BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English
Do opposites attract?

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sophie
Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Sophie…

Neil
And I'm Neil. So, Sophie, the subject of today's show is attraction – do you believe in love at first sight?

Sophie
No, I don't. I think it takes time to get to know somebody well enough to know if you love them. But I have a friend who says when she saw her husband for the first time…

Neil
That was before they got married?

Sophie
That's right – when they met for the first time, that was it: a bolt out of the blue. And they got married three months later.

Neil
A **bolt out of the blue** means something totally unexpected. Well, that sounds very romantic. And leads me on to today's quiz question. Sophie, what percentage of Americans said they believe in love at first sight? Is it…
a) 26%?
b) 56%?
Or c) 86%?

Sophie
I'm not an old romantic like you Neil, so I'm going to go for a) 26%.

Neil
Well, we'll find out later on in the show if you're right to be sceptical or not, Sophie. And **sceptical** for those of you who don't know, means to have doubts about something.

Sophie

I think you can be physically attracted to somebody straight away. I just don't think you can fall in love with somebody so easily. Love is about other things: compatibility, personality and a good sense of humour.

Neil

Yes, humour is important, but apparently, Sophie, for men it's all about the waist-hip ratio. According to research, the ideal waist-hip ratio for women is 0.7 – where **ratio** means the relationship between two sizes – and you get this figure by dividing the waist measurement by the hip measurement.

Sophie

I see. And why do men find 0.7 so irresistible?

Neil

Well, let's listen to Dr Anna Machin, an Evolutionary Anthropologist from the University of Oxford, explaining what a man is looking for.

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Dr Anna Machin, Evolutionary Anthropologist, University of Oxford
He's going to look for signs for fertility and what we call fecundity and good health. And the major indicator of that in women is the waist-hip ratio. And the waist-hip ratio – the absolute ideal – what men find most attractive regardless of culture – this has been tested in many different cultures round the world – is 0.7 and that's really your classic hourglass figure. And the reason why that universally is attractive is because it's tied to the health of that individual. There's a very strong relationship between someone circulating oestrogen and testosterone – obviously you want the oestrogen to be high and the testosterone to be low for a woman to be fertile, and also her general health, so .7 is linked to lower risk of heart disease, lower risk of diabetes and certain sorts of cancers.

Neil

So a waist-hip ratio of 0.7 **correlates** – or has a strong relationship – with good general health and fertility in women.

Sophie

And men find this attractive because it identifies **fertile** women – women who will be able to **conceive** – or get pregnant – and have babies successfully.

Neil

Dr Machin also mentions that 0.7 is the classic **hourglass figure** – which means curvy!

Sophie
Do you like curves, Neil?

Neil
Mind your own business, Sophie. But all this waist-hip theory of attraction isn't very romantic, is it?

Sophie
You're right, it isn't. And whilst we do judge people by the way they look – we also use our sense of smell to sniff out our ideal **mate** – or sexual partner. Apparently, we can detect whether people are genetically different to us by the way they smell. And parents who have different immune systems create healthier babies.

Neil
So it's back to having babies again – all biology and chemistry – and not about feelings at all.

Sophie
Well, let's leave chemistry behind for a moment and listen to Professor David Perrett, at the School of Psychology and Neuroscience at St Andrews University in Scotland. He talks about other factors that play a role in attraction.

INSERT
David Perrett, Professor at the School of Psychology and Neuroscience at St Andrews University in Scotland
Plastic surgery really doesn't count for much in the end. You could be with somebody who's aesthetically very beautiful but if they don't smile or react then that counts for much less. So we can change our faces by interacting with others and doing so in a pleasant manner, and that will aid our attractiveness and make others interested in us.

Neil
What does **aesthetically** mean, Sophie?

Sophie
It means judging something by the way it looks. And whilst we all enjoy a pretty face, most of us are looking for more than that. We are looking for people who appear friendly and approachable, and who we share interests with.

Neil
Exactly – and personally, I think kind eyes are very important – with a bit of a twinkle. What about you, Sophie?

Sophie
I like a good sense of humour.

Neil
Very good. Now, remember I asked you, Sophie: What percentage of Americans said they believe in love at first sight? Is it… a) 26%, b) 56% or c) 86%?

Sophie

I said 26%.

Neil

Sorry, that's the wrong answer, Sophie. 56% of Americans believe in love at first sight, and the percentage is even higher for married people and those in relationships, according to a poll conducted by the website CBS.com in 2013.

Sophie

Well, Americans are a romantic bunch.

Neil

Me too, and I'm British. Now, here are the words we heard today.
bolt out of the blue
sceptical
ratio
correlates
fertile
conceive
hourglass figure
mate
aesthetically

Sophie

Well, that's the end of this edition of 6 Minute English. Join us again soon! Meanwhile, visit our website: bbclearningenglish.com, where you'll find guides to grammar, exercises, videos and articles to read and improve your English.

Neil

And we are on social media too. Make sure to visit our profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary

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something totally unexpected

sceptical
have doubts about something

ratio
the relationship between two sizes

correlates
has a strong relationship

fertile
able to produce babies

conceive
get pregnant

hourglass figure
curvy, with a well-defined waistline

mate
sexual partner

aesthetically
judging something by the way it looks