Hot or Not:
The Effects of Social Status on Attraction among Male and Female Students

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Abstract

Evolutionary theology states that attractive qualities change over time and are different between males and females (Buss, 2012). Males and females have different preferences in both short and long-term relationships, resulting in different qualities that are attractive in mates. The purpose of this study is to see how levels of social status can affect feelings of attraction, which could affect the desire to pursue a relationship with others. Three levels of social status were presented and then a measure of attraction was recorded. This study included sixty participants who were placed in 6 different groups all with different pairings of the pictures. A Likert-scale was measured in order to record levels of attraction to the pictures. There was significant different among the 6 groups in their levels of attraction. This study is beneficial in providing more information about social status’s effect on levels of attraction in evolutionary psychology.
Evolutionary psychology postulates that the mind is shaped by pressure to survive and reproduce. Given that sexual reproduction is the means by which genes are propagated into future generations, sexual selection plays a large role in human evolution. Human mating, then, is of interest to evolutionary psychologists who aim to investigate evolved mechanisms to attract and secure mates. Mating strategies refers to the behaviors used by individuals to attract, select, and retain a mating partner. Attractive qualities change over time and are different between males and females. Males and females have different preferences in both sort and long-term relationships, resulting in different qualities that are attractive in mates. (Buunk, Dijkstra, P., Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick 2002).

From an evolutionary perspective, the primary concern of humans is to find the most fertile and healthy partners to ensure the successful transmission of genes (Buss, 1993). Therefore, both men and women prefer physically attractive partners since attractiveness is considered an indicator of good genes. Although evolutionary theory suggests individuals seek the best mate for survival and reproduction, the best mate will look different to male and female participants as well as young and old participants.

Depending on the level of social status, research has show greater relatedness was associated with higher rates of attraction. Ha (2011) showed participants 10 morphed photographs of a potential partner’s face presented in random order and accompanied by either a low-status or a high-status profile for each series of photographs. Ratings returned a lower attraction towards the low-status subjects. The social statuses of the pictures were then changed to examine if the same picture would make a person more attractive to an individual with a high status profile. Women valued indicators of social status, ambition, finished education, and high salary the most attractive (Ha 2011). Attractiveness is an important factor for males in terms
of dating desire and status is also relevant but to a lower degree than women. In line with evolutionary theory, this study supports social status as an indicator of attraction in females.

A more recent study (Guéguen, 2012) examines the effects of gender and attraction on social status. Both sex and generational differences in desired characteristics in mate selection were examined to test the relationship between social status and attraction. Guéguen posits younger women tend to look for short-term relationships and find themselves more concerned with physical attractiveness while older women look for long-term relationships and are more concerned with the availability of financial resources. An experiment was performed that measured women’s willingness to give out their phone number. More positive responses were given to the male confederates driving high-status cars because they possessed both characters of physical attractiveness and status, while the confederates who only satisfied the looks expectation and not the money expectation in the middle- and low-status car conditions were given less positive responses. These trends could go along with evolutionary theory that women desire men with higher social status as to ensure their care.

Various social statuses can lead to greater attraction in different gender and age (young and old) groups as seen by the previous study. Gendered preferences in mate selection have also been studied as they relate to the theory of evolutionary. Amador (2005) found that men place a higher value than women on good health and good looks, while women placed a higher value on good financial prospect. As males search for a mate, the prospect of physical fitness is on the top of the qualities for which they are searching. Females, on the other hand, look towards the prospect of financial stability because they believe their mate will support them. This study could support the findings that different social statuses matter more towards males and females, respectively.
Young men and old men alike share in the desire for an attractive partner while financial wealth has been found to be important for older women (Buss, 1993). The relative importance of attractiveness and status has been shown to apply to various populations, such as singles, people in romantic relationships (Buss 1993), college students and adolescents.

Previous research has focused on social status as an indication of attraction as well as gender and generational preferences. However, there have been no studies looking at whether the specification of the social status will affect the attraction in general. The present study will further explore social status and help discriminate even further the boundaries of evolutionary theory in mating strategy by looking more closely at different types of social status. Based on the findings of Ha (2011), Amador (2005), and (Guéguen, 2012), it is hypothesized that an increase in the social status of a subject will cause greater attraction in males and females. Female participants will be more attracted the Businessman condition than the Average Joe condition, while males will be more attracted to the Athlete condition than the Average Jill condition.

Methods

Participants

Seventy-six (46 female and 30 male) psychology students, ranging in age from eighteen years to twenty-two years, from a private Midwestern University were participants. By
participating in the study, participants received 30 minutes of research credit for one of their psychology courses. For the purpose of this study, other data collected from the heterosexual participants was utilized for analysis due to the intent of the study to look at heterosexual ratings of attraction. Consent was obtained from each participant prior to the onset of the experiment.

**Materials**

Each participant was given a packet form depending on the number (1, 2, or 3) they drew as they walked into the study and a “male” or “female packet.” Each packet was labeled (1Male, 2Male, 3Male, 1Female, 2Female, or 3Female) and contained a demographic questionnaire, photos of the subjects paired with a description of the subject’s social status, “Athlete,” “PreMedical Track,” and “Entered Work Force after High School” and six rank-scales (1-10) to rate the subjects’ attraction. In order to obtain the most average attraction photos, we started with 10 pictures of female subjects and 10 pictures of male subjects and had 10 girls rate the male pictures and 5 males rate the female pictures, then completed a mean difference between the photos and eliminated the two lowest and two highest attraction so the mean average measured on the 6 remaining photos for male and female subjects.

**Procedure**

There were two data collection times to ensure maximum number of participants. The students in this study voluntarily signed up via sona systems. The total study took 10 minutes. First, the participants were randomly assigned a packet number as they entered one of two classrooms. After one classroom was filled, students were directed to the second classroom. Next, students were given a packet and informed consent form to read and review. Then, the students were assured that their results were confidential and were instructed to fill out the packet and rate the subjects attraction as honestly as they could. Subjects looked through each picture on a separate piece of paper and read the accompanying social status descriptor under the picture.
When participants were finished with all ratings, all sheets were collected from the participants keeping the participants sheets together. Finally, the participants were notified that they would be receiving a debriefing via email after all other studies were completed and they were thanked for their participation.

**Results**

There were forty-nine females and twenty-six males. All participants were from a private Midwestern University. Univariate statistics used for analysis of the variables are displayed in Table 1. The hypothesis stated that an increase in the social status of a subject would cause greater attraction in males and females. Women prefer Businessmen over Work Force whereas men will prefer Athletes over Average Jills. The different labels of social statuses aimed to discover if the attraction increases with a higher status.

For the primary hypothesis, data of male and female participants, N=76, was analyzed using a between groups ANOVA for each respective gender. The scores for attraction obtained on the ratings of the subjects for the three packets were compared. No differences existed between groups on demographic variable. As hypothesized, there was a significant mean difference found between the females’ attraction of the Businessman condition vs. the Average Joe condition ($F(2,44) = .046, p < .05, Mse = .256$). It was found that the attraction scores for the female ratings did support the hypothesis we predicted, which stated females will rate Businessmen more attractive than Average Joes. The Businessmen condition obtained a mean attraction score of 6.88 ($\bar{S}=1.71$) and the Average Joe condition obtained a mean attraction score of 6.35 ($\bar{S}=1.20$). See Table 2. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no significant mean difference between the males’ ratings of the Athlete condition and the Average Joe condition ($F(2,24) = .274, p > .05, Mse = .464$). It was also found that the attraction scores for the male ratings did not support the pattern we predicted. The Athlete condition obtained a mean attraction
score of 10.34 (SD=2.12) and the Average Joe condition obtained a mean attraction score of 9.82 (SD=1.58). See Table 3.

For the exploratory hypothesis, a correlation was used to find if a linear relationship exists between time of relationship and average attraction scores. Pearson’s correlation between time of relationship ($M=21.68$, $SD=19.86$) and the average attraction score ($M=6.65$, $SD=.824$) was $r(23) = -.171$, $p > .05$. Contrary to the hypothesis, there is no significant linear relationship, however the trend is in the direction of the hypothesis that participants in relationships have lower ratings for attraction scores. Post hoc power analysis revealed insufficient power for this correlation, 191 participants would be needed to eliminate the chance of a Type II error.

**Discussion**

The analyses partially supported the previous research that social status would influence attraction ratings in different conditions. The first hypothesis was that women would prefer the Businessmen condition over the Average Joe condition. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis. Females gave higher ratings to the subject when they were labeled Businessmen compared to when the subject was labeled Average Joe. The second hypothesis states men would prefer the Athlete condition over the Average Joe condition. This hypothesis was not supported and there was no significant mean difference between rating Athlete attraction and Average Joe attraction rating. The results of the first hypothesis support the Evolutionary Theory (2012) that asserts males and females will look for qualities in mates that will ensure their successful reproduction. In this analysis, men would prefer physical health and women would prefer material wealth.

The first hypothesis was formulated by the idea that women value indicators of social status, ambition, finished education, and high salary the most attractive (Ha 2011). According to
Ha’s findings, women would rate the Businessman condition higher than the Average Joe condition because of the implications of wealth associated with that condition. The current study found the most significant between these variables. The current study also examined the influence being in a relationship had on rating attraction, which the previous study did not do. The second hypothesis was formulated from the findings of Buss (1993). The previous study showed men and women being concerned with healthy partners as to ensure successful transmission of genes. Due to this it was hypothesize that men would rate the Athlete condition higher than the Average Joe condition. Our results were dissimilar to the previous study when it came to male participants because we did not find a significant relationship for males ratings of the Athlete condition and the Average Joe condition.

Some limitations in our study are that we were are unaware of how attractive the participant found him or herself to be. This could have altered how the ratings were completed. Perhaps the scores could have been lower if the participant finds himself or herself to be extremely attractive or lower if the participant finds himself or herself to be unattractive. Another limitation is the using of the Likert scale to measure attraction scores. The data is dependent on the honesty and accuracy of the participant doing the ratings. Physical preferences, such as hair color or face shape may have affected the way that the participants answered their attraction ratings.

For future studies, age of participant could be examined more closely. It would be interesting to see if measuring age, by expanding the sample beyond college students would have an affect on the ratings of attraction for the various social status conditions. A larger sample should be used in order to increase the power of the study and have the possibility of significant results between the groups.
**Table 1** Summary of Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Univariate Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>M = 18.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in School</td>
<td>Freshmen 31 (41.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 2** Summary of Female Rating Score by Social Status Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Joe</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 Summary of Male Rating Score by Social Status Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Status</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Joe</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

*Relationship time length across average attraction scores for male and female participants.*
References


