

## A SIMPLIFIED APPROACH TO IMPROVING A WOMAN'S ATTRACTIVENESS

My 28-year career as a plastic surgeon in Southern California has made me keenly aware of the relationship between body contour and perceived attractiveness. In the past 20 years I have also seen a surge in scientific articles attempting to quantify what constitutes bodily attractiveness. Most studies reviewed in these articles, I believe, have been somewhat flawed by limitations, but a few of the principles and concepts they have presented have undeniable clinical significance.

Most of the three types of studies which have been reported have involved male participants in a sample population who analyze line drawings or photographs in which women's body proportions may be manipulated to determine attractiveness. The photographs generally consist either of multiple patients or a single patient altered by morphing software. These studies have been open to criticism because they involve only two-dimensional photos or unattractive line drawings, and consequently, a few researchers set out to study statistics related to the phenomenon of speed dating events, which first became a socially acceptable means of mate selection (if only on a temporary basis) in Beverly Hills in 1998.

Speed dating enables males and females to meet large numbers of new acquaintances over a short time period. After the event, participants submit to the event organizers the names of individuals of the opposite sex with whom they would like to share their contact

information. Not surprisingly, perhaps, from information compiled on speed dating, researchers determined conclusively that human males, unlike the males in many animal species, are more likely to reject unattractive females when they (human males) are presented with a large number of available mates. The offers of contact information after speed dating tended to be limited to only a few individuals. After the individual parameters of the participants were calculated and perceived attractiveness was determined, it became clear that when males are faced with too much choice, they tend to give up on qualities which, in the long run, should also be considered important in mate selection, such as personality, education, and intelligence, for physical attractiveness. These decisions, in fact, appear to be made in the first one to three seconds after the meeting.

First impressions are highly influential, and once formed, prove hard to change. It is a well known perception, for example, that attractive women receive higher pay and are judged to be more outgoing, socially competent, healthy, and intelligent than their less attractive counterparts. As a result, it becomes understandable that women try to improve their attractiveness if this can be simply done with relatively few risks.

What can be gleaned from the research, despite its contradictions, is that two parameters clearly stand out as important in determining a woman's attractiveness. The most important predictors are body mass index (BMI) followed by the waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). Breast size, interestingly, is not as important in the perception of attractiveness as a well-balanced figure. Thus, when formulating a surgical plan, a plastic surgeon must

evaluate a woman's body in its entirety. The BMI (the weight in kilograms divided by the height in meters<sup>2</sup>) is measured, and the appropriate diet and exercise program is started, if necessary, to lower the BMI to about 19 to 20, which is the ratio considered most attractive by sample populations. The waist-to-hip ratio is judged to be most attractive at 0.7 or slightly larger. The smaller WHR will have a negative effect on attractiveness. To lower the WHR, especially in mothers, weight control and exercise is usually not enough. Postpartum fat accumulation in the waist and flank areas, as well as stretching of the abdominal wall skin and muscles, leave many women with a WHR of 1.0 or larger. Fortunately, two surgical options nicely address these issues. Liposuction easily removes fat in the flanks, waist, and abdomen, improving shape and contour. If there is significant abdominal wall muscle laxity and skin from a pregnancy, the patient will need an abdominoplasty which securely tightens the muscles back to the pre-pregnancy level and narrows the waist.

Since we know that female attractiveness is achievable "by the numbers," it becomes the plastic surgeon's goal to do his math and aim for the numeric formula that will make the individual patient as visually attractive as possible. A weight reduction program which addresses the BMR is instituted which includes diet and exercise, paired with body contour procedures such as liposuction and/or abdominoplasty (tummy tuck). My goal is to achieve for my patients a well-balanced and natural-appearing figure, consistent with the statistically proven fact that the body proportions with the highest correlation to female attractiveness are a low BMI of 19 or 20 and a WHR of 0.7.

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