

The implicit cognition of interpersonal attraction

ABSTRACT:

Background

Current knowledge of interpersonal attraction and relationships is largely based on explicit cognition – what people say about themselves and others – which also reflects attitudes and biases that may be inaccurate. By contrast, little is known about what happens automatically and instinctively in the cognitive system when someone feels attracted to another person, known as implicit cognition.

Aims

Our research aimed to investigate: i) if changes in the implicit cognitive processes – time perception, attention and memory – in situations related to reproductive fitness constitute a unitary adaptation; ii) if individual differences in implicit cognition predict real-world behavior; and iii) the influence of female reproductive hormones and self-esteem on the implicit cognition.

Method

We conducted a series of three experimental studies in laboratory settings and one study in a more realistic methodology, namely a speed-dating. In addition, we conducted a systematic literature review.

Results

Our findings suggest that changes in the implicit cognitive processes may reflect evolutionary adaptations aimed at making the human cognitive system more responsive in situations related to reproductive fitness. Results also revealed gender differences that may be due to the different selection pressures. Furthermore, hormonal changes and self-esteem seem to modulate time perception of attractive stimuli.

Conclusions

Our findings carry both theoretical and practical significance. For example, they offer new perspectives on the risky sexual behavior linked to alcohol use. Our research helps to unveil the automatic and instinctive cognitive processes that form the foundation of interpersonal attraction.

Keywords

Implicit cognition, Attraction, Time perception, Evolutionary adaptation, Menstrual cycle

Published Work:

Arantes, J., Pinho, M., Wearden, J., & Albuquerque, P. B. (2021). "Time slows down whenever you are around" for women but not for men. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 641729. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.641729>

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