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## Bernhard Fink

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### Synonyms

[Symmetry](#); [Mate Choice](#)

### Definition

Physical signals of attractiveness in humans

### Introduction

The work of Bernhard Fink and his collaborators has a clear focus on the sexual signals that are revealed via our physical bodies. Based on the assumption that what is deemed physically attractive is by and large universal, Fink's research attempts to uncover what adaptive information these attractive physical traits are signaling to potential mates.

### Facial Attractiveness, and 2D:4D Ratio

One such physical trait is our faces, and what they may signal in mate choice. In a review, Fink and Penton-Voak (2002) examined previous research

in an attempt to identify what features of faces make them attractive. They conclude that the key features include symmetry, indicators of hormone levels (such as testosterone), and “averageness”. Evolutionary psychology suggests that such features act as reliable cues of an individual's health, an important trait in mate choice, thus making them attractive (Fink and Penton-Voak 2002).

Drawing on one of the above facial features, symmetry, Fink et al. (2004) examined what this may signal about an individual's developmental stability, which could account for its role in mate choice. Using 2D:4D ratio as a proxy indicator of fetal hormonal environments, they found that this was significantly related to facial asymmetry, but in opposite directions for men and women. Fink et al. (2005) further investigated how 2D:4D ratio interacts with facial features differently between men and women. By comparing key facial characteristics with 2D:4D ratio in a sample of men and women, Fink et al. (2005) found that prenatal hormone levels affect men and women's faces differently. Also, although 2D:4D ratio affected men and women's face shapes in a similar manner, this effect was three times stronger for men. From these findings, it can be concluded that facial (a) symmetry and shape acts as an important and honest signal of quality due to its links to the early developmental environment of individuals (in terms of fetal testosterone/estrogen levels), thus accounting for their importance in attractiveness judgments.

Furthermore, Fink et al. (2001) examined if skin texture of faces affects their perceived attractiveness. It was found that men's judgments of the attractiveness of women's faces varied in response to differing skin texture, which, Fink et al. (2001) conclude, shows that skin texture acts as an honest cue of good health and fertility. Likewise, Fink et al. (2006a, b) showed that facial skin coloration also influenced attractiveness ratings. They found that skin color distribution influenced perceptions of women's age (thus acting as a signal of youth) and also judgments of their attractiveness and health.

## Body Morphology and Movement

However, what do facial features related to attractiveness reveal about the rest of the body, and how may the rest of the body influence physical attractiveness? To answer the former question, Fink et al. (2006b) sought to find out how facial indicators of psychological traits of attractiveness, masculinity, and dominance may relate to the actual physical trait of strength. They found that men's hand-grip strength did indeed positively relate to women's ratings of their perceived levels of all three psychological traits. Therefore it seems that there exists clear links between signals from faces and from bodies that can play a key role in mate choice. This is further supported by Fink et al. (2010) who found that ratings of attractiveness, masculinity, and dominance in men's faces were positively correlated with the same ratings in the bodies. Therefore Fink et al. (2010) conclude from this that it is the same mechanisms that cause the development of such cues in both men's faces and bodies, thus contributing to them both being important sources of sexual signals of attractiveness in mate choice.

In terms of how the body may physically signal attractive traits for mate choice, Fink et al. (2014) found a positive relationship between men's body symmetry and their physical hand-grip strength. As physical strength will be a desirable trait in sexual selection (for both inter- and intrasexual selection) and be an honest indicator of quality, it will develop together with other indicators (such

as body symmetry) to play a role in attractiveness in men. More recently, Fink has explored how perceptions of physical signals of quality in bodies are influenced by the signaler's body movements. In an early investigation, Fink et al. (2012) took measurements of men's personality traits and also recorded them dancing to a simple rhythm. After anonymizing the recordings, these were then shown to a sample of women to rate for the quality of the dancing. Fink et al. (2012) found that women's assessments of the quality of dancing correlated with a number of these traits, suggesting that such body movements may be able to act as an honest signal of other underlying characteristics. Subsequent research shows that dance quality can also signal traits that positively relate to men's attractiveness, such as physical strength (Weege et al. 2015). This suggests that future research into sexual signaling of physical traits in men should incorporate moving as well as static cues, as humans of course do in the real world.

## Conclusion

The work of Bernhard Fink and various colleagues have been pivotal in making the connections between physical signals in our bodies, what these signals relate to, and how and when these are viewed as attractive in mate choice. This is central to the view of evolutionary psychology that what is attractive is universal and has an adaptive value in sexual selection. Furthermore, recent investigation into movement via dancing quality offers a novel approach to research into attraction, and through utilizing modern technological advances, Fink and colleagues offer a clear sense of how humans realistically view potential partners in mate choice.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Body Attractiveness](#)
- ▶ [Facial Attractiveness](#)
- ▶ [Fluctuating Asymmetry](#)
- ▶ [Physical Attractiveness](#)

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