to men because they are better for carrying children, a [study by Georgia Gwinnett College](#) showed that curvy women's bodies activate parts of the male mind that are associated with rewards and parts of the brain that are activated by drugs and alcohol.

[Image courtesy of [S's Flickr Stream](#).]

### The Skinny on Showing Skin



### Your Name Is No Accident

27 Facts You Don't Know About Your Personality and Future. But Should! [Numerolojist.com](http://Numerolojist.com)

### Confused About Carbon?

Download Our Free Information About Carbon Footprint. Learn More Today! [www.The-Green-Guide.info/](http://www.The-Green-Guide.info/)

### 1 Rule of a flat stomach:

Cut down a bit of stomach fat every day by using this 1 weird old tip. [Thedietsolutionprogram.com](http://Thedietsolutionprogram.com)



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### In The Magazine

MAY-JUNE 2010  
The United States of Amazing

- Issue Contents
- Issue More Links
- Back Issues



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Women often think that the more skin they reveal, the more attention they will get from men, but this may not be true. [A study by the University of Leeds](#) watched social interactions between men and women at one of the most popular clubs in London.

The researchers considered the arms to be 20% of the body, legs to be 30% of the body, and the torso to be 50% of the body, and they concluded that men found women who covered up too much of their bodies to only be half as attractive as those who displayed around 40% of their skin. The most interesting part of the study, though, was that men felt women who showed more than that were "too available," and were often overlooked for those who seemed a little more modest.

[Image courtesy of [rockabillyboy72's Flickr stream](#).]

### Hard to Get Men by Playing Hard to Get?



Along those same lines, the stories about men wanting a girl who's hard to get are somewhat true...but not completely. Men want someone who's hard for *anyone* to get, but they don't want a woman who is hard for *them* to get. [University of Wisconsin researchers showed](#) men photos of women and told them that the girl already saw and reviewed images of the participant and three other men. Each girl was presented as not being interested in any of the men, being interested in all of the men, only being interested in the test subject, or no information was provided about her woman.

Men were overwhelmingly uninterested in both the women who were interested in all participants and none of the participants. The great majority of men were interested in the woman who was only into them. They seemed to think she would have the good qualities of the easy-to-get women and the good qualities of the hard-to-get women, believing she was warm, easygoing and not demanding or difficult.

[Image courtesy of [Denis Malka's Flickr stream](#).]

### Long Legs, Less Love?



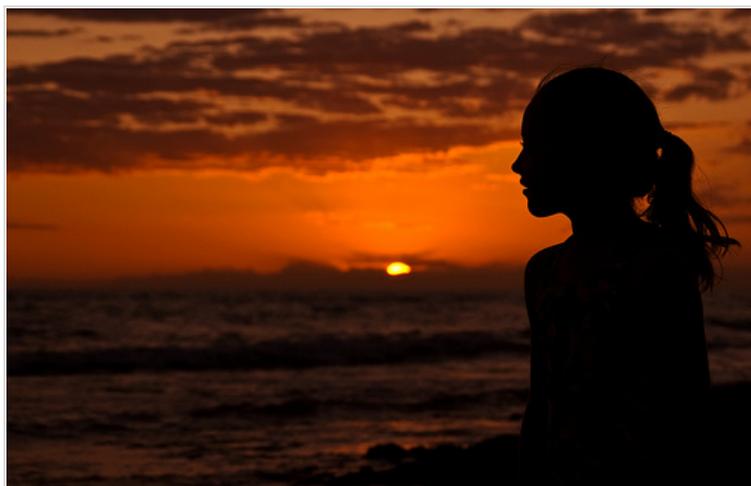


For years we've been told that men love long, long legs. But according to a study performed by [the University of California and the University of Westminister](#), men like women who have legs proportional to their body. Men and women were shown images of computer generated body images of women and asked to rate them on their attractiveness. The further the length of the legs got from an ideal 1:1 ratio of body to leg length, the less attractive men judged them to be.

Stereotypes held fast when it came to what women believed men would like, and they seemed to consistently agree that the men would find longer legged women attractive.

[Image courtesy of [Lovro67's Flickr stream](#).]

### Little More Than a Pretty Face



When people start looking for long-term mates, research says the body becomes less and less important — for both sexes. [University of Japan researcher Tomas E. Currie](#) noted that while there have been hundreds of studies evaluating how men and women evaluate the importance of specific body parts, there were relatively few examining the importance of one feature over another. He decided to also examine if these factors changed based on what type of relationship the person was looking for.

The results showed that men cared a lot about bodies when looking for a short term relationship, but they cared more about faces when looking for something long term. Women seemed to consistently look for attractive faces whether looking for a short or long term thing. The body was just an extra bonus in either case.

[Image courtesy of [Sugaro Pictures' Flickr stream](#).]

### What Women Want, Based On Healthcare

Speaking of what women want, this is a very gray area and is said to change from woman to woman and even be inconsistent among a single individual. Unsurprisingly, there have been tons of studies trying to figure out exactly what the softer sex is interested in.

One study, completed by [Wake Forest University psychologist Dustin Wood and Claudia Brumbaugh of Queens College](#), even confirmed the fact that while men are largely in agreement about who they find to be attractive, women have no consensus with one another. While men would largely agree about how attractive a given image of a woman was, the scores from women would be all over the board.





Perhaps the real reason for these major differences is the reason women seem to prefer masculine or feminine men. **A study by the University of Aberdeen** recently showed women located throughout the world images of men and asked them to evaluate based on attractiveness. Each set of images contained two pictures per male subject. In one of them, he was digitally altered to look more masculine and in the other, he was altered to look more feminine. The researchers noticed that women who had access to better healthcare preferred feminine men, while those who had less-quality health services were attracted to more masculine men.

Researchers speculated that historically women have liked masculine men with a square jaw and low brow because they were more likely to help produce healthy offspring. On the other hand, more effeminate-looking men seem more likely to help raise the children. It seems that once health concerns are out of the way, women tend to shift their interest to those men who appear to be more nurturing.

[Image courtesy of **SpreePiX - Berlin's Flickr stream.**]

### Problems With The Pill



Of course, healthcare isn't the only thing that affects how a woman sees men. As it turns out, women may also notice a striking difference in their attraction to men after going on the birth control pill.

Men and women are largely attracted to one another due to pheromones and scent, but a **study by the University of Liverpool** shows the pill can drastically alter the scent a woman is attracted to. Additionally, once she quits taking the pill, she may revert to her old sensory guides and start finding her existing partner to be less attractive.

[Image courtesy of **Blmurch's Flickr stream.**]

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Of course, it's important to remember that these studies just take into account the overall feelings of a group of men or women and there are always going to be people who disagrees with the general populace.

Now, there are plenty more studies about men and women — way too many for me to read, let alone include in this article — but I'm sure many of you have seen some interesting ones. So let's hear them. What's the most surprising study you've heard about?





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## 1 Trick of a tiny belly :



Cut down a bit of your belly every day by using this

1 weird old tip. 

### Comments (22)

Ah. This explains my bizarre attraction to the GEICO cavemen.

posted by **Anna** on [5-21-2010 at 9:04 am](#)

Great article! I just skimmed it before work, and now I look forward to going back and reading it all thoroughly!

posted by **Lynn** on [5-21-2010 at 9:27 am](#)

@Oh Anna! Glad to hear it! I am strangely, MAGNETICLY drawn to Flo, the Progressive Insurance lady!

posted by **Zane** on [5-21-2010 at 9:44 am](#)

I wonder if the findings in different cultures/countries truly represent how the rest of the Western world feels (such as the "hour glass" study in Scotland vs our mind sets in America).

But great article – same as @Lynn – I scanned it and will go back and reread it throughout the day!

posted by **okiemelissa** on [5-21-2010 at 9:46 am](#)

If men like average-sized women so well, why aren't they featured in men's magazines?

posted by **Fruppi** on [5-21-2010 at 10:44 am](#)

RE: hips and childbirth

I am not sure how genes are supposed to encode to make it obvious to researchers that it has childbirth in mind. It just has to work its magic regardless of whether the subject thinks they are going to get published in a reputable journal. I imagine that childbirth (of some kind) existed before regular drug and alcohol use, so I would tend to think the drugs are piggybacking on the natural impulses, not vice versa.

re: face

From what I understand symmetry (and hence some form of genetic health) forms a major part of the aesthetics of facial beauty. The rest of the body is harder to discern asymmetry, so I wonder: if you exaggerated asymmetry of bodies, might you find the same effect?

Fruppi,

I am not sure if this directly addresses your question, but in many things I find that the further away

something is, the larger it needs to be to get our attention. In this case, the more remote our chances of attaching to a person is, the higher our standards of beauty are. IOW, why linger our gaze over a moderately attractive person that we have no chance of dating?

posted by **anomdebus** on [5-21-2010 at 11:04 am](#)

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I thought that women were supposed to understand that men don't dig skinny women, unless it's their personal fetish. That models are super thin has never been attractive to men. That is only attractive to fashion designers, who want their models to look like clothes hangers, because their stupid fashions only look good ON hangers. After all, their original drawings are only in 2-D (Oddly, just like the models).

posted by **bubba** on [5-21-2010 at 11:20 am](#)

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To Fruppi's question, the answer is, I think, embedded in the article. Men view the models in the magazines as 'short term' not 'long term'.

posted by **Rod T** on [5-21-2010 at 12:17 pm](#)

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ZANE, me too!

All my friends think I'm weird for liking Flo, but she just seems fun to me. Glad I'm not the only one.

posted by **JetaN** on [5-21-2010 at 12:34 pm](#)

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All of you are misunderstanding Fruppi's question. The article states that men find more average-bodied women more attractive. Therefore, if a man were looking for a "sexier body" because he was looking at magazine women as a short term relationship, he would prefer his magazine women to have a more average body. So why don't magazines feature women with "average" bodies?

I think the real answer to fruppi's question is that I think he/she is misunderstanding what constitutes an average body according to the article and these studies. Men's magazines often do not feature the rail-thin models that you find in women's fashion magazines. They feature actresses and celebrities that have more hourglass or more voluptuous figures. They might not be average in the sense that "the average american is overweight" but average in the sense that they represent a healthy middle ground between chubby and skinny.

And I'm also attracted to Flo. I also don't know why because she's not that visually attractive

posted by **Ryan** on [5-21-2010 at 1:19 pm](#)

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I like my women BIG and CURVY!!  
I eat lemons and limes to ward off SCURVY!!

boats and Ho's, yo!

posted by **cajun bob** on [5-21-2010 at 1:25 pm](#)

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Thanks for the great article, Jill.

Made for some interesting conversations at work today. :)

Do you know where (if) I could find examples of the photos used in the masculine vs feminine males comparison?

posted by **blackglasses** on [5-21-2010 at 1:28 pm](#)

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RE: okiemelissa

I read an article where scientists did just that. They showed drawings of women with specific bust/hip/waist ratios to some remote tribe. The majority of the men agreed on which was the most attractive, which coincided with Western men's opinions.

posted by **Joshua** on [5-21-2010 at 1:31 pm](#)

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Ok, I'll third the Flo thing, I'm totally drawn to her. I think she's a babe!!!!

posted by **hockeyzombie** on [5-21-2010 at 2:15 pm](#)

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In most cases, it comes down to "women look at women" and project that onto what they interpret men want in a woman. Runway models are long and leggy because it frames the clothes better and the audience is primarily women. Not men. A lot of women also opt for aesthetic surgeries not to make them more attractive to men but to fill out their clothes better. Men tend to pay less attention to what a woman is wearing than women do. Again, "women looking at women". I would agree with the short term vs. long term conclusion. I love my wife regardless of her shape. As most Mental Floss folks would agree... it's what's between the ears that determines sexy or ugly. And I married a bombshell!

posted by **Dan** on [5-21-2010 at 2:31 pm](#)

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@ cajun bob.... thank you so much for that. I almost fell out of my chair! With your permission I would like to use that! I don't know how but I will try to work that in when I am out tonight!

posted by **Jen** on [5-21-2010 at 2:50 pm](#)

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I just came back from another two weeks in Mexico where the mindset about curvy (and I do mean curvy, not fat) vs. skinny women is definitely pro-curvy. They expect a woman to eat a meal, not pick at a salad, and to be able to properly fill out her clothes and not have bones jutting out. For me, buying clothes in Mexico that are made in Mexico is a huge ego booster, because in North America I have to buy a large or extra large to accommodate my hips. In Mexico, I get buy a medium! And a month in Germany and Turkey last year revealed very similar male opinions as Mexico. Maybe it's ancient brain syndrome that leads them to prefer a woman who wouldn't blow away in a strong wind or be unable to cart a child around!

posted by **Beth** on [5-21-2010 at 3:19 pm](#)

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I love me some Flo.

posted by **Troy Lee Wells** on [5-21-2010 at 4:10 pm](#)

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This was an extremely interesting article. I feel like I learned something today.

posted by **Marisa Gesualdi** on [5-21-2010 at 4:22 pm](#)

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I liked this article as well! I don't feel so strange about my large 'hind quarters' and small waist.

I also REALLY agree with the bit about smell. I LOVE how my husband smells. No his perfume, but his natural smell. I am very attracted to it!

posted by **Kate** on [5-21-2010 at 4:46 pm](#)

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I saw a study once on female's preferences of Feminine vs Masculine faces in men.

It showed that women tended to prefer masculine when they were ovulating and the feminine when they weren't.

posted by **Nerak** on [5-21-2010 at 7:25 pm](#)

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AWESOME article!!! My boyfriend and I are really open with each other about how our brains work, and we have been trying to learn as much as possible about how the other thinks. Everything you have posted in this article is totally true and a lot of it pertains to the conversations my guy and I've had over the past year.

I think the most surprising/relieving thing is the way men view beauty. Us girls have been killing ourselves (unfortunately too often literally) to look like the stereotypical definition of "beauty" when really guys like us just the way we are.

I really wish those stupid fashion designers would get the picture and stop making young girls believe they have to be a size 0 to be pretty.

posted by **KerriD** on [5-21-2010 at 11:29 pm](#)

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