

HEALTH

Study: Women on Birth Control Pills Prefer Less Masculine Men

Women who used computers to design their ideal man saw a change in their preferred facial features after going on the pill.

By Lindsay Abrams

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PROBLEM: Oral contraceptives can affect how attractive women
are to men, as well as who they themselves are attracted to. And

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how attractive we find them, its *possible* that these effects might have some influence on who we end up with.

METHODOLOGY: Researchers in Scotland designed several experiments that delved further into the hormonal quirks wrought by birth control. In the first, they gave young, straight women the ability to digitally alter images male faces. The participants tinkered with features like cheekbone prominence, jaw height, and face width, attempting to find the perfect ratio of attractiveness for either a short or long-term relationship. Some did the same, but with female faces. None of the women were taking birth control at the outset; after the experiment, they were given the option to start, which about a third took. Three months later, the experiment was repeated.



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Less (left) and more (right) masculine versions of the same face.

In the second study, volunteers were asked to rate the manliness of men in relationships, based on their mugshots. Half -- 85 -- of these men were dating women who had been on the pill when they first met.

RESULTS: After beginning a regimen of hormonal birth control, the women's ideal of attractiveness in a potential romantic partner skewed significantly less masculine. They were more likely, for example, to prefer narrower jawbones and rounder faces. These preferences appear to translate to real life decisions: the men whose partners had been on the pill when they first started dating were found, as a whole, to be less masculine-looking.

IMPLICATIONS: Let's say you're a particularly masculine-looking man

might consider digitally altering your face. The rest of us can marvel at the hormonal quirks wrought by birth control and perhaps resolve that they're a small price to pay for preventing unintended pregnancy.

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