

## Snap Judgments

We all make snap judgments about a new face. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in speed dating, during which one person has to decide on another's romantic potential in just a few seconds. As it turns out, however, that decision doesn't depend only on whether someone is hot or not.

By scanning the brains of speed daters as they looked through pictures of potential dates, a group of Caltech researchers recently showed that as people weigh their romantic options they consider two factors: physical attractiveness and—perhaps less obvious—their own individual preferences regarding compatibility. Moreover, the researchers found that these two factors are related to activity in two distinct parts of the brain.

The first is the paracingulate cortex, an area of the brain known

to become active when we're comparing choices. It lit up when participants saw pictures of attractive faces.

The other—the rostromedial prefrontal cortex—was more surprising. It had previously been associated with consideration of other people's thoughts, comparisons of oneself to others, and, in particular, perceptions of similarities with others. In the experiment, it became active when people saw the face of someone they wanted to date but who was not, on average, rated as especially desirable by the rest of the group. Its activation suggests that, in addition to beauty, the speed daters were considering individual compatibility.

And that really is in the eye of the beholder. —*MW*