

## **Seduction**

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Seduction is as old as humankind. In *The Art of Love*, the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.E. to A.D. 17) composed a step-by-step guide on the art of seduction. Seduction is the process by which a person tries to attract an appealing date or mate who, under normal circumstances, might resist his or her romantic or sexual invitations. The tactics people have been found to use include: (1) pretending to be more physically and socially appealing they really are, (2) feigning their motives—for example, claiming to be interested in casual sex or in a serious relationship when they are in fact hoping for the opposite, and (3) flirting. Let us consider these tactics in more detail.

### *1. Exaggerating one's physical and social appeal.*

When men and women want to seduce an attractive partner, they often present themselves in an appealing way, and this can be exaggeration or outright deception, which can lead to a misleading or false impression. Such misrepresentation can now easily be done online, through Facebook, tweets, or profile information in Web-matching services. People who subscribe to online dating services sometimes lie about their age, financial status, health, and interests; and post a photo taken years earlier. This deception in the presentation of self can be done to attract (or seduce) someone to whom they would be attracted but believe would not consider them if they did not present themselves in a certain way.

For example, when scholars analyzed the profiles posted by 30,000 users at a dating website, and compared their data with national averages, they found that most subscribers claimed to be better looking than average; only 30% of users admitted to being average in looks, and a mere 1% said they were “less than average” in attractiveness. Generally, men and women claimed to be an inch taller than the national average, and women claimed to weigh 20 pounds less than the national average.

Of course, exaggerations designed to make oneself look more desirable can also occur in face-to-face settings. Men and women present themselves as more charming, good looking, popular, intelligent, rich, and successful than they actually are. In a study that was conducted in the 1990s, before the Internet was common, 46% of the men and 36% of women reported telling a lie to get a date with an attractive person. Although lying occurs in face-to-face interactions, it is more difficult to be deceptive about such personal attributes as appearance and age in such encounters. Those who are deceptive online to attract a partner often have to provide the truth when they meet in person. People who are high self-monitors are especially likely to be deceptive about their characteristics.

## *2. Feigning intent about true desire.*

Another type of deception to gain the interest of another (i.e., to seduce)—in addition to presenting oneself as more desirable than one really is—is to misrepresent one's motives. For example, one may feign interest in a long-term relationship, if one believes that the other is interested in being in such a relationship.

Evolutionary psychologists such as David Buss (1994) contend that—because of gender differences in required parental investments—men are generally far more eager to participate in casual sex, hook-ups, and one-night stands than are women. Women are more interested in securing a loving, long-term committed relationship. Thus, it follows that in social settings that present the opportunity to meet the opposite sex, men should be motivated to pretend to be more interested in entering a long-term-relationship than they really are. Women should be motivated to do just the opposite—to pretend to be interested in casual relations, while secretly hoping that the casual sexual encounter might lead to something more serious. Each gender is pretending to offer what the potential date or mate wants.

## *3. Flirting: Indicating approachability*

Flirting is a way to communicate attraction to another person and refers to subtle or playful verbal or nonverbal behaviors that indicate romantic interest. Scholars have observed people flirting in a variety of social settings and have also asked people to self-report the behaviors they have engaged in to attract others. Several types of flirting behaviors have been identified, but the most common are smiling, extended eye contact, being attentive, moving closer to the other, and touching. Men also engage in behaviors that display their resources. In all cultures, men and women engage in nonverbal expressions to attraction others. In addition, flirting is not exclusive to heterosexual contexts or to young adults. Gays and lesbians, and older adults also use flirting to seduce and attract.

In some cases, the process of seduction and flirting may reflect the balance of power between two people. For example, through nonverbal ways, powerful people can take up more space and display more intense expressions than do the powerless. In addition, less powerful people are often more attentive and more sensitive to the nonverbal communications of the more powerful. Women have been found to be more aware of the processes that occur in flirting.

Evolutionary biologists argue that men and women who engage in flirting are often more successful in finding a mate. For example, Monica Moore (1985) studied flirting behavior in women in various settings and found that the more often women engaged in flirting behaviors, the more often they were approached by men in the settings. A recent study found that flirting in a speed-dating experiment predicted how often a person was chosen as a potential date.

Flirting occurs not only in face-to-face settings, but also online (“cyber flirting”). People flirt through teasing text messages, emoticons to portray emotion, and by communicating through webcams.

In an interesting study, Timothy Perper and colleagues (1985) spent hundreds of hours observing couples in singles bars. They made a surprising discovery. It was women who generally made the first move, even though men often actually made the *verbal* overtures and thought they controlled the action. The researchers found that neither men nor women alone could determine whether the initial flirtation would result in the couple leaving the bar together. They provided a “flow chart” of the steps that take couples from the first time their eyes meet until they leave the bar together. It was clear that at each step, both men and women must signal their eagerness to continue interacting if that interaction was to continue. Either person has the power to break things off at any time.

The signals sent by women and by men can be quite subtle. It is no accident that in flirting, signals are so ambiguous. If one’s overtures are rejected, one can always pretend that the whole thing was just a misunderstanding. In fact, advances to seduce another are not always successful. Flirting behaviors can be met with rejection.

In sum, people attract or seduce others through a variety of behaviors. Although we focused on behaviors people engage in to seduce a new, potential partner, the same types of strategies are engaged in by long-term partners as they signal their desire to have sex.

**See also:** arousal; hooking up; romance and sex

**Keywords:** seduction, flirting

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**Abstract:** Seduction is the process by which a person tries to attract an appealing date or mate who, under normal circumstances, might be resist their romantic or sexual invitations. The tactics men and women have been found to use include: (1) pretending to be more physically and socially appealing they really are, (2) lying about what they want—claiming to be interested in a casual sexual encounter or a serious relationship when they are in fact hoping for the opposite, and (3) flirting.

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