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Your Face: The Window to Your Love Life

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Your Face: The Window to Your Love Life

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I was sitting in church one day as a newly-married man and noticed a nice-looking woman on the piano bench up front. She was staring my direction and caught my eye. She had an intense look that startled me. She gave a coy smile. I was surprised and alert – but I didn't recognize her and was getting uncomfortable. I glanced at my wife beside me, who didn't notice what was going down. I looked back at the woman and she laughed, and then winked. I felt extremely awkward and started to sweat. I glanced around again to see if anyone was watching this steamy exchange, and then realized her husband was right behind me gazing and waving back at her.

The face is a beacon and transmitter. There are about forty-six facial muscles whose sole purpose seems to be communication of feelings.^[i] These muscles make an infinite variety of expressions, and are implements in the mating game. Sexual attraction is broadcast by facial expressions, including flashing eyes and smiles.^[ii] Those with gorgeous faces have a significant advantage in this arena, and a good looking person will always have others willing to jump into a relationship with them. A John or a Jane might be a jerk or have a room temperature IQ, but if they are beautiful, then breathless suitors will follow them around like dogs.

Humans are astonishingly good at recognizing and remembering faces -- even those we haven't seen for years. We can differentiate faces based on tiny variations in symmetry or arrangement of features, and we generally agree on which configurations are desirable, even though the differences between lovely and homely are minuscule. We easily distinguish between a cold stare, a blank stare, a come-hither stare, an in-love stare, and an about-to-attack stare. When our eyes fasten upon one of these in another, our body reacts instantaneously. Strong emotion in others triggers tiny responses in our facial muscles. If you watch someone pulling out a splinter, you cringe, and if you see someone beam with joy, your expression unconsciously follows, as you mirror the other's face.[\[iii\]](#)

There is a specific part of the brain that recognizes and interprets emotional expressions. Fearful and angry expressions get the most response, but any face gets this section of the brain going.[\[iv\]](#) One study found that people looking at faces scan from the eyes to the nose, to the mouth. However, women make about twice the number of these scans, which may be why women are better at recalling details of faces.[\[v\]](#)

It is important for partners to be in tune with each other's expressions and respond sensitively. However, it is possible to misread emotion, especially when [blinded by feelings](#). For instance, if you are irritated you will more likely interpret your partner's face as upset, even if it isn't. However, a soothing look can also calm a partner down, or create a feeling of connection.[\[vi\]](#)

Pay attention to the power of the face in your relationship. Smile, wink, or send a happy look. Share a knowing glance when you can tell what the other is thinking. Look at each other without talking, and your connection will deepen. Just like the woman who was bonding with her husband while I got in the way, you can feel closer without saying a

word.

[i] Jerry Adler, "Smile, Frown, Grimace and Grin — Your Facial Expression Is the Next Frontier in Big Data," In *Technology: Rana El Kaliouby, Smithsonian Magazine*, December 2015.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/rana-el-kaliouby-ingenuity-awards-technology-180957204/>

[ii] Kate Fox, "The Flirting Report," *Social Issues Research Centre*, 2004. ; Ty Tashiro. *The Science of Happily Ever After: What Really Matters in the Quest for Enduring Love*. 2014. Harlequin Nonfiction.

[iii] Ulf Dimberg, and Monika Thunberg, "Rapid Facial Reactions to Emotional Facial Expressions," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 39, no. 1 (1998): 39-45.

[iv] Jan Theeuwes and Stefan Van der Stigchel, "Faces Capture Attention," *Visual Cognition*, 13, no. 6 (2006): 657–665.

[v] Jennifer J. Heisz, Molly M. Pottruff, and David I. Shore, "Females Scan More Than Males a Potential Mechanism for Sex Differences In Recognition Memory," *Psychological Science* 24, no. 7 (2013): 1157-1163.

[vi] Robert Epstein, "How Science Can Help You Fall In Love" in *Love Sex and Science*, ed. Scientific American.

Adapted from upcoming book: *Love Me True: Overcoming the Surprising Ways we Deceive in Relationships*.

Cedar Fort, 2016.
