If You’ve Got It, Flaunt It: Humans Flaunt Attractive Partners For Status And Desirability

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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DEC 2012
The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

If you’ve got it, flaunt it: Humans flaunt attractive partners for status and desirability

presented by Benjamin Winegard, a candidate for the degree of master of Psychology, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Craig T. Palmer
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</table>
In an amusing and insightful scene from the movie *Legally Blonde*, a hapless man is emphatically rejected by a snobby woman (“women like me don’t date losers like you”). Walking by, Elle Woods (played by Reese Witherspoon) hears the exchange, confronts the man in front of the woman, and feigns that he had broken her heart. The other woman, surprised, suddenly changes her attitude, asking the once unappealing man, “so when did you want to go out?” This is a humorous example of nonindependent mate choice or mate choice that is influenced by the choices of same-sex peers (Pruett-Jones, 1992). Nonindependent mate choice has been found in many species (Mery et al., 2009; Place, Todd, Penke, & Asendorf 2010), but is not yet well integrated with standard theories of human mate choice. These focus largely on the particular physical and behavioral cues that men and women use when selecting or describing their preferred mates (Geary, 2010). Although this focus has led to the discovery of many traits that influence human mating decisions, standard theories of mate choice remain incomplete because they have not incorporated experimental findings on nonindependent mate choice. I integrate nonindependent mate choice with signalling theory and test associated hypotheses in two studies. In study 1, young women and men were paired with attractive and unattractive opposite-sex partners and chose whether to administer a face-to-face survey to their peers (flaunting) or older adults (concealing). Study 2 attempted to replicate study 1 using only men as subjects. It also expanded study 1 by investigating if men preferred to flaunt in front of same-sex or opposite-sex peers.

**Signalling and Social Information**
The mate signalling theory (MST) of nonindependent mate choice is an extension of signalling theory, a recent theoretical model that has been successfully applied to many areas of animal and human behavior (Bird & Smith, 2005). The basic tenets are straightforward. Trait quality varies among individuals of all species. These traits are not always manifested or easily perceivable (e.g., immunocompetence, intelligence) but can, in principle, be reliably signalled. Thus perceivers benefit by attending and reacting to the signals. However, signallers and perceivers often have competing interests (Dawkins & Krebs, 1979). The signallers can potentially exploit the perceivers by enhancing their signals without changing underlying traits; therefore, perceivers must remain vigilant against deceptive signals. One solution to this potential arms race is the development of signals that are difficult to fake and therefore reliable (Grafen, 1990; Zahavi, 1975; but see Szamado, 2011 for complexities).

Humans have developed the most abstract and sophisticated signalling space among extant species. Nevertheless, the basic signalling principles are the same (Schaedelin & Taborsky, 2009). Prestige goods such as Porsches, Rolexes, or rare and aged scotches, are reliable social signals because they are difficult to fake. Once a prestige good is easily copied or accessible, its value declines and it is replaced by another prestige good or an elaboration of the old good (Milner, 2010). Although prestige goods potentially signal many things about their owners, they most clearly signal status and wealth (Han, Nunes, Dreze, 2010). They do this because people who do not posses wealth or status cannot own or easily display them, thus solving the problem of potential deception. MST builds upon these principles and extends them into the realm of nonindependent mate choice by asserting that mates can function, in part, as social
signals; that is, mates convey to others information about traits or qualities that are not readily observable (Sundie et al., 2011)

**Sex Differences**

Although both men and women send and receive signals, there are differences in what they signal and what they are attuned to perceive. According to signalling theory, each sex has evolved to detect signals about fitness relevant traits; concomitantly, each sex signals those traits. Theoretical considerations derived from evolutionary biology, coupled with copious data, indicate that men and women weigh the qualities of potential mates differently (Geary, 2010). Specifically, men weigh physical attractiveness more heavily than women because attractiveness is, to some degree, a signal of underlying fertility; and women weigh social status more heavily than men because social status indicates an ability to invest resources in offspring (including the status itself, which is an important resource, e.g., being the legitimate son or daughter of a famous person can confer benefits) (Buss, 2007; Geary, 2010; Griskevicius et al., 2007).

**Mate Signalling Theory**

Men, more than women, are motivated to display signs of social and cultural status (Geary, 2010). One of the most valuable and reliable signals of a man’s status is his mate because it is difficult to “fake” being partnered with a coveted woman; or, put more generally, mates are honest indicators of status ranking (Buss & Shackelford, 2008).
other words, signalling theory should generalize to mating and, given their sensitivity to
status, men should either flaunt or conceal their partners depending upon their partners’
relative desirability (Vakirtzis & Roberts, 2009; Vakirtzis, 2011). By “flaunt” I mean
actively display or show off and by “conceal” I mean actively hide. These can be
achieved in a variety of ways. For example, a man might flaunt by taking his partner to a
public location or by talking about his relationship with her to others; and he might
conceal by remaining in private places with his partner and by remaining silent or even
lying about his relationship with her to others. If correct, other women should use the
desirability of a man’s actual or potential partner as a signal of his social and biological
quality which can result in nonindependent mate choice. Copious research supports this
prediction (Hill & Buss, 2008; Vakirtzis & Roberts, 2010; Waynforth, 2007). For
example, almost 40 years ago, Sigall & Landy (1973) found that undergraduate women
formed more positive assessments of men who were partnered with attractive women
than men who were either not partnered or were partnered with unattractive women.
Similarly, if correct, men should treat their mates, in some respects, as they treat other
goods that are socially evaluable and contain potential information about status (e.g. cars,
clothes, houses). Support for this prediction is indirect but is suggestive. For example,
studies by Ronay and von Hippel (2010) and Roney, Lukaszewski, and Simmons (2007)
demonstrated that testosterone and its related behaviors increase when men are merely in
the presence of attractive women. Saad and Vongas (2009) showed the same testosterone
increases when men drove a Porsche Carrera. Although testosterone is associated with
myriad social behaviors, these examples show that there is a similar pattern of
testosterone increase when “showing off” for women (flaunting talents), when conversing
with women, and when driving status enhancing vehicles ( flaunting goods), indicating that similar physiological and psychological mechanisms might be involved in each case.

Although men are more motivated than women to display status and mates, women do not completely lack such motivation. There are two important reasons to expect flaunting in women. First, partnering generally takes place between two people who have equal or close to equal status (Milner, 2010). Women, therefore, should wish to display their status because it would allow them a larger pool of potentially high status men. And second, women should flaunt because it would make them appear more desired. Other things held constant, the more a woman is desired, the more honestly she signals her mate’s social status. According to the MST, this is because the more potential suitors a woman has (more desirability), the more status, ambition, ingenuity, a man needs to partner with her. In other words, a highly desired woman provides a strenuous test of the quality of a man’s traits. And by providing a strenuous test, the woman compels more resource investment from the man, making the relationship mutually beneficial (Hakim, 2010).

**Study 1**

I predicted that both men and women would flaunt attractive putative mates and conceal unattractive ones; however, I predicted that there would be an interaction such that men would possess a stronger bias to flaunt and conceal than women. I further predicted that the relation between a putative romantic partner’s attractiveness and a subject’s mate flaunting would be mediated by their expectations regarding how being
seen with this partner would influence their perceived desirability and status. This follows directly from the tenets of the MST, which assert that men and women display or flaunt mates because it leads others to perceive them as having more status and more desirability (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011).

Participants Undergraduates at a large Midwestern University participated for course credit. The final sample consisted of 64 men (mean age = 20.27, SD = 4.86) and 75 women (mean age = 19.09, SD = 1.89).

Design and procedure Participants were given pamphlets (see appendix for pamphlet) dealing with higher education surveys. They were told that they were going to collect survey data about attitudes toward higher education and educational funding from one of two areas on the campus. Participants were told that our research team was interested in response rates and how the characteristics of the surveyors affected survey responses. Participants in the experimental condition were told they would be collecting their data with a partner and were to act as if they and their assigned partner were in a happy romantic relationship (participants were told this had been shown to affect response rates). Participants then filled out basic demographic information. After completing preliminary questionnaires, participants were told that pictures of their partners had been collected so they could be identified when they met to collect survey data. To ensure realism, participants were told that any participants who did not want their pictures shown were removed from the study and given credit for a different one. Participants then opened the pamphlets and looked at the three by three inch photographs of their
putative partners. The photographs were taken from a pre-rated (raters = eight men and eight women) set of 247 photographs (117 men and 130 women) (Bailey, Winegard, Li, & Geary, 2012) (see appendix for all pictures used). From that pre-rated set, I chose three women and three men from the top decile of attractiveness and three women and three men from the bottom decile. Photographs that did not appear natural (e.g. were black and white, idiosyncratically lit, or glamour shots) were removed. Underneath their picture, each putative partner had a name and a schedule of open times during which they could meet to conduct the surveys. Participants were asked to mark times they were available to meet. Next, participants read about two locations that they could choose to conduct the surveys. One location was described as full of undergraduate students and one was described as full of administrators (see appendix). Participants were then asked to pick a location preference on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly prefer the administrative and 7 = strongly prefer the undergraduate). Finally, participants filled out questions on a five point scale about how they would feel and how they thought they would be perceived as they collected the survey data (e.g. “Other people will view me as having status.” 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The other questions were hypothesis irrelevant but were included to make the questionnaire appear general, thus disguising hypothesis relevant questions. The control group was run exactly the same as the experimental group except that participants were told that they would give the survey alone and therefore did not have a putative partner.

**Operationalization of flaunting and concealing** The undergraduate location, because it consists of status and mate relevant peers, is considered the flaunting location, and the
administrative location, because it consists of people outside of their peer groups, is considered the concealing location (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Flaunting is operationalized as a significant preference for the undergraduate location over the mean preference of the control condition; and concealing is operationalized as a significant preference for the administrative location over the mean preference of the control condition.

**Results**

A 2 (sex) by 3 (partner status: attractive, unattractive, and none) ANOVA confirmed the predicted main effect of partner status, $F(2, 133) = 27.35, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .292$, and the sex by partner status interaction, $F(2, 133) = 4.23, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .060$.

Figure 1.
Flaunting and concealing as a function of sex and partner.

Note. Figure displays neutral response on scale as divider between flaunting and concealing. We calculated flaunting and concealing by using the control group. Here, the control group is shown relative to the neutral response for comparison. Bars represent standard errors.
As shown in Table 1, within-sex pairwise comparisons of location scores of individuals in the alone (control) condition versus scores from individuals in the attractive and unattractive partner conditions confirmed three of the four flaunting and concealment hypotheses. Between-sex contrasts confirmed that men were more likely to flaunt and conceal than were women.

Table 1.
Summary Results for Flaunting and Concealing Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Supported?</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men flaunt</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men conceal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women flaunt</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>0.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women conceal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>0.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men flaunt &gt; women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>0.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men conceal &gt; women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>0.572</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Men (women) flaunt compared men (women) in the control condition to men (women) in attractive condition; women (men) conceal compared women (men) in the control condition to women (men) in attractive condition; Men flaunt and conceal > women compared men in the attractive (flaunt) and unattractive (conceal) conditions to women in these same conditions.

To support my operationalized definition of flaunting and concealing, I obtained bivariate correlations between both available schedule times and partner status \((r = .269, p < .01)\) and between available schedule times and flaunting or concealing \((r = .432, p < .01)\). These revealed that there was convergent validity between my utilized measures (flaunting = attractive condition – control condition; concealing = unattractive – control condition) and an alternative measure with face validity (viz., times available to meet over the next two weeks). To further investigate this relationship, I ran an ANOVA with available schedule time set as the dependent variable. The 2 (sex) by 3 (partner status:
attractive, unattractive, and none) ANOVA with available schedule time set as the
dependent variable revealed a main effect of partner status, \( F(2, 133) = 21.64, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .246 \)
and a sex by partner interaction, \( F(2, 133) = 7.17, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .097 \). I also
entered the subject’s age and relationship status as covariates. This did not significantly
alter any results. This strongly supports my operationalization of the concepts of
flaunting and concealing.

I next used Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) macro designed for SPSS to run a
multiple mediation model to test whether expected status and expected desirability,
simultaneously assessed, would account for the relation between partner status and
flaunting or concealing. Confidence intervals were estimated with bootstrap analysis, a
non-parametric method that is robust and does not assume multivariate normality. The
results revealed that perceived status and perceived desirability fully mediated the
relation between partner status and flaunting or concealing. Specifically, the total effect
of partner status on flaunting or concealing was 0.586, \( p < .01 \), while the direct effect,
the effect after removing the indirect effect of the mediating variables, was 0.179, \( p = .168 \).
Figure 2. Mediation model showing the relation between partner status and flaunting/concealing as mediated by expected status and expected desirability.

Note. Unstandardized coefficients illustrated with standard errors in parentheses. One asterisk indicates ($p < .05$); two asterisks indicate ($p < .01$). Solid line from IV to DV shows the total effect of the IV on the DV (c path); the dashed line shows the direct effect of the IV on the DV (c-prime path).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N = 139)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected status</td>
<td>0.268 (0.083)</td>
<td>[0.144, 0.484]</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected desirability</td>
<td>0.146 (0.069)</td>
<td>[0.030, 0.331]</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.415 (0.123)</td>
<td>[0.204, 0.689]</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Confidence intervals estimated based on 1,000 bootstrap resamples. Model summary = $R^2 = 0.544$, $F(3, 135) = 53.74$, $p < .001$.

Single mediator models demonstrated that none of the hypothesis irrelevant questions (see appendix) significantly mediated the relationship between partner status and flaunting or concealing.
A mediated moderation model demonstrated that the sex by partner status interaction was not mediated by expected status or expected desirability, meaning that non-measured variables are driving sex differences in flaunting and concealing.

Figure 3.
Moderated mediation model investigating whether the sex by partner status interaction was mediated by expected status and/or expected desirability.

Note. Sex and partner status (not illustrated) are used as covariates in the model. Unstandardized coefficients illustrated with standard errors in parentheses. One asterisk indicates ($p < .05$); two asterisks indicate ($p < .01$). Solid line from IV to DV shows the total effect of the IV on the DV ($c$ path); the dashed line shows the direct effect of the IV on the DV ($c$-prime path).

Discussion of Study 1

To my knowledge, these results are the first to provide experimental evidence of mate flaunting, an effect that was found for both sexes but was larger for men than for women. I also showed that men, but not women, conceal unattractive putative mates. Also, as predicted, increases in expected status and desirability mediated the relation between partner status and flaunting and concealing. Indeed, I found full mediation as the
direct effect of partner status on flaunting and concealing reduced to insignificance when I included the mediator variables.

While these results suggest that both men and women use mates as costly signals, there are alternative perspectives that could explain this pattern of results. For example, the mate quality bias perspective of Vakirtzis and Roberts (2010) makes almost exactly the same predictions. However, unlike the mate quality bias perspective, the MST predicts that men should desire to flaunt equally in front of men and women. This is because, according to the MST, the main purpose of flaunting is to gain social status not to elicit direct mate copying among women. That is, men who flaunt women, like men who flaunt other prestige goods, are attempting to influence social information and increase the probability that other men and women will view them as possessing prestige and status (Danchin, Giraldeau, Valone, & Wagner, 2004). Therefore, study 2 was designed to 1) replicate study 1 with a sample of only men, and 2) investigate if men prefer to flaunt in front of same-sex or opposite-sex peers.

**Study 2**

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend the predictions outlined for study 1; specifically, that men would flaunt when paired with an attractive woman and conceal when paired with an unattractive women, and that the relation between partner status and flaunting and concealing would be mediated by expected gains in status and desirability. Study 2 was designed to extend the study 1 results by examining whether men would have a preference for flaunting to men or women. If flaunting functions to enhance
perceived desirability as a potential mate, then men will choose to flaunt more to women than men. However, if the function is to enhance perceived status, then men will choose to flaunt to both sexes. I predicted that men have no preference between flaunting in front of women and flaunting in front of men.

**Participants** Undergraduates at a large Southern University participated for course credit. The final sample consisted of 72 men (mean age = 19.78 $SD = 2.72$).

**Design and procedure** Study 2 used the same design and followed the same procedure as study 1 with one exception: Subjects were asked if they preferred to collect the data in women only location (a sorority) or a men only location (a fraternity). Subjects answered this on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly prefer the fraternity, men only, location and 7 = strongly prefer the sorority, women only, location).

**Operationalization of flaunting and concealing** I used the same operationalization of flaunting and concealing as I did in study 1. However, when investigating whether men prefer to flaunt in front of men or women, I did not make use of this operationalization. The relevant comparisons here are between the attractive and unattractive conditions as well as within these conditions (i.e., do men in the attractive condition prefer the sorority significantly more than the fraternity?)

**Results**
A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that there was a significant effect of partner status on location preference $F(2, 69) = 26.41, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .434$. A post-hoc Tukey HSD revealed that men in the attractive condition flaunted while men in the unattractive condition concealed. These results were not affected when subject’s age and relationship status were entered as covariates.

Table 3. Comparisons of flaunting and concealing between men in the attractive, unattractive, and control conditions. Positive numbers represent a preference for the undergraduate location; negative numbers a preference for the administrative location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractive</th>
<th>Unattractive</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean S.D.</strong></td>
<td>1.45a 1.30</td>
<td>-1.41b 1.39</td>
<td>-0.22c 1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location desired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with different superscript letters a,b,c differ significantly ($p < .05$). Sample size > 20 across conditions. The survey was transformed so that a neutral answer (4 on Likert scale) was set to 0.

As in study 1, I used Preacher and Hayes SPSS macro to test whether expected status and expected desirability, simultaneously assessed, would account for the relation between partner status and flaunting or concealing. With this sample, expected status fully mediated the relation while, contrary to study 1, expected desirability was not a significant mediator.
Figure 4.
Mediation model showing the relation between partner status and flaunting/concealing as mediated by expected status and expected desirability.

Note. Unstandardized coefficients illustrated with standard errors in parentheses. One asterisk indicates ($p < .05$); two asterisks indicate ($p < .01$). Solid line from IV to DV shows the total effect of the IV on the DV (c path); the dashed line shows the direct effect of the IV on the DV (c-prime path).

Table 4.
Results Testing if Perceived Status and Perceived Desirability Mediated Tendency to Conceal or Flaunt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample ($N = 139$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected status</td>
<td>0.8217 (0.223)</td>
<td>[0.414, 1.220]</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected desirability</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.018)</td>
<td>[-0.063, 0.027]</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.824 (0.224)</td>
<td>[0.350, 1.247]</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Confidence intervals estimated based on 1,000 bootstrap resamples. Model summary = $R^2 = 0.544$, $F(3, 135) = 53.74$, $p < .001$.

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that there was a significant effect of partner status on location gender preference (ie., sorority vs. fraternity location) $F (2, 69) = 3.168$, $p = .048$, $\eta^2_p = .084$. A post-hoc Tukey HSD revealed that men in the control condition preferred the sorority location relative to men in the attractive condition. None of the other groups differed in location preference. Neither men in the attractive nor
unattractive condition preferred the sorority to the fraternity location (both 95% confidence intervals included 0) whereas men in the control condition did have a significant preference for the sorority location over the fraternity location (95% CI = 0.36 to 1.38). These results were not affected when subject’s age and relationship status were entered as covariates.

Table 5.
Comparisons of sorority (women only) and fraternity (men only) preference between men in the attractive, unattractive, and control conditions. Positive numbers represent a preference for the women only location; negative numbers a preference for the men location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location desired</th>
<th>Attractive Mean S.D.</th>
<th>Unattractive Mean S.D.</th>
<th>Control Mean S.D.</th>
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<td>0.27\text{a,b} 1.42</td>
<td>0.00\text{a,b} 1.14</td>
<td>0.87\text{a,c} 1.14</td>
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Note: Means with different superscript letter\text{a,b,c} differ significantly ($ p < .05$). Sample size > 20 across conditions. The survey was transformed so that a neutral answer (4 on Likert scale) was set to 0.

Discussion of Study 2

The results of study 2 replicated those of study 1 quite nicely. Men flaunted in the attractive condition and concealed in the unattractive condition. The mediation analysis differed slightly from that of study 1. With this sample, only expected status mediated the relation between partner status and flaunting and concealing. However, expected status was the stronger mediator in study 1, so this result is not entirely discordant.

Consistent with my predictions, men did not prefer to flaunt in front of women in the attractive condition and they did not prefer to conceal in front of men in the unattractive condition. Interestingly, men in the control condition had a preference for the women only location over the men only location. However, it has not escaped my notice...
that an undergraduate man might prefer hanging out in a sorority rather than a fraternity. These results are more consistent with the MST than they are with a mate copying or mate quality bias perspective. More precisely, the fact that men who are paired with attractive opposite-sex partners do not prefer to flaunt in front of women is inconsistent with the hypothesis that men flaunt to display the objective quality of their mates to other women.

**General Discussion**

Two studies demonstrated that both men and women flaunt attractive opposite-sex partners. Men flaunt and conceal to a greater degree than do women. Further, the relation between partner status (attractive, unattractive, none) and flaunting and concealing was fully mediated by expected desirability and expected status. Study 1 and study 2 differed slightly here: Study 1 found that expected desirability was a mediator whereas study 2 did not. However, both studies converged on the idea that expected status is a stronger mediator than is expected desirability. Study 2 also demonstrated that men equally prefer to flaunt in front of men and women with mate signalling theory.

Although these predictions are similar to those made by Vakirtzis and Roberts (2010), the MST emphasizes slightly different mechanisms that result in distinct hypotheses. Vakirtzis and Roberts emphasize a correlation between mates’ values and argue that women parlay the correlation, using the qualities of a man’s mate as a reasonable indicator of the man’s qualities. The MST, upon the other hand, emphasizes the socially relative nature of the flaunted or concealed mate and argues that mates...
function like other prestige goods. (It is possible, of course, that both mechanisms are operative and the theories are not mutually exclusive.) What is important from the perspective of the MST is not solely the intrinsic (or biological) quality of the flaunted mate but rather his or her desirability to others in a relevant pool of peers. To see this, consider why a Porsche Carrera signals status. It does not do so because it is the highest quality car on the market, which may or may not be the case; rather, it does so because it is a highly desired and exorbitantly expensive car. The same should hold for a flaunted mate. His or her intrinsic quality is not the most important variable; his or her desirability is. My studies manipulated only attractiveness because, absent any social information, attractiveness is a reliable indicator of desirability (Geary, 2010). However, in the real world, many variables, such as visibility and reputation, influence desirability. For example, it is likely that Kim Kardashian (a highly visible socialite) would confer more status to a man who flaunted her than any of innumerable women of higher biological quality (higher fertility, residual reproductive value, health, intelligence, etc.) because many high status men desire Kim Kardashian – and this is exactly what the MST predicts. The MST also predicts that men will flaunt not just in front of potential mates but also in front of other same-sex peers, a hypothesis supported by study 2; and it further predicts that women should flaunt to indicate their desirability, a prediction that is supported by Place, Todd, Penke, and Asendorf (2010) and was confirmed here.

The MST has important ramifications for theories of human mate choice that are of interest to observers of romantic interactions and to scholars. For example, the MST can potentially explain what many films and novels have pointed out: that it is perilous to date outside of one’s status group--to date the school or area “nerd” or “dork” despite his
or her obvious attractiveness. According to the MST, partnering with a low status mate, *ceteris paribus*, decreases one’s own status and desirability, even if the person is of high biological quality, in the same way that wearing clothes commonly worn by lower status individuals does, even if they are of high quality. Conversely, as evinced by coin portraits of Cleopatra (relatively uncomely), the opposite is also true: a high status individual who is of relatively low biological quality will increase one’s status. Furthermore, the MST (as applied to social relations more generally) can also address same-sex friendships in a similar manner. Same-sex friends, for example, are also honest signals of one’s social status and therefore have important signalling functions (e.g., the status of Michael Jordan’s good friend is increased simply by his being friends with Michael Jordan), perhaps explaining why many are willing to spend exorbitant amounts of time and money collecting “icons” (e.g. autographs and memorabilia) from celebrities (Milner, 2010).

Future studies using the MST framework will investigate the role that potential moderators such as personality traits, life history traits, and age play in mate flaunting and concealing. It will be important to use more diverse samples in future studies. I am hopeful that such a framework will attract researchers from diverse disciplines (sociology, social psychology, evolutionary psychology, evolutionary biology, zoology, marketing) and that it will allow a more accurate understanding of the complicated and socially dynamic phenomenon of human relationships.
References


Appendix

Welcome to the Survey Collection Study on Higher Education

Please Wait For Instructions
In this study, we are interested in determining whether or not response rates and answers are influenced by the traits of survey givers. Previous studies, for example, have shown that couples giving surveys provoke more compliance and more positive reactions than singles. Research has also shown that personality variables affect the responses of those taking the surveys. We want to test these findings outside of the laboratory. You will survey individuals about higher education.

Today, you will be paired with an individual of the opposite sex (picture included later in pamphlet) whom you will then be required to go to an area on the campus and pretend to be in a relationship with while asking a set of questions to 10 different individuals of your choosing from the location you are assigned to.

When you go out to collect data, you should keep certain things in mind:

1) You will need to actually act like you are dating the person you are assigned to collect data with. This will include talking to the individual as if you were in a relationship (you can invent a back story to help you with this, if you desire). Please try to make this seem as realistic as possible and act genuinely happy with each other while you collect the data.

2) Under no condition should you engage in inappropriate physical contact with the person you are assigned to work with. You can be convincing without such contact and it is not allowed.
Please wait for further instructions before turning the page.

Please answer the following demographic variables relevant to survey collection. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, you may choose to leave it blank.

1. What is your age? ______

2. Please check a mark by your gender  M__  F___

3. Please write your ethnic identification _______________

4. Please list how many close friends you have ________

5. Please indicate your major _________________

6. Please list your GPA ________

7. What is your relationship status? Married ___  Single ___  Have girl/boyfriend ___

8. How satisfied are you with your current relationship? Please answer by circling a number on the five point scale below. 1 indicates extremely unsatisfied, 3 is neutral, and 5 indicates extremely satisfied.

   1  2  3  4  5

9. What is your religious denomination (write “none” if you are not religious)? __________

10. What political party do you generally vote for? Please check the box next to your answer.

   Republican []  Democrat []  Independent []

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.
1 = Disagree strongly  
2 = Disagree moderately  
3 = Disagree a little  
4 = Neither agree nor disagree  
5 = Agree a little  
6 = Agree moderately  
7 = Agree strongly  

I see myself as: 

1. _____ Extraverted, enthusiastic. 

2. _____ Critical, quarrelsome. 

3. _____ Dependable, self-disciplined. 

4. _____ Anxious, easily upset. 

5. _____ Open to new experiences, complex. 

6. _____ Reserved, quiet. 

7. _____ Sympathetic, warm. 

8. _____ Disorganized, careless. 

9. _____ Calm, emotionally stable. 

10. _____ Conventional, uncreative.
**Please wait for further instructions!!!!**

Your assigned research Partner:

Here is where the image of the “partner” is placed

Available Times to Collect Data with Jennifer Cullen. If you will not be available for any of the listed days, you may be contacted with a different set of days in the future. Conversely, you may be assigned other research instead.

The times listed are for two subsequent weeks FOLLOWING this week.

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When collecting data with your assigned partner (see picture on the last page), you will have the choice of two locations described below. Remember, your job is to convincingly act like you and the person you are partnered with are in a HAPPY RELATIONSHIP. Also remember that you will collect data exclusively from the people in your area. So, if you are in the undergraduate location, you will collect data from undergraduates and if you are in the administrative location, you will collect data from administrators and workers (e.g. secretaries and custodians).

**Undergraduate location:** This will be a heavily populated area of the campus consisting almost exclusively of undergraduate individuals between 19-25 years old. Often, there are groups of individuals from sororities and fraternities in this location. Depending on the time of day that you collect data, there may be individuals from other campus groups (such as sports club members). Your job will be to collect data from 10 individuals in this location while acting as if you and your assigned partner are in a relationship.

**Administrative location:** This will be a heavily populated area of the campus consisting almost exclusively of individuals in their 40s and 50s who work on the campus. Often, there are campus custodians, secretaries, and maintenance workers in this location. Depending on the time of day that you collect data, there may be a few professors from other departments (e.g., English, anthropology). Your job will be to collect data from 10 individuals in this location while acting as if you and your assigned partner are in a relationship.

Please answer the question below honesty:
LOCATION PREFERENCE: Please MARK the box you prefer.

1) I very strongly prefer the administrative (e.g. custodians) location  
2) I strongly prefer the administrative location  
3) I very slightly prefer the administrative location  
4) I have no preference  
5) I very slightly prefer the undergraduate (e.g. female and male undergraduates) location  
6) I strongly prefer the undergraduate location  
7) I very strongly prefer the undergraduate location

**PLEASE WAIT FOR FURTHER**
INSTRUCTIONS!!!!

When collecting the data how do you anticipate you will feel?

The following will be completed on a 4 point scale. Please circle the appropriate number.

1 = not at all  2 =slightly  3 =moderately  4 =extremely

Anxious  1  2  3  4
Confident  1  2  3  4
Embarrassed  1  2  3  4
Enthusiastic  1  2  3  4
Happy  1  2  3  4
Competent  1  2  3  4

Please go to the next page and finish the Survey questions.
When collecting the data how do you anticipate OTHER PEOPLE will view you?

The following will be completed on a 5 point scale. Please circle the appropriate number.

1 = strongly disagree  2 =mildly disagree  3 =neither agree nor disagree  4 =mildly agree  5 =strongly agree

Other individuals will view me as:

Having status  
1  2  3  4  5

Being competent  
1  2  3  4  5

Being intelligent  
1  2  3  4  5

Being confident 
1  2  3  4  5

Being a leader  
1  2  3  4  5

Being socially awkward 
1  2  3  4  5

Being desirable  
1  2  3  4  5

Please Turn Pamphlet Over When You Have Finished!
Figure 5.
Attractive Condition, Man A
Figure 6.
Attractive condition, Man B
Figure 7.
Attractive Condition, Man C
Figure 8.
Unattractive Condition, Man D
Figure 9.
Unattractive Condition, Man E
Figure 10.
Unattractive Condition, Man F
Figure 11.
Attractive Condition, Woman A
Figure 12.
Attractive Condition, Woman B
Figure 13. Attractive Condition, Woman C
Figure 14.
Unattractive Condition, Woman D
Figure 15.
Unattractive Condition, Woman E
Figure 16.
Unattractive Condition, Woman F