

The personality traits that are more attractive than our looks

Considering the attention given to appearances, and how quickly we form – and stick to – a first impression, it would be easy to assume that looks are what matter most in finding love. But when presented with a real-life date, do we choose personality over looks?

According to Jess Alderson, co-founder of the dating app So Syncd, which requires users to complete a psychometric test to measure personality traits, we do. Of a sample of more than 1,000 users, almost 90% preferred personality over looks.

Psychometric tests, which usually take the form of a questionnaire, have been used for decades in psychiatry as a way to quantify personality.



Psychologists often use the Big Five test, which measures people on five traits – openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Of the Big Five, agreeableness, which is an indicator of someone's interpersonal skills (or how caring and compassionate they are), plays a strong role for both men and women in the initial assessment of a date's desirability. And according to studies, for both men and women, physical attractiveness must be coupled with agreeableness to predict desire for a serious relationship.

"Being a nice person is crucial for harmonious long-term relationships", says Greg Webster, a psychology professor at the University of Florida. "Agreeableness is kind of a necessity," he says, adding that entering into a relationship with someone you thought was beautiful but unkind would be problematic.

Sociologists Terri Orbuch from the University of Michigan and Susan Sprecher from Illinois State University, say qualities that relate to familiarity, such as how similar physically the other person is to us, how close they live to us, and whether we approve of their friends, explain why similarity to your potential partner is so important. Partners reporting high levels of similarity in the Big Five personality traits of conscientiousness and openness have a head start on other couples in their ability to solve problems and manage daily tasks.

"We should seek partners who are familiar to us and share some of our personality traits, appearance, geography and social groups", agree psychologists Ellen Berscheid from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and Harry Reid from the University of Rochester, New York.

But some personality differences might be appealing too. For example, we prefer being in teams whose levels of extraversion are opposite to ours, which might bring different qualities in us.

"It makes sense that we've evolved to be attracted to people who at least have a certain amount of differences to ourselves," says Alderson. "We make a stronger team and would be more likely to survive. But again, you need a certain common ground that brings you together."

The psychometric test used in the So Syncd dating app is not the same as the Big Five, but asks questions based on similar themes – such as how outgoing users are, or if they build emotional connections easily. "We pair couples who have just enough similarities to form a strong connection, and then just enough differences to create that spark of excitement to get to know someone new," says Alderson.

Read the text and answer the questions:

1. How many So Syncd users valued personality over looks, according to the provided statistics?
 - a) Very few
 - b) About half
 - c) The vast majority
 - d) All people

2. What is said about the use of psychometric tests in dating apps?
 - a) They are a new invention that has not been tested enough yet.
 - b) They are used to match users based on similarity in personality traits.
 - c) They measure a broader range of personality traits than the Big Five test.
 - d) They have proven to be ineffective in assessing the compatibility of potential partners.

3. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as an important factor in choosing a romantic partner?
 - a) Level of agreeableness
 - b) Geographic proximity
 - c) Physical similarity
 - d) Economic status

4. What is said about the role of partners' agreeableness in a relationship?
 - a) It is less important than familiarity to your potential partner.
 - b) It is the most important personality trait for a harmonious long-term relationship.
 - c) Coupled with physical attractiveness, it can be a predictor for a serious relationship.
 - d) It isn't as important as the other traits from the Big Five.

5. What is the importance of differences in potential partner's personality traits, according to the text?
 - a) They create a spark and might make you a stronger team.
 - b) They make you less attracted to each other.
 - c) They help you connect easier.
 - d) They make you more extraverted.