

IS ACCURACY IN FERTILITY DETECTION MEDIATED BY DIFFERENCES IN
THE MATE VALUE OF THE RATER AND TARGET?

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ABSTRACT

I propose the existence of a perceptual bias in men toward detecting fertility status in women of similar mate value. To test this hypothesis, 153 male undergraduates (raters) chose which of two photographs of the same woman was more attractive for 116 female undergraduates (targets) photographed once at ovulation and once during a non-fertile phase of their menstrual cycle. Differences between independently determined rankings of women's physical attractivenesses and the men's self-perceived mate values were curvilinearly associated. Men's accuracy at detecting mate value differences peaked for women of modestly higher mate value than themselves, with lower accuracies for women of lower attractiveness and substantially higher attractiveness than themselves. Furthermore, these functions varied with manipulations of apparent target partner status and rater self-perceived mate value. Results suggest that men's sensitivity to cycle-related changes in women's attractiveness vary with the fit between the man's self-perceived mate value and the relative attractiveness of the woman. I discuss how this perceptual bias might have coevolved with a tendency to seek mates with similar mate values.