

Daughters and Their Mothers are Differentially Impacted by Men's Attractiveness and Personality Traits

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INTRODUCTION

- Previous research shows that offspring rate physical attractiveness in a potential mate for themselves as more important than their parents rate the same trait when considering a mate for their offspring (Apostolou, 2011; 2015; Fugère, et al., 2017a; Perilloux et al., 2011).
 - Previous research also shows that offspring and their parents report valuing other traits (e.g. ambition/industriousness, education/ intelligence, kindness, family oriented) more than they value attractiveness (Apostolou, 2011; 2015; Fugère, et al., 2017a; Perilloux et al., 2011).
 - However, experimental research on mate preferences and parent preferences is rare. One study shows that attractiveness is more important to both women and their mothers than personality characteristics (Fugère, et al., 2017b), however this research only included positive personality characteristics.
 - We aimed to test whether unattractiveness or negative personality characteristics more strongly impacted women's preferences for a mate for themselves and mothers' preferences for a mate for their daughters.
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- Based on prior research suggesting that attractiveness is a necessity in a potential mate (Li et al., 2002; Fugère, et al., 2017b) we proposed
 - Hypothesis 1:** Less attractive men will be rated less favorably than men with negative personality characteristics
 - Hypothesis 2:** Less attractive men will be rated less favorably by women versus their mothers and men with negative personality characteristics will be rated less favorably by mothers versus their daughters
 - Hypothesis 3:** Attractiveness ratings will be more strongly related to overall dating desirability than personality favorability ratings for both women and their mothers.

METHOD

Participants

- We assessed mate preferences among matched samples of women and their mothers.
- Participants included
 - 101 heterosexual and bisexual White women (aged 14-50, $M = 19.16$)
 - 101 mothers (aged 38-81, $M = 49.55$)
- Materials**
- Three photographs of men varying in attractiveness (less attractive, moderately attractive, and more attractive) were randomly associated with positive, moderate, and negative personality traits in a 3 X 3 between subjects design (see Figure 1). Women and their mothers were asked to rate men's attractiveness, personality favorability, and overall dating desirability for themselves or for their daughters.

Figure 1.



“He describes himself as respectful and trustworthy” (positive), or “disorganized and physically fit” (moderate), or “careless and indifferent” (negative).

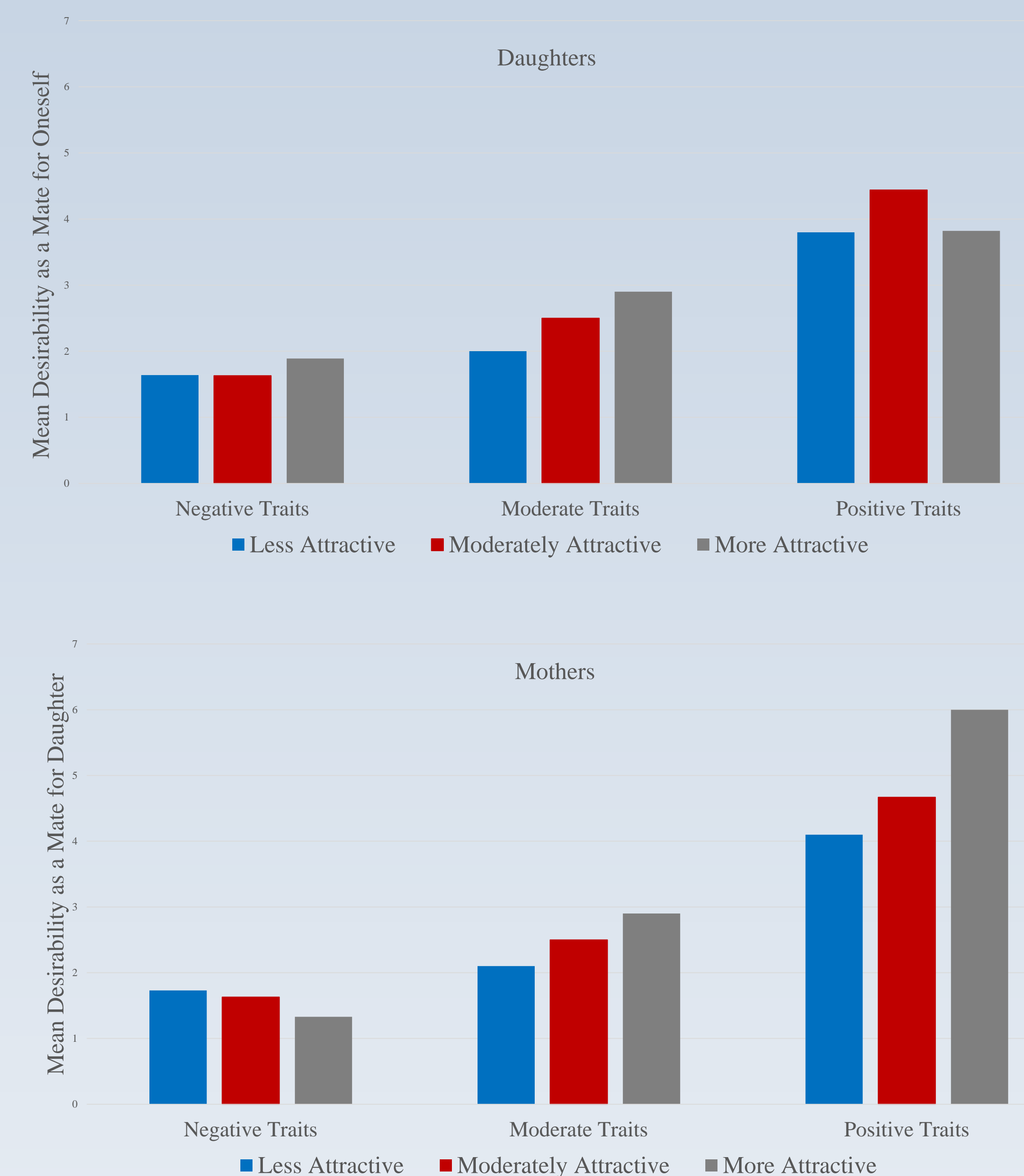
Manipulation checks revealed that the main effect for attractiveness was statistically significant ($F(2, 90) = 8.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$).

$M_{\text{less attractive}} = 2.82, M_{\text{moderately attractive}} = 3.56, \text{ and } M_{\text{more attractive}} = 3.98$

The main effect for trait profile was also statistically significant but was much larger than the effect for attractiveness ($F(2, 81) = 95.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70$).

$M_{\text{careless/indifferent}} = 1.72, M_{\text{disorganized/physically fit}} = 2.75, \text{ and } M_{\text{respectful/trustworthy}} = 5.31$

Figure 2.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- A 2 (generation) X 3 (attractiveness) X 3 (personality profile) mixed ANOVA revealed a three-way interaction of these factors on the ratings of desirability as a partner for oneself or for daughters ($F(4, 75) = 2.81, p = .031$, see Figure 2). Daughters rated the less attractive and moderately attractive men with the negative traits most negatively while mothers rated the attractive men with the negative traits most negatively. Daughters rated the moderately attractive men with the positive traits most positively while mothers rated the attractive men with the positive traits most positively.
- Hypothesis 1:** Although we predicted that the less attractive men would be rated less favorably than the men with the negative personality characteristics, this hypothesis was not supported. Both women and their mothers rated men less positively when they had negative personality traits ($M_{\text{women}} = 1.72, M_{\text{mothers}} = 1.56$) rather than a less attractive appearance ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.48, M_{\text{mothers}} = 2.64$), this may be due to the larger effect of the personality manipulation.
- Hypothesis 2:** We hypothesized that the less attractive men would be rated less favorably by women than their mothers and the men with the negative personality characteristics would be rated less favorably by mothers than their daughters. Although the less attractive man was rated less favorably by women than their mothers, this difference was very small and not statistically significant ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.45, M_{\text{mothers}} = 2.61$). Similarly, although the man with the negative personality traits was rated less favorably by mothers than daughters, this difference was also very small and not statistically significant ($M_{\text{women}} = 1.71, M_{\text{mothers}} = 1.57$).
- Hypothesis 3:** We hypothesized that physical attractiveness ratings would correlate more strongly with dating desirability and explain more unique variance than personality favorability, however for both women and their mothers, personality favorability correlated more strongly with dating desirability ratings and predicted more unique variation.
- Although some results do seem consistent with previous research showing that attractiveness is more important to offspring than to parents (consistent with evolutionary theory), we believe that the relative strength of the personality manipulation versus the attractiveness manipulation is driving these results. Future research should examine the relative importance of these factors using more equivalent manipulations.

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