

	
<p>Walking the trails and trials of life</p>	<p>Riding that wave</p>
<p>Mountains/Hills; Sporty; Candid</p>	<p>Natural water body; Sporty; Candid; Shirtless</p>





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“... an examination of the digital personas of cisgender heterosexual men on the dating app Bumble and ... the Darwinian theory of sexual selection ...”

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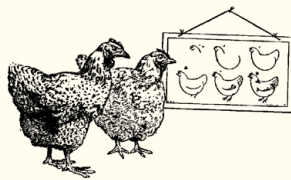
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INTRODUCTION



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FOR INDIANS WHO GREW UP WATCHING the classic Bollywood movie ‘*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge*’ (The Big-Hearted Will Take the Bride), which released in 1995 and played in cinemas for 20 years, Switzerland was marketed and shown to us as the land of love. It’s not a surprise, therefore, to see many Indian couples travel to Switzerland, particularly areas where the movie was shot, such as Interlaken.^{1} So naturally, when I shifted to Switzerland from New Delhi to pursue my Master’s degree, my friends pushed my mid-20s single cisgender heterosexual self to join dating apps, with the hope that my romantic luck would shine in the land of love. Since several of my heterosexual friends, from India, Mexico and the UK found partners on Bumble, I looked to it as well. They had recommended it as a sensible dating app for women, of women and by a woman. It markets itself as an app that enables women to take an active role in the courtship process.

I was surprised to see a good amount of Bumble boys of Geneva skiing, hiking or doing other sports activities. Add ‘I can’t live without pasta’ and ‘wine connoisseur’ to the general mix of personalities. This was a contrast to the profiles I had seen in Delhi. Bumble boys of Delhi loved showing off their socioeconomic status through the places they dine and party at and visit. Tinder boys of the United States of America became their national news when a lot of them ended up posting pictures of holding a fish. Maybe they were trying

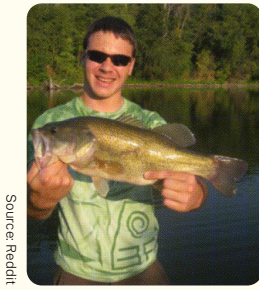
Fig i:
A still from
the movie
DDLJ, shot in
Switzerland.



© Freepik / Rawpixel / Bumble

Fig ii:
Home screen
of the dating
app Bumble.

Fig iii:
A man hold-
ing a fish, a
common photo
on American
Tinder.



Source: Reddit

to advertise what a catch they are since they have a catch. It was this realisation of the regional contrast in self-representation that made me take more interest in the boys' photographs rather than the boys themselves.

One poses in order to be noticed, implying the presence of a gaze as well as an attempt to enhance

one's natural visual qualities. On dating apps, this takes on greater significance and specificity. The key objective of a profile image is to establish a favourable impression in a very short span of time. The attainment of that objective is determined largely by the degree of attractiveness presented and perceived. But how does one assess whether posing candidly while eating food at a fancy restaurant or standing in front of the Burj Khalifa, would serve as a 'heart stealer'?

I began to think about how desire can be awakened through an image, and this became the overarching question of my thesis.



As a victim of bullying on the path to self-acceptance, I have frequently wondered how one determines what and who is beautiful. Being raised in a country where people have endured centuries of exploitative colonization, I now belong to the minority group of people of colour in a predominantly white country – a fact that has only added to my inquisitiveness about this subject. While I was conditioned to believe that notions of beauty are fundamentally tied to race and social class, I discovered a key that transcends other factors: evolution, corroborated by the theory of sexual selection.

In 1859, Charles Darwin developed the theory of sexual selection as a result of his desire to comprehend the significance of the stunning peacock tail. Sexual selection is the evolution of traits that aid mating, instead of survival. In design terms, it is form over function.^{2} In many cases, in the animal kingdom which includes humans as well, sexual selection works on males rather than females, with males evolving traits in tune with females' preferences. The proverb 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is in reality 'beauty is in the brain of the beholder'.^{3}

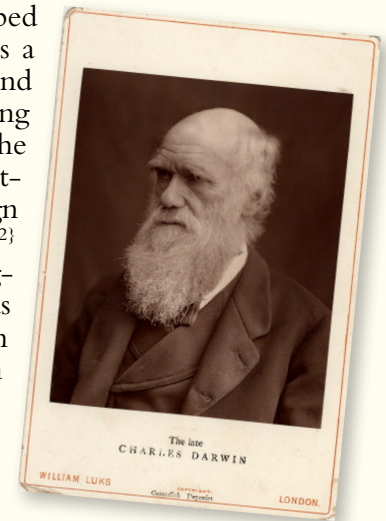


Fig iv:
A portrait
of Charles
Darwin.

Sexual selection cemented the fact that the brain is the most important sex organ. Within the context of multiple neurobiological and cognitive restraints, the brain is influenced by centuries of evolution and biased in its evaluation of beauty and attraction, along with the world around it. Since sexual selection managed to give females an active role in the mating process and wield evolutionary power, many male scientists such as Alfred Wallace, Darwin's partner in the theory of natural selection, rejected this theory, given that the role of women was popularly considered second-class in society.^{4}

With females marketed by Bumble and supported by sexual selection to have an active role in the courtship process, I formulated my research statement: this thesis is an examination of the digital personas of cisgender heterosexual men on the dating app Bumble and links them to the Darwinian theory of sexual selection in the realm of a monogamous relationship. It is important to note here that the thesis seeks to place the theory itself – not the theorist – at the centre. This is demonstrated using concurrently occurring examples of courtship processes among humans and other members of the animal kingdom. It attempts to understand how much of the digital personas, depicted through photographs, to attract mates, are performative, internalised and driven by evolution – like the

courtship rituals of the animal kingdom.

The examination and demonstration of the research statement unfold in three chapters. They introduce the reader to the world of online dating with Bumble while enlightening them about the historical evolution of self-representation through various mediums, and the evolution of male traits in conjunction to female preferences among humans and animals. Although my thesis arose from a personal perspective as a user of Bumble, I have now adopted the role of a designer, a ‘novice’ biologist and evolutionary psychologist to understand humans as a species better. My analysis relies on the primary investigation of 126 profiles of cisgender heterosexual men on Bumble and secondary literature research. The latter includes studies by prominent professors and researchers, working at distinguished institutions and universities, with expertise in the fields of human behaviour, zoology, and computer-mediated communication. It also includes studies from several psychology journals as the study of human behaviour through sexual selection is a part of the branch of evolutionary psychology.

CHAPTER 01

SWIPE RIGHT FOR LOVE



CONTENTS:
FINDING LOVE ONLINE;
HOT OR NOT;
TRAP THAT THIRST,
WOMEN MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

I COME FROM THE LAND OF arranged marriages, where your family, friends, priests, uncles and aunties find the right match for you, instead of you looking for one. Love is found by word of mouth, in newspapers or with the advent of the internet, matrimonial websites like Shaadi.com (eng. translation: *Marriage.com*) and Jeevansaathi.com (eng. translation: *LifePartner.com*). When my parents took a different route and found each other in the common dining space at a military station, it was quite the drama moment for their families.

Today, most of my friends have a smartphone-shaped matchmaker, equipped with high-speed internet and a lot of options. With a roaring record of success, who is this matchmaker?

FINDING LOVE ONLINE

In the early 2010s, emerging research suggested the ability to be social, to interact with other living organisms dynamically to support growth, reproduction and mutual development is the key to life on Earth. From prokaryotes to invertebrates to mammals, all engage in social relationships.^{1} It is no surprise that humans do, too. Strong social relationships have been thought to lead to a longer life and a healthy mind and heart, as corroborated by studies by social scientists.^{2} With the invention, expansion and emergence of the Internet, this has become the latest tool to find love.^{3} It is now possible to find your 'soulmate' from absolutely anywhere.

Online dating fosters interaction between potential romantic partners, using the basic exercise of setting up a profile. You put your best face forward, evaluate other people's profiles, and slide into their inbox in case of a match.^{4} Access, match, communicate, repeat (until you find the one).^{5} This exercise is facilitated by answering a series of questions on one's sexual, political, geographical, anatomical, and other preferences. An algorithm evaluates the responses and uses patterns in one's preferences to suggest suitable pairings. Online dating, is therefore, an algorithmic



Fig 1.1:
A popular
**matrimonial
newspaper
supplement** in
North India.



matchmaking system.^{6} One can use it to seek a soul-mate, have casual sex or socially network,^{7} and are likely to connect with people who share their interests and beliefs.^{8}

(in a film or television programme) an amusing or charming first encounter between two characters that leads to the development of a romantic relationship between them.

Imagine your introvert self had a meet-cute at a bar. You spend time and energy making conversation to gauge what you two have in common. With online dating, it becomes easier to filter and identify profiles that share similar demographics, ethics and views in advance. With the inception of LBRTD (Location Based-Real-Time-Dating)^{9} applications, it lets you find nearby users, providing the advantage of proximity affordance, hence, facilitating an offline meeting.^{10}

27 years ago, in 1995, Gary Kremen jump-started this industry by turning a shower thought into reality^{11} and launching Match.com, the first online dating site for public use. Within two decades, the online dating industry had 323.9 million users across the world – one in every 24 people was using this service. This has led to the industry amassing a revenue of over \$5.61 billion.^{12}

As the numbers make clear, online dating is a billion-dollar business. It thrives by exploiting people's need for companionship and sexual needs, and markets itself differently for differing needs:

☞ Launched in 2012, with 75 million users (2021)^{13}, **tinder** lets you sign in through Facebook and match with people in your preferred radius, based on their photos.

☞ Debuted in 2014, dubbed the 'feminist Tinder'^{14}, **bumble** terms itself a women-centric dating app challenging 'archaic' dating rules by allowing women to initiate contact. In 2021, it had 45 million active users.

☞ Launched in 2004 as a website and then as an app in 2012, **okcupid** markets itself as a way of connecting with like-minded people based on the compatibility of one's responses to matched questions.^{15} It boasted over 91 million connections made in 2021.

☞ Launched in 2013 and marketed as 'designed to be deleted'^{16}, **Hinge** employs the Gale-Shapley algorithm which connects a user base of 20 million people who are likely to

mutually like one another based on engagement, while also matching with people with similar preferences.^{17}

☞ Launched in 2006, **badoo** with its now 28.4 million active users,^{18} positions itself as a social network meant for romantic, casual and platonic connections.

HOT OR NOT

A viral hit 20 years ago, Hot or Not was a website that allowed one to add photos to be rated on a scale of 1–10 of attractiveness by the Internet. This marked the beginning of the Internet being used to objectively gauge one's self-worth.^{19} Inspired by this sensation, nearly all dating apps that came up, starting with Tinder, used pictures of possible matches that one could swipe right to like or left to discard. Tinder designed its interface like a classic game of cards where love, sex and intimacy serve as prizes. As a result, the images of possible matches are piled like a deck of cards.^{20} On most dating apps, reciprocated likes initiate a 'match', leading to the inbox, and 'bios' serve as short introductions. Some apps such as Hinge and OkCupid use prompts and questions to help users connect better. Users can also mention surface-level information about themselves such as being gym rats, drinking/smoking tendencies, career profile, music/movie preferences, political inclinations, etc. The more you tell, the more chances you have of connecting with someone with similar tastes. Premium features are available for a price and vary across the apps, but generally include access to swipe an unlimited number of users, more filters for better quality matching, and abilities such as viewing who has liked you, browsing in incognito mode, boosting your profile for higher reach, and switching locations.

TRAP THAT THIRST

The national bird of India, the peacock, flaunts plumage so beautiful and iridescent that it drove Charles Darwin to formulate the theory of sexual selection, discussed in detail in the third chapter of this thesis.^{21} During the breeding season, a peacock will intermit-



Fig 1.2: **Swipe left to discard;** one of the swiping mechanisms on the dating apps.

→ A game of cards that involves the interaction with the top card of the deck by throwing it to the side.





At the end of the mating season, the peacock loses its feathers and regrows longer and fuller plumage for the following mating season.

tently shake and rattle his feathers to impress a peahen. The plumage's brightness and length are known to indicate his fitness, an important factor in mating, and everything he does is designed to market himself as desirable. If the peahen likes what she sees, mating is a done deal.^{22} The peacock uses the visual and sound cues to advertise itself as a suitable mate, awaken the senses and seduce the peahen, making itself seem more desirable.

Consider a standard first-date moment from Hallmark movies: the boy dresses up, uses good perfume, brings the girl out to a nice restaurant, orders food that looks good, strokes her shoulder softly, and makes the rom-com fan swoon. Even on a screen, this can pique your interest and arouse your senses. Just as the peacock rattles its feathers and Hallmark movies seduce and spark thirst with such

Fig 1.3: Peacock plumage: **the reason** Darwin considered and theorised sexual selection.

Fig 1.4: **Movie stills** of restaurant dates to make viewers swoon.



© Relevant movie production houses

scenes, individuals need to employ self-branding and presentation techniques to tickle and awaken senses. Thirst traps are the key.

To attract people, one uses their best pictures, with visual cues that indicate how and what they are as a person. One puts on an 'act'. While an individual becomes an actor performing an act, they also become an exhibit. They play the role of a curator by filtering and presenting things about the 'exhibit' to their audience that they might find interesting.^{23}

For mating purposes, animals and birds are known to get together in a lek or a harem – the most sexual marketplace in the animal kingdom. Males congregate in an area to display their features to visiting females, who are free to choose any they find most desirable. Elephant seals, fallow deer, sage grouse and great snipe are known for their lekking behaviour.^{24} Imagine dating apps as a marketplace just like this, where you 'sell' yourself while 'browsing' and 'shopping' for potential mates, by becoming images.^{25} The swiping mechanism advocates for split-second decisions, forcing users to put out their best selves to get better impressions. To attract as many people as possible, users can employ effective cues and rules, eventually turning into a 'trend'.

A photo is used as a "thirst trap," luring viewers to respond with praise, compliments, or more explicit displays of desire.

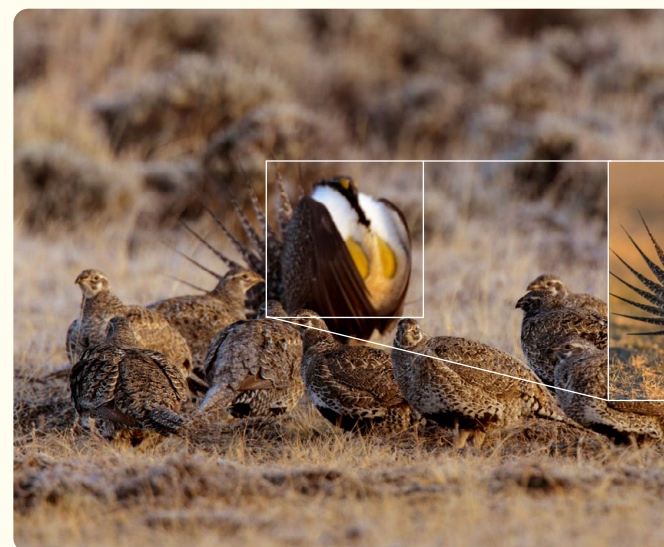


Fig 1.4: **Lek** with male and females sage grouses.

Fig 1.5: **Courtship ritual** of the male greater sage grouse.

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Edward T. Higgins, one of the most reputed and influential scholars in social psychology, developed the idea of self-discrepancy in his article 'Self-discrepancy theory: What patterns of self-beliefs cause people to suffer?'. The theory suggests that the idea of 'self' is constructed into three sets – actual self, ideal self and ought-to self. As the names suggest, the actual self refers to how you or other people believe you are like, the ideal self refers to how you would aspire to see yourself, that helps one improve, and the ought-to self consists of qualities that you should have.^{26}

A highly sought-after study published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior* revealed that users find presenting physical attractiveness the most important aspect of their dating profile. The data in the table below shows that 90% users placed the highest importance on looks over other aspects such as interests, personality, and astrological signs. Looking at this through a sexual selection perspective, appearance or

Aspects participants were looking for in a partner			
Attractive qualities	Men(%)	Women(%)	Total(%)
Looks	96.7	83.3	90
Similar interests/ values	83.3	86.7	85
Socioeconomic status	73.3	73.3	73.3
Personality	63.3	80	71.1
Honesty	56.7	50	53.3
A certain age group	36.7	56.7	46.7
Height	30	53.3	41.7
Proximity	36.7	43.3	40
Size	46.7	26.7	36.7
Non-smokers	36.7	20	28.3
People with different interests	23.3	33.3	28.3
Humour	20	26.7	23.3
People with no children	16.7	23.3	20
People with children	16.7	16.7	16.7
Opening line	16.7	6.7	11.7
Star sign	3.3	16.7	10
People who want children	3.3	10	6.7

Fig 1.6:
A study on
what **aspects**
people are
looking for in
a partner in
online dating
by Monica
T. Whitty, a
psychology
lecturer in
the UK.

physical traits, like facial symmetry and muscularity, act as cues to one's fitness and genetic qualities, making one sexually desirable. The study also revealed users' attempts to balance their actual and ideal selves (to appeal better) with their profiles to create more appealing profiles with a reduced possibility of alienation due to deception once offline interaction occurs.^{27}

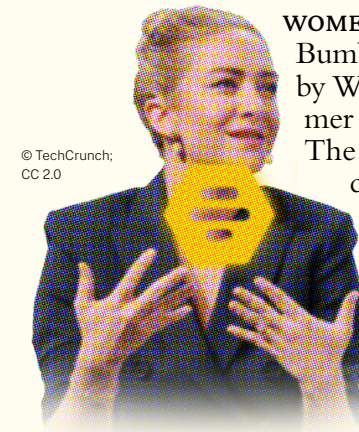


Fig 1.7: Whitney Wolfe Herd

WOMEN MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

Bumble was founded in 2014 by Whitney Wolfe Herd, a former Vice President at Tinder. The app challenged courtship conventions that give a woman the passive role of waiting for her Prince Charming.^{28} It encourages women to make the first move within 24 hours after a match has been initiated; marketed as giving them an assertive role instead.

In a traditional, patriarchal courtship, if a woman rejected a man, chances are he will not respond well to it – there have been innumerable instances of violence inflicted on women by rejected male suitors around the world. After her sour though successful stint at Tinder, which resulted in a sexual harassment lawsuit, Ms. Wolfe Herd originally intended to start a social networking site for women, with compliments as the only form of communication. On the recommendation of a friend, the founder of the dating app Badoo, she returned to the online dating industry with Bumble, since her experience lay in this realm with Tinder, which she helped market and grow in its early stages.^{29} Ms. Wolfe positioned Bumble as giving women the baton to make a move. It is marketed as an answer to reducing male aggression by eliminating the rejection.^{30} A study using in-depth interviews of Bumble users found that this feature gives women agency and access to a safer online space, along with a sense of control, where they can contemplate their matches even after swiping right.^{31}



Bumble champions itself as a ‘women-focused’ and ‘100% feminist’ app fighting,^{32} though it limits its feminist manifesto to fighting gender inequality in matters of courtship. In claiming to achieve this feat, Bumble, focuses on gender as the only axis of oppression to be destroyed. With a diverse user base, it is unfortunate that the values of the app construct a narrow view of power dynamics, leaving intersectional identities such as race and sexuality out of the picture. The app’s beliefs assume masculinity, related to heterosexual male bodies, as intimidating; and femininity, related to heterosexual female bodies, as soft and at risk.^{33} This standardization of male and female bodies feels unfair and manipulative, considering literature evidence exists that proves that race plays an important factor in standardizing bodies. People of colour have been studied to be viewed as barbaric,^{34} savage,^{35} violent^{36} and criminal^{37} while white people are viewed as civilised.^{38} Considering that gender and sexuality are fluid, the framework of Bumble’s values only associates them with cisnormativity and heteronormativity. Therefore, to assume all men are savage and women are soft, without considering race in the construction of identities, limits the notion of masculinity and femininity.^{39}

a. Cis-normativity is the assumption that all, or almost all, individuals are cisgender.

b. Heteronormativity is the concept that heterosexuality is the preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation.



© C.P. SCOTT MAN, H.E. GREGORY WOMAN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVES

Fig 1.8: **Aboriginal Australians were described as ‘savages’** and ‘who rank lowest in intelligence of all human beings, in National Geographic’s article on Australia in 1916.



CHAPTER 02



ME, MY SELF & I

CONTENTS:
THE EVOLUTION OF REPRESENTING ONESELF;
IF HE'S GOOD ON THE LOOKS,
HE'S GOOD ON THE BOOKS;
THE GAME TO CHARM

PARTICULARLY IN THE DIGITAL AGE, one's identity is essentially linked to one's images. Résumés, professional and educational applications, report cards, passports, visas, travel cards, all social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn for business, all demand a photo.^{1}



Fig 2.1:
Specimen
of a Dutch
passport
with photo.

THE EVOLUTION OF REPRESENTING ONESELF

The art of portraiture can be characterised as a physiognomic resemblance and/or idealisation of a living or non-living person. In the ancient times, this existed in the form of sculptures, inscriptions and objects such as coins and paintings.^{2} Portraits not only work with likeness but also with the notion of identity, which can shift in perception, representation, and understanding through time and space.^{3} They have

served as a record as well as an evidence of the subject's authority, beauty, wealth, intellect and other virtues.^{4} The ruling & noble classes^{5} in the West used art to ceremoniously represent themselves, because they could afford it, aside from artists, printmakers and sculptors.^{6}



Fig 2.2:
Angela Bella, an ideal portrait, Urbania (prev. Casteldurante), Italy, c.a 1530. Italian majolica pottery with bust portraits of women, were ordered by lovers and 'lovers of poetry'. Angela's beauty was a significant theme in Renaissance arts.

Renowned photographer Gisele Freund explains in her book *Photography and Society*, how 'each society develops characteristic forms of artistic expression that are born of the needs and traditions of dominant social class'. She also explains how a change in social structure not only influences the subject matter but also the techniques that are used for art.^{7} The monarchs loved an emulation of their power through a full-length portrait painting.^{8} The noble classes fancied miniature portraits they could enclose in powder boxes or a lockets,^{9} signifying romantic or political



allegiance to the person depicted.^{10} In general, the portraits represented their subjects as deserving of love, honour, respect and power.^{11}

With the emergence of the middle class in the second half of the 18th century in Western Europe^{12}, the art of portraiture became democratised and mechanised, aiding the rise of photographic portraiture.^{13} The camera and the human body interacted in this new production space, and the advent of new techniques in the 19th century made photographic portraits cheaper, rendering them affordable for the ascending classes too. Once a medium of the rich, photographic portraits increased in number as an individual could use the medium to establish their new social status to itself and the society. Photography was being used to transform bodies into objects that could be symbolically owned.^{14}

Portraiture was further democratised by the invention of daguerreotype in 1838, by Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre, a French printmaker, artist and proprietor of dioramas. A daguerreotype was a finely detailed photograph developed in mercury fumes on a highly polished, silver-plated sheet of copper.^{15} Following this, a few formats emerged that boosted photography's mass production. One of them was a carte de visite, invented by French photographer Eugène Disderi in 1862. A 6cm x 9cm portrait photograph print, this was a highly marketed item during the 19th century and brought down the cost of a photographic print from 50 to 100 French francs (FF) to less than

Fig 2.3: **Daguerrotype** of an American author with her lock of hair and rosemary. Giving someone a lock of hair was considered a sign of love or devotion.



Fig 2.7: The full-length, life-size portrait of Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605-1627), depicting his status as the 'World-Seizer'. This is the largest known Mughal portrait.

Fig 2.4: A gold coin circulated in the Kingdom of Bulgaria during King Ferdinand I's reign, in 1894.



Fig 2.5: Locket with a small painting of a man. Pictures inside lockets generally indicated romantic or political allegiance.

Fig 2.6: Statue of King Tomaslev in Zagreb, Croatia.

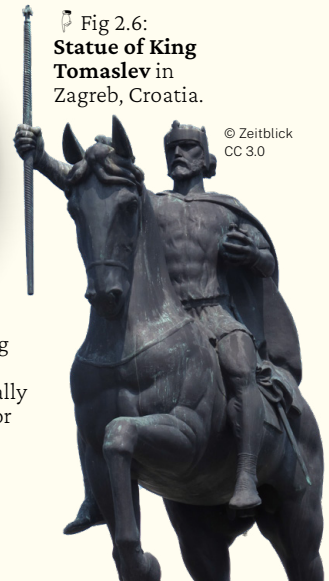




Fig 2.8:
Album of
**cartes de
visite** of
British and
European
royalty.

FF 2, with twelve photographic prints being available for around FF 20.^{16} Due to its low cost, it was widely available and led to the opening of 300 photography studios in Paris alone.^{17} People began using it as a calling card and sharing it with one another, leaving a physical trace in the form of a photo. Friends and family gathered them for albums, substituting the physical existence of real people, such as families and famous people like actors and monarchs.^{18} By being in print, the body had a life separate from its physical existence. This has continued to images being created by and stored on different tools. Such as what we see on Bumble as well.

Photographic technology has evolved but this practice of sharing images of oneself and collecting images of friends and family has continued. First made available in 1888, Kodak hand cameras allowed the development of personal photography as a popular, domestic and regular activity. People who could afford it could photographically record events themselves, rather than going to professionals.^{19} The volume and variety of photographs increased with the ease and comfort of digitization in the 21st century. Digital cameras and cameraphones have helped make image-making spontaneous while creating room for experimentation. With easy access to networked technologies such as computers, phones and the Internet, sharing images became more convenient.^{20} In December 2021, Instagram, a popular social networking site founded in 2010



Fig 2.9:
**First camera
phone picture**,
promptly
shared with
thousands of
friends, family
and business
associates
worldwide.

and centred on photo sharing, reached an active user base of 2 billion with over 50 billion photos shared.^{21} Peer bonding, social interaction and the act of being informed and informing, like by sharing cartes de visite in the 19th century, were seen as a common motivation for online photo sharing.^{22} In a social relationship context, photographs serve as proof of an event happening, like a vacation or a party. They invoke memories by serving like a time machine that takes you back to the past.^{23} This idea has also been corroborated academically by Dr. Van House, an American professor emerita at UC Berkeley and contributors, in their empirical study of cameraphone photos and sharing. Their studies have helped classify the social use of photography into five parts: creation and maintenance of social relationships, personal and group memory, self-expression, self-presentation and functional.^{24}

Dr. Van House, in another paper titled 'Feminist HCI meets Facebook: Performativity and Social Networking Sites', argues how making, viewing and analysing images embodies how we represent ourselves and reinforces societal norms and constructions.^{25} Susan Sontag in her essay *Heroism of Vision* from *On Photography* suggests the successful role of photography in beautifying the world so that photographs now set the standard of beauty, rather than the world doing so.^{26}

The tool to show oneself may have changed from a sculpture to a painting to a photograph, yet portraiture still serves its classic definition. Today, anyone who can afford the tools, regardless of profession and experience, can use a medium of portraiture to represent themselves. This democratisation of portraiture and documentation of events has been possible through the industrialisation of photography. Through self-representation, users are showing the world the kind of people they are, the activities they are engaging in and the spaces they are occupying, in addition to self-portraits.^{27} Users are defining how they perceive themselves while shaping their appearances through the medium of photography. The act of image-making, as portraiture was once used by the ruling and noble class, is used to give their body status and identify in a definite way.^{28}



Fig 2.10:
Susse Frère
Daguerrotype
camera

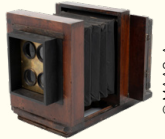


Fig 2.11:
Camera used
for **cartes de
visite**



Fig 2.12: First
hand held
Kodak camera



Fig 2.13: First
commercially
available
digital SLR.



Fig 2.14: First
commercial
camera phone



IF HE'S GOOD ON THE LOOKS, HE'S GOOD ON THE BOOKS According to social psychological research^{29}, 'physically attractive' people were found to have more socially desirable attributes and attained greater personal achievement in many areas of life. This shows that physical attractiveness can influence beliefs about one's personality and one's expected success, and is known as the '*what is beautiful is good*' hypothesis. According to neurological science studies, this might be because the reward centre in the human brain, the medial orbito-frontal cortex, is stimulated by both the attractiveness of a face and goodness of behaviour, which links aesthetic processing to the moral processing.^{30}

First impressions are important. Let's consider the example of the male African village weaverbird. He showcases his nest by hanging upside down from its bottom and rapidly flaps his wings as soon as he notices a female in proximity. The female observes and if he passes her initial visual check, she enters the nest to investigate it further.^{31} A similar emphasis on first impressions among humans is supported by social psychology studies with the theory of thin slicing. It suggests that rich perceptions are often formed from a brief encounter, using indications from expressive movements such as body language, facial expressions, posture, and voice.^{32}



Fig 2.15:
A male **black-headed weaverbird** building his nest.

Much like the weaverbird, humans using dating apps, with a swiping design, must catch the eye of their potential mates within those few seconds of deliberation between swiping right or left.

Let's examine the mating ritual of a bowerbird to comprehend the significance of attempting to enhance one's inherent visual qualities. The males of each of the 18 bowerbird species indigenous to Australia and New Guinea build display areas called bowers, meant only for mating purposes. A bower is large and complex and decorated with brightly coloured items such as flowers, berries and snail shells. Females fly in search of the most attractive, ornamented and superior quality bower, and mate with the builder. A successful builder male may mate with up to 10

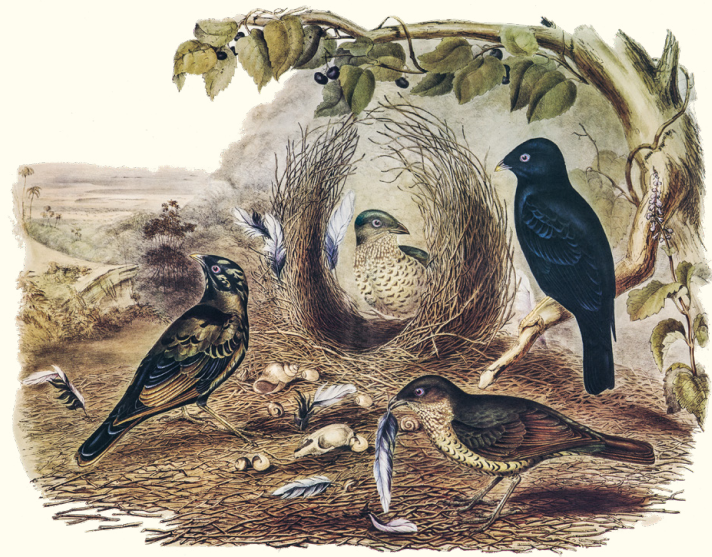


Fig 2.16:
A male **satin bowerbird** in his decorated bower.

females in a day. Bowlers are among the rare instances of animal art that Darwin had identified, in addition to being one of the best examples of sexual selection through mate choice. Given that sexual selection for bower complexity nearly doubled the male's brain size and bowers require a good amount of time, energy and skill to construct, the aesthetic appeal of a bower can act as an indicator of good genes, skills and intelligence.^{33}

Like the bowerbird advertises itself via the medium of art and building, humans interested in mating may advertise themselves, in a digital context, using the art of photography. Hence, to maximise the matches, a lot of tips for a great profile picture destined to get a match are available on the Internet, backed by data drawn by online dating companies such as OkCupid^{34} and Hinge^{35}, scientific theories^{36} and customer research by influencers and dating coaches.

In one of their educational resources, the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Museum discusses the various elements of portraiture. The analysis of these elements can tell the viewer more about a work of art and its meaning. These include pose, clothing, colour, medium, scale, setting and objects.^{37} Lighting for a portrait, especially in photography, is also important.

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For lighting, data from OkCupid suggests taking photos during the ‘golden hour’, as redder and softer light during the beginning of sunset and sunrise imparts a warm glow to the subject, making them more attractive. Their report also discourages using a flash to click a portrait, since it has found that doing so makes the subject look older by almost 7 years, the excess light drawing attention to blemishes and lines.^{38}

The pose is an important aspect of a portrait. It can aid the viewer in understanding the artist’s point of view about the subject, or how the subject wants to be seen. Just like a male elk shows off his physical traits by fighting off his competitors using his majestic antlers^{39} to be deemed attractive by females, data collected by Hinge shows that men are 45% more likely to get swiped right on a sporty photo.^{40} Taking a cue from the sexual selection theory, it may be possible that ‘being active’ and engaging in sports is seen as a fitness indicator. It is also a good idea to accentuate your jaws, muscles and beard. These morphological features are sexually dimorphic traits which also act as sexually selected indicators of fitness. A meta-analysis of studies showed that women found moderately muscular men more sexually appealing than non-muscular and very muscular men. Evolutionary psychological studies, backed by the meta-analysis study in question, showed that muscular men prefer short-term relationships, had more affair partners and were preferred by women as short-term partners generally.^{41} Another study on evolution and human behaviour showed that women sexually preferred men with beards, as it is associated with the perception of maturity and masculinity.^{42}

Other suggestions to look more attractive included taking more space in a photo. This was corroborated by a study done by social psychology researchers who found that postural expansiveness – the expansion of the body in a physical space – made one look more romantically attractive by making one seem assertive.^{43} Smiling in pictures is highly recommended as it boosts one’s social attractiveness and is regarded as a sign of trustworthiness and intelligence, traits women look for in their partners. Self-perceived attractiveness ratings increased by 10.26% for every 10% increase in proportional smile width.^{44}

Distinct difference in size or appearance between the sexes of an animal in addition to the sexual organs themselves.

Objects or props in a photo can work as informational indicators of the subject. Posing with pets is encouraged as it shows one as responsible and caring, traits that some women search for in their partners and which evolutionary psychologists believe boost attractiveness.^{45} Hinge, in their study, found that wearing sunglasses in photos reduced the chances of being viewed positively by over 41%. Another study on social psychology discouraged using alcohol in pictures as exposure to it can indicate reduced cognitive impairment, making one look less intelligent. This has been termed the ‘imbibing idiot’ bias.^{46}

In terms of style, Hinge has reported that selfies were 40% less likely to be swiped right and recommends candid photographs instead, as they were found to be 15% more likely to be perceived positively.^{47}

THE GAME TO CHARM

To understand the visual courtship displays on Bumble, I studied profile pictures of cisgender heterosexual men. The sample size for this personal study was 126 profiles of cis-het men aged 24–29, with 515 images in total. The photos were sketched with notes taken, to avoid privacy and consent issues.

The photographic themes for the study could be divided into the following categories:

☞ Selfie

A self-portrait taken with a camera or a phone at arm’s length.

☞ Posed

A consciously constructed picture, including postures such as hands in pocket, closing cuff buttons of a shirt, sitting/standing in front of an object/structure/space.

a. Candid

Upper body images that include the participants looking in a direction other than directly at the camera.

☞ Sporty

Images with the participants engaging in a physically strenuous exercise, such as skiing, hiking, sailing, bouldering, running.

☞ Touristy

Images depicting the participant as a tourist.

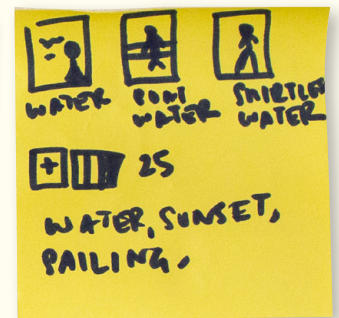
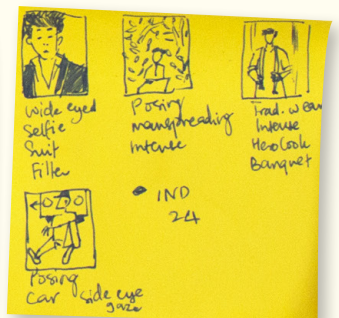
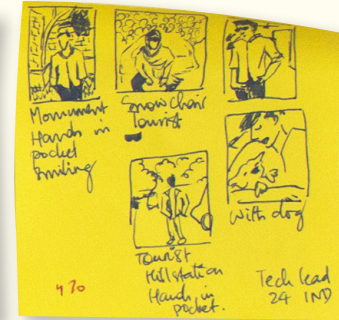
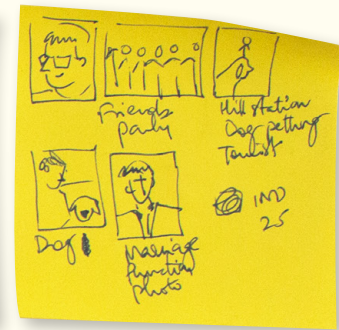


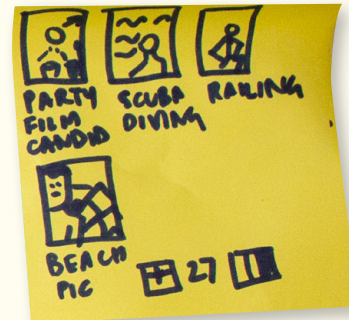
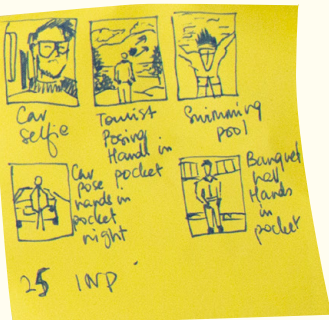
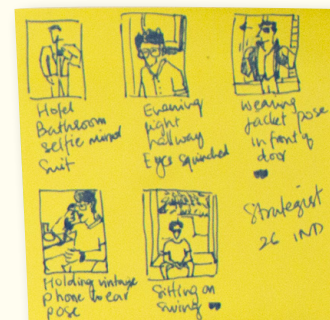
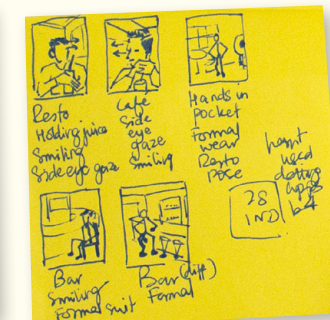
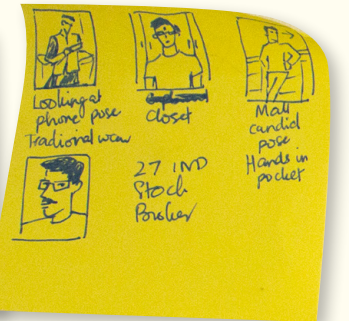
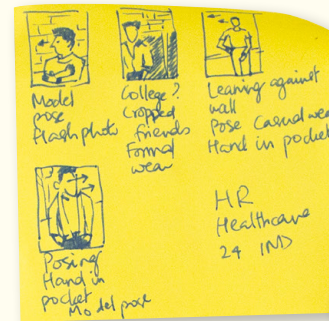
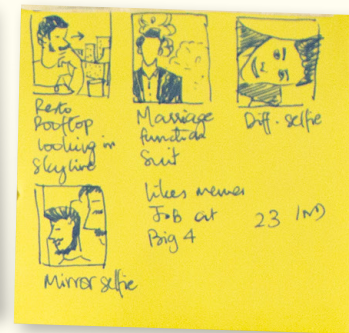
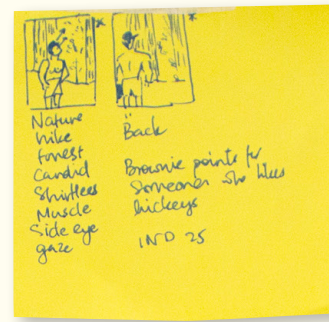
The spaces in the study could be divided into the following categories:

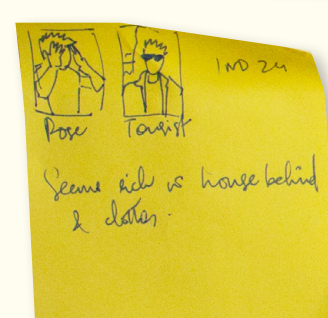
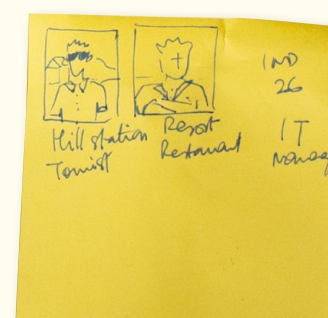
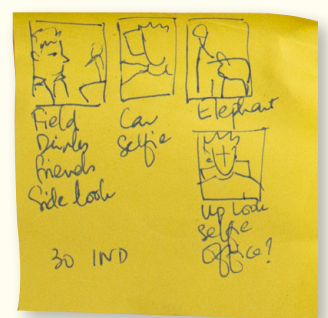
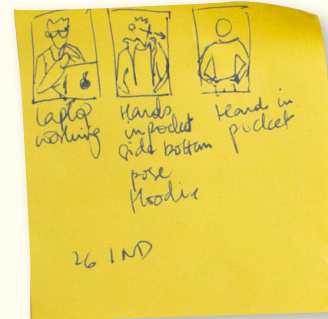
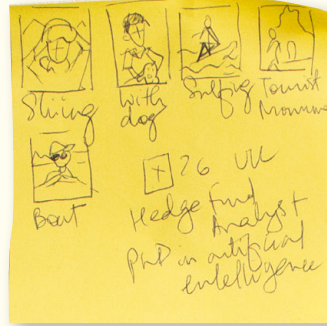
- ☞ Mountains/hills
- ☞ Natural and artificial water bodies
- ☞ Restaurants/bars/hotel
- ☞ Gym
- ☞ Bedroom
- ☞ Bathroom

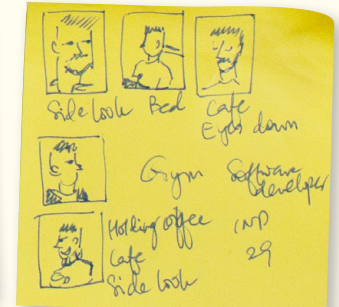
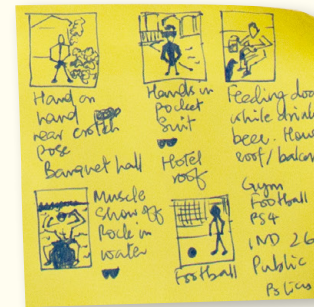
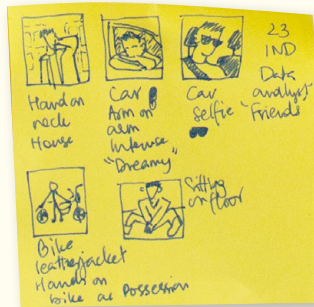
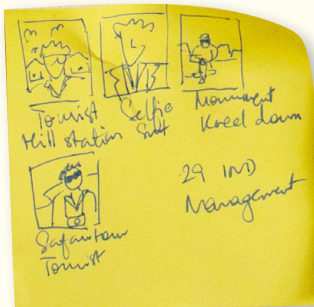
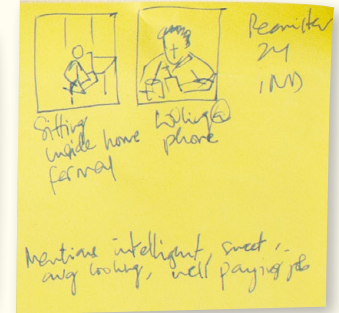
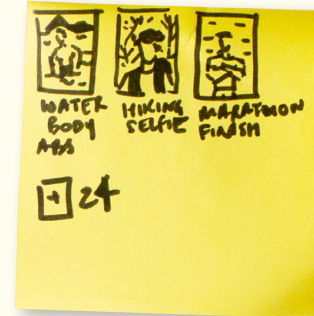
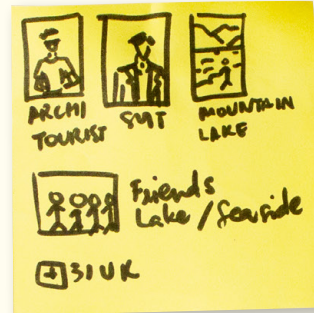
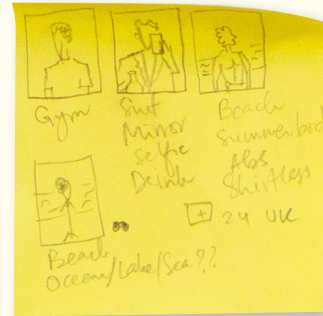
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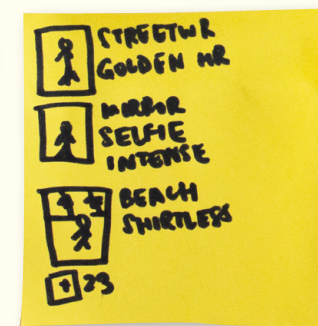
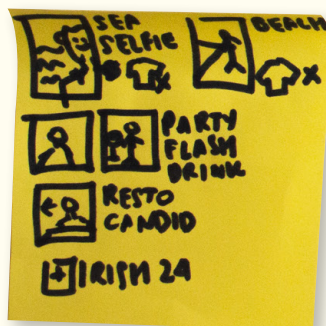
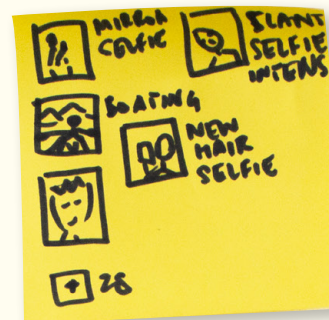
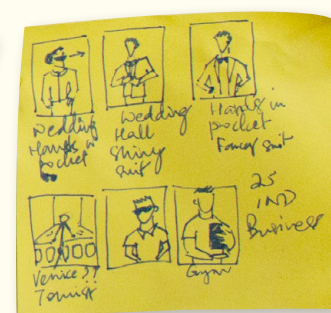
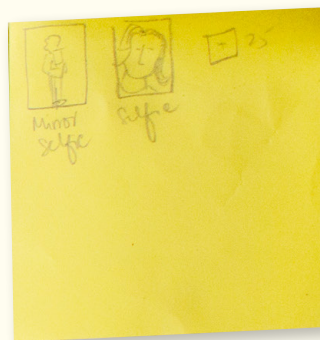
- ☞ Mirrors
- ☞ Animals
- ☞ Music activities
- ☞ Alcohol/smoking
- ☞ Fashion fits (showcasing a person's entire outfit)
- ☞ Sunglasses

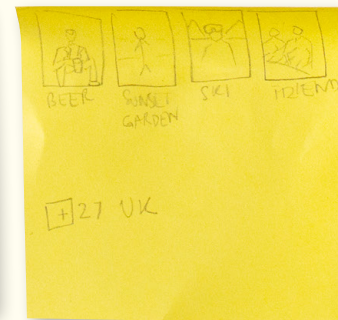
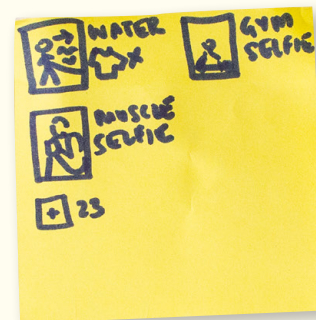
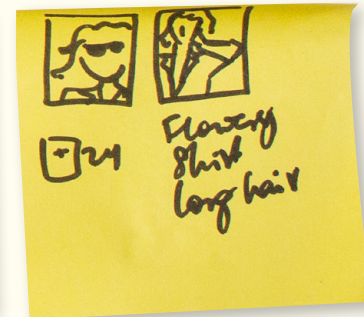
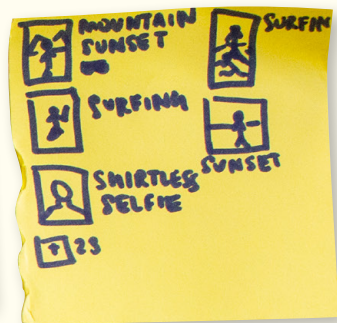
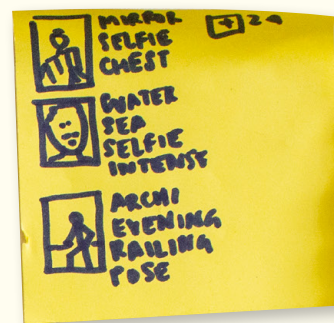
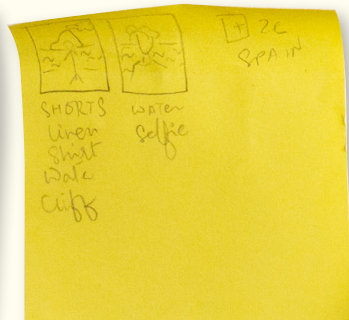
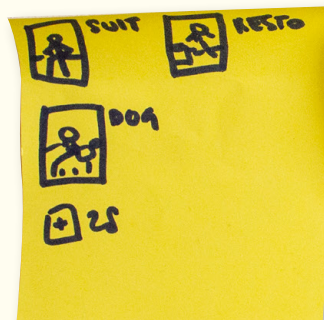
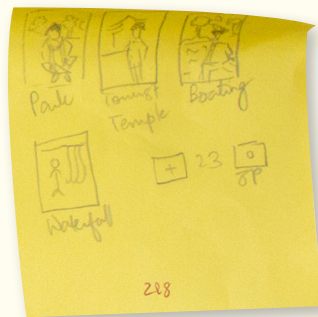
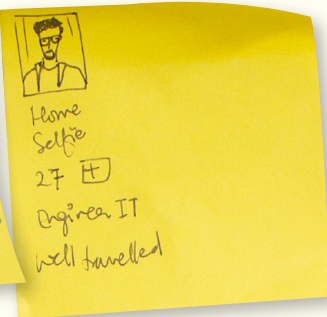


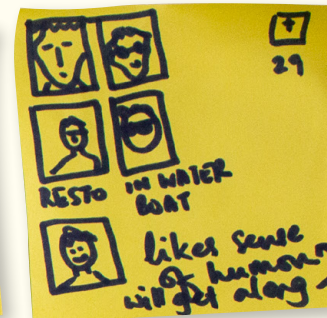
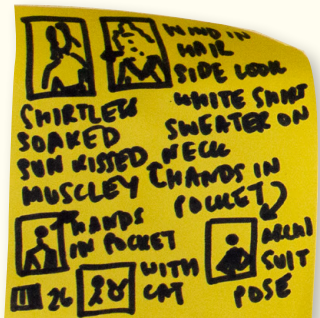
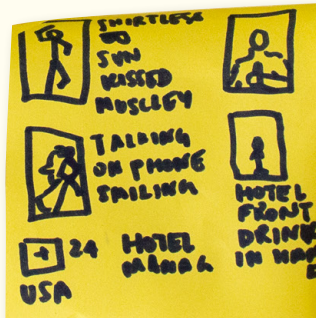
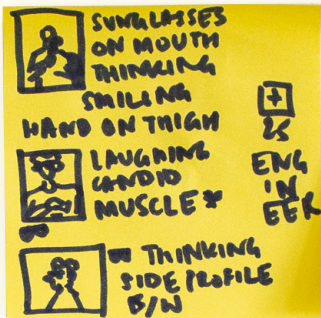
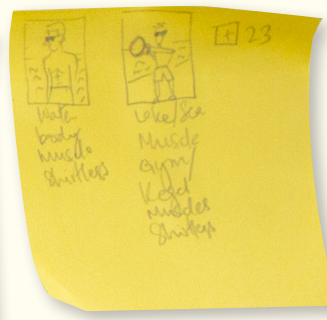
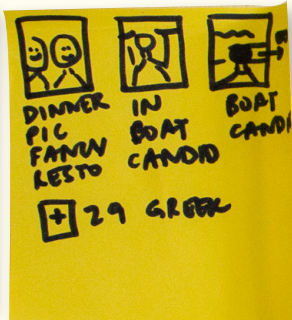
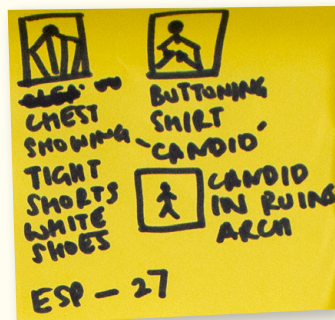
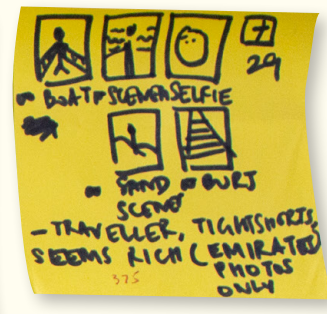
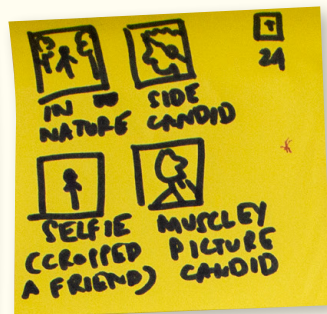
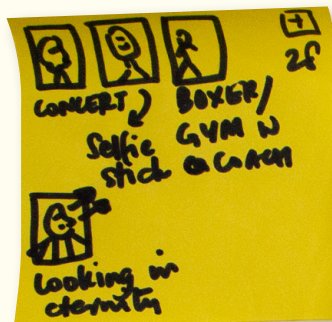


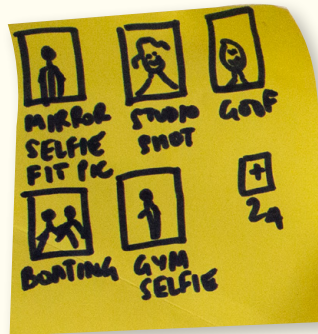
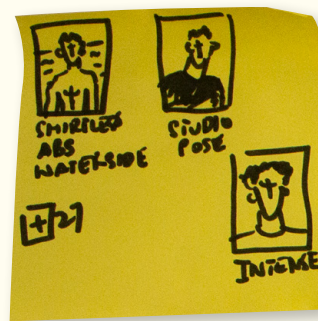












It was observed that restaurants/hotels and bars appeared in 53 images (10%) and tourist places in 57 images (11%). These are important markers of socioeconomic standing, which further serves as an indicator of the resources one has access to. Posing at locations serves to remind viewers that 'I was here' or 'I engaged in this activity'. Exhibiting one's socioeconomic status also involves using the tool of fashion. 30 images (5.8%) were essentially 'fit pics', with people in sunglasses in 72 (13.9%) of them. Cars and automobiles were used as an accessory in 16 images (3.1%). Possession of vehicles can also provide insight to one's socioeconomic status.

Repetitively seeing landscapes such as mountains and water bodies, also provides insight on the subject's geographical location and, in turn, their culture and hobbies. Water bodies were the highest occurring space, appearing in 74 images (14.3%). Mountains and hills occurred in 50 images (9.7%). Engaging in musical activities, seen in 7 images (1.3%) might demonstrate talent, a trait that women might find intellectually attractive.

Engaging in sports, being at the gym, showing off one's muscles, and being shirtless are all examples of showcasing one's physical traits. They serve as 'thirst traps', especially for women drawn to men with muscles. 49 images (9.5%) were categorised as sporty while no shirts were worn in 28 images (4.7%), with muscles being the point of attraction in 27(5%) images. The gym was seen in 6 images (1.1%). As discussed earlier, men with muscles, advertising their masculinity, are sexually preferred by women for short-term relationships.

It was observed that 107 images (20.77%) could be categorised as selfies, with 26 images (5%) taken in front of a mirror. 87 images (16.89%) were observed to be posed and 78 images (15.14%) were candid. This corroborated Hinge's report of candid photos being viewed favourably. It can be assumed with both kinds of images that the subject was taking into consideration how they look and constructing their appearances for the viewers. In doing so, they were posing and composing images to provide a perspective of themselves, emphasising visual features.

The sample also included the practice of the 'cheerleader effect'^{48} – a visual phenomenon where



one appears more attractive when viewed in the company of others, with friends and family occurring in 22 images (4.2%). Some participants showed off their nurturing side by posing with pets, observed in 26 images (5%). Access to personal space and leisure objects was given through a glimpse of the bedroom in 8 images (1.5%), bathroom in 6 images (1.1%) and the use of alcohol and cigarettes in 19 images (3.6%).

SUPPLEMENT

SHOP FOR A LOOK


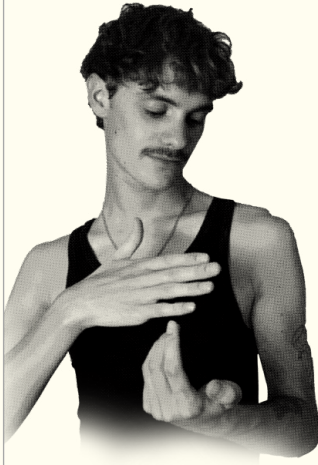




	
Ski ya later	Come ski some waves
Mountains/Hills; Sporty; Candid	Natural water body; Sporty; Candid; Shirtless
	
Walking the trails and trials of life	Riding that wave
Mountains/Hills; Sporty; Candid	Natural water body; Sporty; Candid; Shirtless


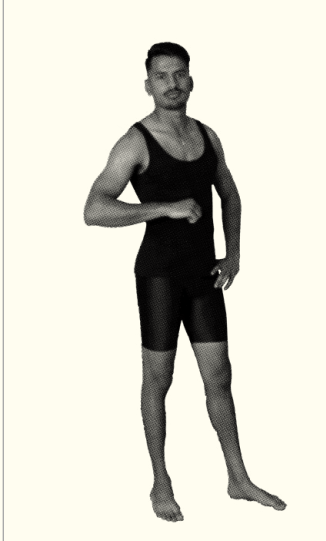
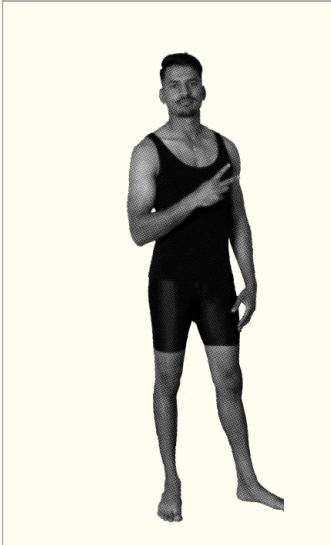

	
Bikers gonna bike	Leaning on things like the patriarchy version 1
Mountains/Hills; Sporty; Candid; Automobile	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Cars; Shirtless
	
Your God-given Ed Sheeran	Besties for the resties
Posed; Candid; Bedroom; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Music activities	Posed; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Friends/family



	
Pockets of jealousy	It's cuffin' season
Mountains/Hills; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits	Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits
	
Nothing but gains here	Wine and dine
Selfie; Posed; Sporty; Gym; Mirror; Shirtless	Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid

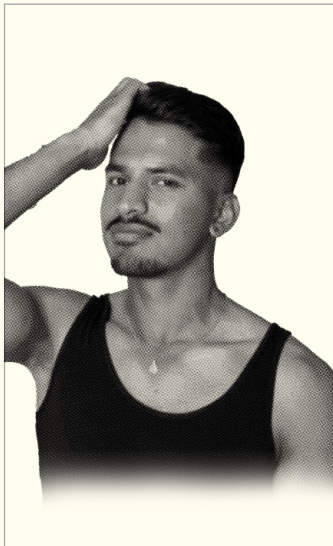

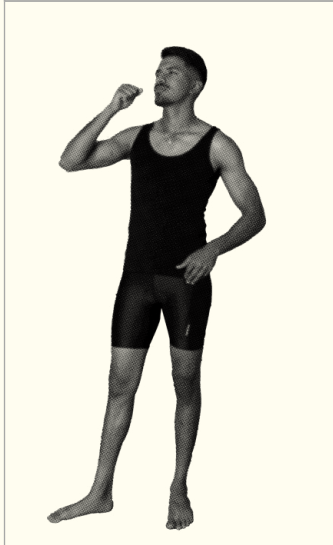
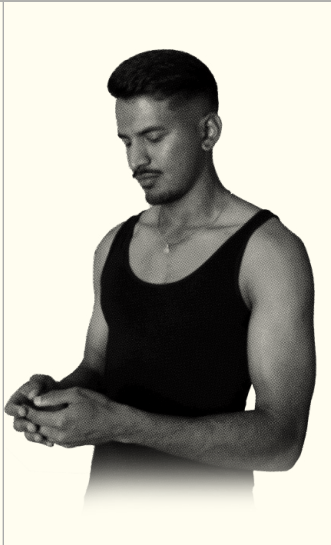
	
Mirror, mirror on the wall	Pawsitive vibes only
Selfie; Posed; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Bedroom; Bathroom; Gym; Fashion fits; Mirror	Posed; Candid; Animals; Bedroom; Mountains/hills;
	
I stand (on a pedestal)	I don't sweat, I sparkle
Posed; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Fashion fits; Friends and family	Selfie; Posed; Sporty; Gym; Mirror; Shirtless


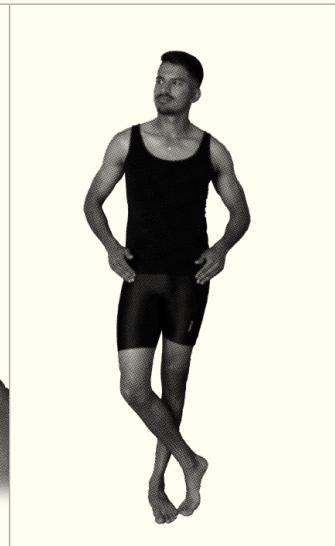

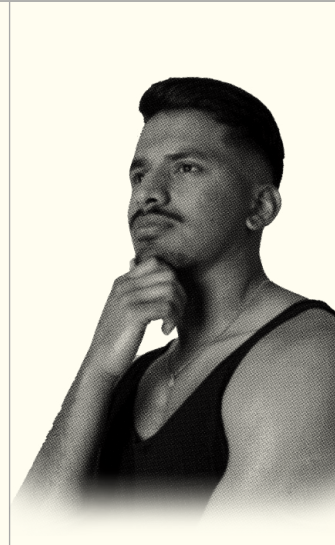


	
#WaitingForTheFood	Leaning on things like the patriarchy version 2
Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Cars
	
May peace be with you	Sun's out, shades on
Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Friends and family	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed

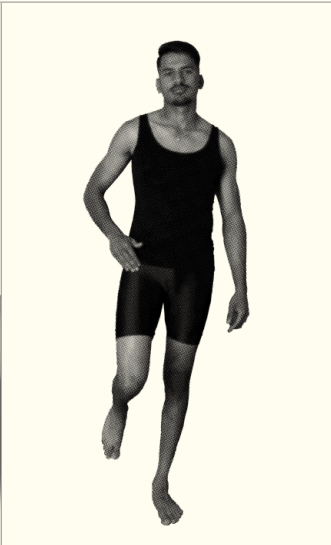
	
The Shah Rukh Khan pose	Protecting my masculinity
Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits
	
My coat of pride	POV: You're safe
Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits; Cars



	
Head and shoulders	Leaning on things like the patriarchy version 3
Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits; Cars
	
Wish you were beer	Ticking your boxes with my full(filling) inbox
Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid	Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits

	
My jaw, you're in awe	My pocket, you gawk it
Mountains/Hills; Water bodies; Touristy; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits	Mountains/Hills; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits
	
#ProudMan	Intellectual thinker
Mountains/Hills; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits; Cars	Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid



	
My eyes are on you	Lean and mean
Mountains/Hills; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid	Mountains/Hills; Touristy; Sporty; Restaurants/hotels/bars; Posed; Candid; Fashion fits

FEEL FREE
TO REMIX



CHAPTER 03



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX (UAL SELECTION)

CONTENTS:
WHAT IS SEXUAL SELECTION;
CHOOSE YOUR MATE;
FIGHT FOR YOUR MATE;
WHAT MAKES HER SWOON

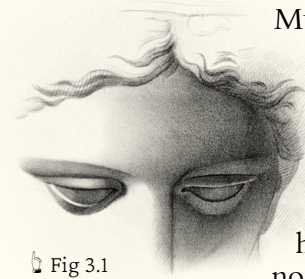


Fig 3.1

MY GRANDMA WOULD CONSTANTLY URGE ME as a child to do the culturally 'correct' symmetrical middle hair parting (fig 3.1) because if I didn't, I wouldn't be able to find a husband. I always did an uneven middle hair parting to rebel against this notion. Research for my thesis

has provided an answer to this mystery almost two decades later, with no husband in sight. The idea of symmetry being attractive may have been propagated by the sexual selection theory, in which symmetry is one of the fitness indicators for mate selection, and is hence desirable.^{1}

WHAT IS SEXUAL SELECTION?

“... on what I call Sexual Selection. This depends, not on a struggle for existence, but on a struggle between the males for possession of the females; the result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring.”

-CHARLES DARWIN, ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES
BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION^{2}

163 years ago, in 1859, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) presented the theory of sexual selection in his seminal book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.^{3} He then solidified his work on it with the book *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*^{4} in 1871.

As mentioned previously, sexual selection refers to the evolution of traits that do not aid survival but instead, aid success in mating. At sexual maturity, with help of sex hormones, sexually selected physical traits emerge, timed to affect the process of mate



selection.^{5} While sexual selection employs many mechanisms, mate choice (intersexual) and male competition (intrasexual) are two of the most popular and widely researched mechanisms.^{6}

Sexual selection is usually more pronounced in males than females.^{7} Consider those middle school biology classes, where you were taught that males create an abundance of gametes throughout their lives while females produce a relatively small quantity. This indicates that not all male gametes will fertilise female gametes in a reproductive process because it only takes one gamete of each type to do so. Angus John Bateman, an English geneticist through his work on sexual selection in fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*) in 1948, showed that female fecundity is limited by their access to resources, while that of males is limited by their access to females. As a result, men often compete among themselves for access to females, whereas females are selective and mate with only chosen males,^{8} as seen on Bumble!

Sexually selected traits act as a form of communication to distinguish between species and then to distinguish between members of a species. Take the example of a túngara frog. Túngara frogs (*Physalaemus pustulosus*) are found in northern South America and Central America.^{9} Courting males use calls (sound) to attract females. In a single night, they might make more than five thousand calls.^{10} The simple call consists of a frequency-modulated whine which can be produced by itself. The complex call consists of the simple call followed by 1-7 harmonic chucks. Females rely on the whine to distinguish between species and whine with chucks to distinguish between members of the same species. The chuck added to the whine makes the call 5 times more appealing, increasing the attractiveness of the male by 500%.^{11} The chuck appears to have evolved as a result of sexual selection, as it improves the males' ability to attract females.^{12}

Fig 3.2: The mating call of a Túngara frog involves the inflation of its vocal sac.

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CHOOSE YOUR MATE

Mate choice generally refers to female choice of male traits (though the opposite is also true in some cases). Female preference for a behavioural or morphological trait can arise for different reasons, including:^{13}

- ☞ The trait advertises the ability of the male to provide resources, such as breeding territory, nutrition and care for the female and potential progeny.
- ☞ The trait indicates a healthy broad genetic quality with genetic benefits for potential progeny.

FIGHT FOR YOUR MATE

The act of competition can emerge when an individual's use of a resource (in this case, a mate) makes it tougher for others to get it. This can work in different ways. One of the ways is through a direct encounter, where members of a specific sex can fight among themselves. This has led to the evolution of male armaments such as deer antlers and beetle horns, which gives them an advantage when fighting off competitors while acting as a fitness indicator. Consider the giraffe, whose long neck has been theorised to have evolved due to sexual selection. Clubbing their competition with well-armoured heads on long necks, larger necked giraffes are perceived dominant and gain a better chance of access to oestrous females.^{14} Mate choice here also acts as a competitive mechanism. A mate becomes unavailable to the other sex, temporarily, when they are engaged in mating with the mate of their choosing. Retaining a mate is another mechanism.^{15} Consider the *Plecia nearctica*, known as the lovebug. In this species, the mate competition is intense. Male lovebugs typically compete with other males and may grip females before they fly away from their emerging locations. They may also cause problems for other copulating couples. When a male begins successfully copulating with a female,

Fig 3.3: The neck of a giraffe has been theorised to have evolved under sexual selection for male-male competition.



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Fig 3.4: Lovebugs in the copulation position.



© Author unnamed, CC 3.0

competition is intense. Male lovebugs typically compete with other males and may grip females before they fly away from their emerging locations. They may also cause problems for other copulating couples. When a male begins successfully copulating with a female,



he may maintain his copulatory position for nearly 56 hours, although sperm transfer only takes 12.5 hours.^{16} By remaining attached until the female is ready to deposit her eggs, preventing other males from fertilising them, this prolonged copulation works as a way of guarding her. In humans, the emotion of sexual jealousy has evolved to prevent infidelity, manifesting as vigilance and violence in a psychological adaptation. A sexually jealous person may monitor their partner and their relationship, or fight their sexual rivals, keeping them away from their partner.^{17} This emotion can surface in those participating in casual dating, which can initially be non-exclusive, to discourage potential suitors.

WHAT MAKES HER SWOON

American evolutionary biologist Robert L. B. Trivers proposed the 'parental investment' theory in 1972, which is "any investment by the parent in an individual offspring that increases the offspring's chance of surviving (and hence reproductive success) at the cost of the parent's ability to invest in other offspring".^{18} Females carry the responsibility of fertilisation, gestation, and nursing among more than 5,000 species of mammals, including more than 250 species of primates.^{19} As a result, females incur a higher cost for initial parental investment in traits that serve mating more than males.^{20} One with costly assets cannot afford to part with them so easily. A pioneer of evolutionary psychology, David Buss emphasises that understanding human mating tactics now requires understanding that they are based on recurrent contexts spanning evolution. Which tactics get activated and remain dormant are dictated by the relevant socio-cultural environments.

“Among humans, the evolution of women’s preference for a committed mate with resources would have required three preconditions. First,

resources would have had to be accruable, defensible, and controllable by men during human evolutionary history. Second, men would have had to differ from each other in their holdings or skill at resource acquisition, as well as in their willingness to invest those holdings in a woman and her children. If all men had possessed equal potential to acquire resources and shown an equal willingness to commit them, selection could not have favoured a female preference for these qualities. Constants do not count in mating decisions. And third, the advantages of committing to one man would have had to outweigh the advantages of being with several men”

-DAVID M. BUSS, *THE EVOLUTION OF DESIRE: STRATEGIES OF HUMAN MATING* ^{21}

Consider the elephant seal to understand the advantage of a male’s access to defensible and controllable resources. A male seal will threaten and battle other males to secure his position in the social hierarchy



Fig 3.5:
Elephant seals fighting in a harem to establish dominance for mating.



A group of female animals sharing a single mate.

which gets him access to female seals who congregate in harems, which can consist of up to 40 females, with one alpha male mating with them. The female seal boosts her chances of mating with a mature, powerful, high-ranking male by enticing males to compete for her.^{22} Research shows significant levels of interpersonal male aggression, conflict, and warfare included in the 'state of nature' of humans, fulfilling the first precondition mentioned by David Buss.^{23}

Severe injuries found on ancient skeletal remains have also been discovered, indicating that men engaged in interpersonal violence throughout human history.^{24} This might be the reason why men have shown the evolution of morphological traits that adapt them to male contests, an important mechanism of sexual selection. Men exhibit stronger development of upper body strength and musculature, including larger biceps and broad shoulders, some of the most sexually dimorphic features of the human body. This



Larger biceps and broad shoulders in males are few of the sexually dimorphic traits of the human body



Fig 3.6:
Illustration to show **sexual dimorphism** in the human body.

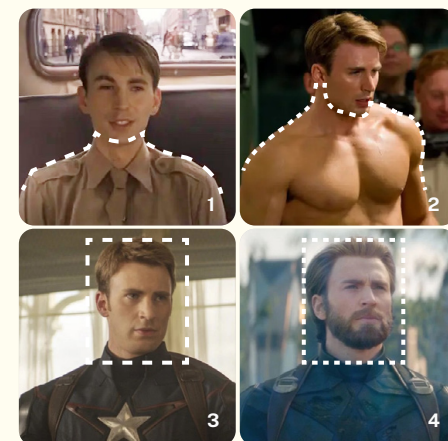
could be seen as an adaptation for intrasexual competition, but it could also be an adaptation for hunting large animals.^{25}

Primates have been studied by animal behaviour researchers to show higher levels of the hormone testosterone in males during mating season, and the presence of oestrus females. Male howler monkeys show an increase in testosterone levels when challenging other extra-group males while chimpanzees have shown the same when competing with other males.^{26} The biological definition of masculine traits in humans such as a long and broad jaw, deep voice, and broad shoulders are also seen as health cues. They

Also known as heat; a period of time in which a female animal is fertile and ready to have sex

are products of testosterone, which is produced during puberty. It has been observed that men's traits are adapted better towards making them look dominant: beards,^{27} deep voices^{28} and muscular bodies. Testosterone-dependent traits may signal a man's long-term health. Only healthy people are capable of compromising their immune systems by releasing high levels of testosterone, since this hormone has an immunosuppressive effect.^{29} Positively correlated in studies, facial bilateral symmetry and prominence of testosterone-dependent secondary sexual facial traits such as cheek and jaw bones, chin, advertise immunocompetence and resistance to pathogens/disease resistance, acting as cues to inheritable fitness benefits, hence being sexually attractive.^{30}

Being muscular can also provide insight into one's ability to invest energy in maintaining a metabolically expensive body type over a long period.^{31} Women have been studied to favour dominating male behaviour and associated morphological traits for short-term sexual relationships and during the fertile phase of the ovulation cycle, possibly since these



© Marvel

Fig 3.7: **Representation of masculine traits, such as broad shoulders(2), jaw-line and beard(4)**, as attractive seen through the example of Captain America, a popular American movie superhero played by Chris Evans, titled the 'Sexiest Man Alive' in 2022, by a popular American magazine, *People*.



biases gave genetic benefits ancestrally.^{32} This body of research sheds light on why, in the study of Bumble profiles of men covered in Chapter 2, almost 1/5th of the sample size uploaded pictures of themselves flaunting their physiques and sport skills.

Height is one of the combinations of morphological and behavioural traits that is considered attractive. It works as a power and status marker. Male height has been observed to bestow an economic, political, and social advantage. Taller men have been observed to get hired easily, are more likely promoted than shorter men, have received more votes in the US and are associated with high status.^{33} This can provide insight to why it's been found that men lied more about their heights on dating apps.^{34}

The most fundamental and universal basis for female choice in the animal kingdom may be the evolution of the female preference for males who provide resources.^{35} For instance, it is common to see the practice of nuptial gifts by male insects. In bush crickets or katydids, during copulation, the male provides the female with her energy requirements. This nuptial gift is a gelatinous mass produced by the male accessory gland, the spermatophylax, which is transferred and ingested by the female. Females who consume this show a higher level of fecundity, egg-laying rate and longevity.^{36} Another set of insects that can be considered are the empidine flies. Instead of hunting for food on their own, females rely on gifts of prey by their mates. Certain male empidine flies are also known to offer silk and seed fluff to females to increase their mating success.^{37}

Humans usually, work with a bi-parental mechanism.^{38} Women face the burdens of internal fertilisation, a nine-month gestation and lactation. Hence, they would benefit from choosing a mate who would match their parental investment by providing them and their offspring with protective and nourishing resources. Ancestral women often paid a heavy price for neglecting their right to choose their partners since that led to them being vulnerable to domestic violence, food insecurity, illness and abandonment. While the opposite resulted in numerous benefits such as protection, involved parental investment, gene quality

and nourishment.^{39} In terms of long-term mating, women are known to prefer intelligent, caring and friendly mates who are able to invest in resources.^{40} A research of 1,111 personal advertisements revealed that women sought financial resources eleven times more than men do.^{41} Another study testing evolutionary hypotheses in 37 countries, with more than 10,000 participants found that, in 36 out of 37 countries, women regarded a prospective mate's strong financial prospects more than men did and overall, rating good 'financial prospect' higher than good 'looks'.^{42} A study on the effect of physical attributes and socioeconomic status on mate selection found that a mate's socioeconomic status affected a woman's perception of attractiveness more than a man's did. A good status was able to equalise the lack of 'good' physical attributes in men.^{43}

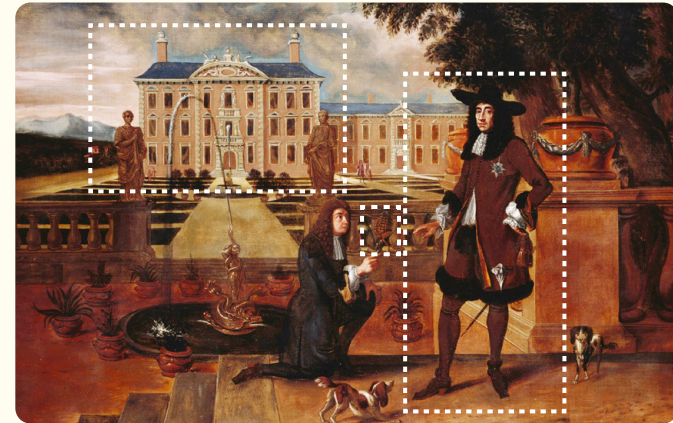


Fig 3.8.a: Portrait of **Charles II of England with a pineapple, considered as an indicator of wealth**, in the 17th and 18th century. The portrait also uses the full-length body portrayal, clothes and house as indicators of power.

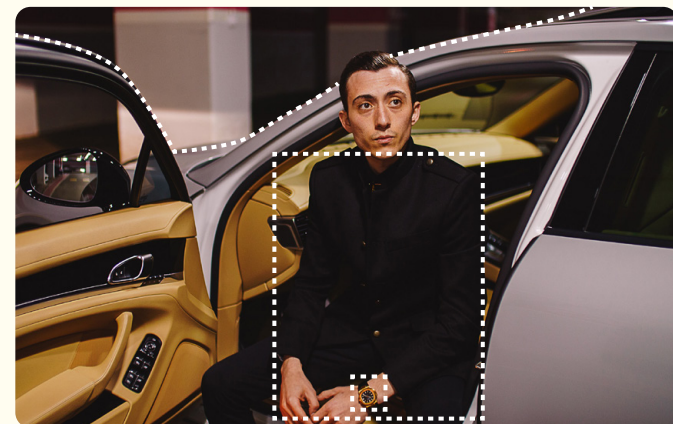


Fig 3.8.b: Portrait of a **man with socioeconomic markers** such as clothes, jewellery and car, a noticeable occurrence in my study of dating profiles.

Materials eaten, or beneficial substances absorbed by the opposite sex during mating.



A person's socioeconomic status (SES) can act as a cue on their ability to possess, access and control resources. Another study corroborated this theory and found that women considered a mate's status and resources as 'necessities',^{44} including access to better nutrition, living conditions, education, health resources, and professional and social opportunities. In my study, with a noticeable occurrence of socioeconomic markers such as access to restaurants, hotels and bars, using fashion (clothing is used to assess socioeconomic status)^{45} and automobiles as props and the documentation of travel, can be seen to depict one's SES.



CONCLUSION



LAST THOUGHTS

WHAT PAVES THE WAY FOR THE ACT OF 'SEX', 'copulation' or 'mating' is the courtship ritual, performed extravagantly by humans and animals alike. The act of seduction includes the act of representing oneself in the most enticing way possible, working in tune with the preferences of the party being enticed. Bumble's survey revealed that 85% of its users are seeking commitment and that the dating app is not a marketplace for casual encounters.⁽¹⁾ This thesis, hence, works within the context of a monogamous heterosexual relationship and outlines instances of humans and animals using different tools with the same motivation. It focusses on female preferences of male traits on the dating app Bumble and the theory of sexual selection. It investigates the overarching question of how an image may awaken desire by analysing the design of three key points: Bumble's ideology, self-representation using portrait photography and morphological features of human and animal males. Using the key elements of a portrait, it found that the profile photographs of men on Bumble meant to showcase themselves were attuned to academically proven preferences of females, as stated by the theory of sexual selection.

This thesis in no way implies that a woman strategizes to enhance her reproductive success and consciously views men via a parental lens in the context of her desire for a male trait. Instead, there lies a complex set of neurological and psychological systems built by evolution and experience that determined the preferences for certain traits – ability and will to provide economically, protect from harm and to provide for and nurture offspring. This was evident in Bumble's profile images with the usage of certain spaces, props and poses. The research reinforces the persistence of the historical motivations of the art of portraiture – to show the subject as worthy of love, honour, respect and power.

The mating strategies that one uses now are based on recurring context throughout evolution. The ones that are active or remain dormant are dictated by relevant socio-cultural environments. This research aims to be developed further via the lens of socio-cultural context, in order to fully investigate racial and social power dynamics, which are currently a crucial missing

link. It aims to dig even deeper into deconstructing the images on dating apps, to understand the potential of what images can convey, specifically those that are intended to seduce. Since the research is restricted to a cis heteronormative sphere, due to my personal context, it would be interesting to collaborate with individuals from different contexts to gain greater insight into the subject.

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CHAPTER 03

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CONCLUSION

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THE END