

The Relative Importance of Physical Attractiveness and Personality Characteristics to the Mate Choices of Women and their Fathers

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INTRODUCTION

- Previous research shows that offspring value physical attractiveness in a potential mate for themselves more than their parents value attractiveness in a potential mate for them (Apostolou, 2011; 2015; Fugère, et al., 2017 Perilloux et al., 2011).
- Researchers propose an evolutionary explanation for this difference, individuals’ greater degree of genetic relatedness to their children than grandchildren (Apostolou, 2011; 2015; Perilloux et al., 2011).
- Previous research also shows that offspring and their parents value other traits (e.g. ambition/industriousness, education/ intelligence, kindness, family oriented) more than attractiveness (Apostolou, 2011; 2015; Fugère, et al., 2017; Perilloux et al., 2011).
- However, self-report may not be the most reliable way to assess mate preferences, especially the preference for attractiveness (e.g. Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Sprecher, 1989).
- We tested five hypotheses investigating the relative importance of physical attractiveness versus personality traits to women and their fathers and the potential for mate-choice conflict among women and their fathers.

METHOD

Participants


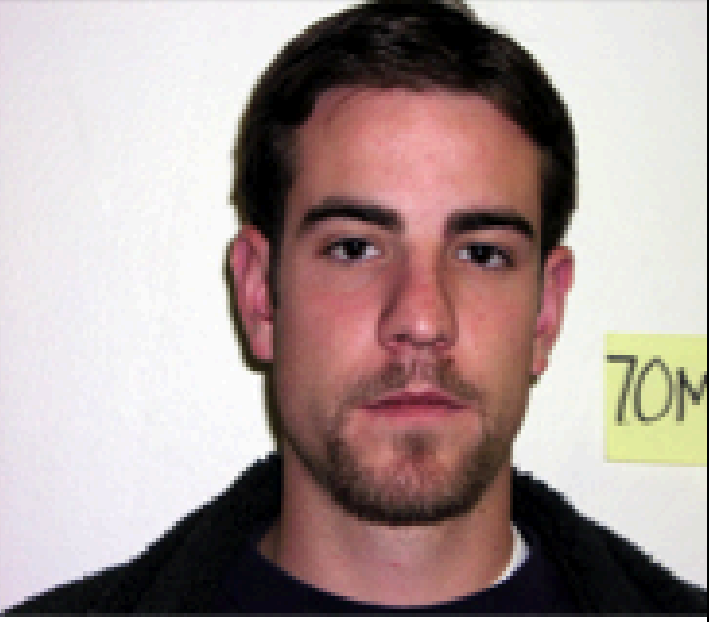
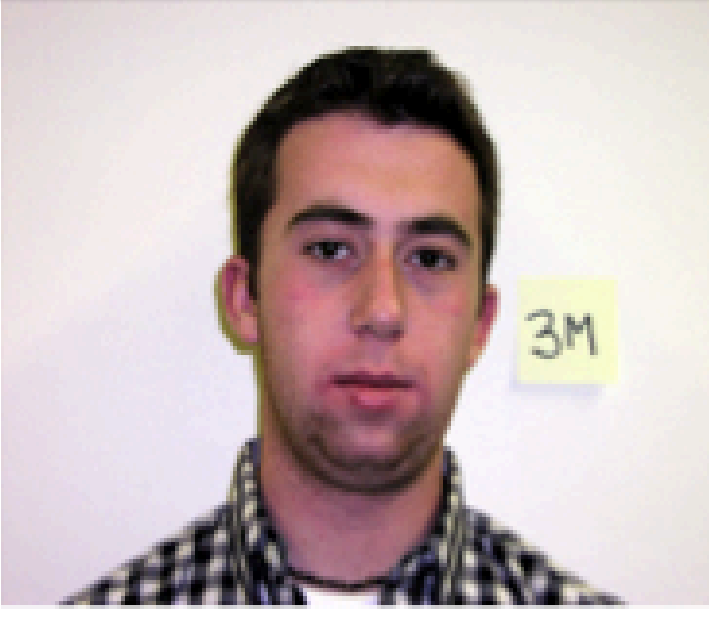
- We assessed mate preferences among matched samples of women and their fathers.
- Participants included
 - 86 women (aged 16-33, $M = 18.43$)
 - 86 fathers (aged 31-64, $M = 51.19$)
- The participants were primarily Caucasian.
- Caucasian daughters $N = 65$, 76% and fathers $N = 67$, 78%
- Latinx daughters $N = 9$, 11% and fathers $N = 9$, 11%
- African American daughters $N = 1$, 1% and fathers $N = 3$, 4%)
- Asian American daughters $N = 2$, 2% and fathers $N = 1$, 1%
- Other ethnic backgrounds daughters $N = 6$, 7% and fathers $N = 4$, 5%

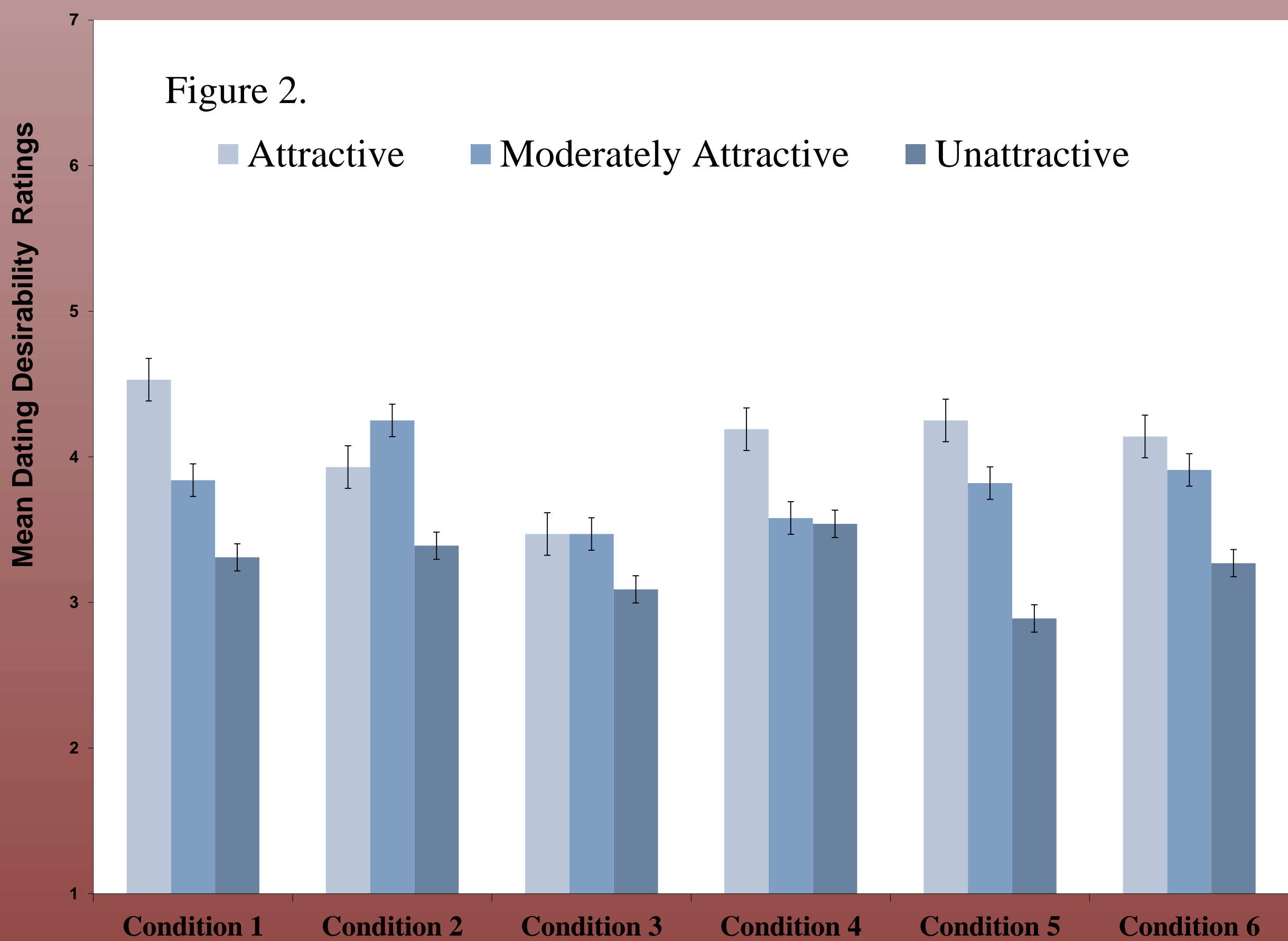
Materials

- Three photographs of men varying in attractiveness were randomly assigned to 1 of 6 possible traits and attractiveness level combinations (see Figure 1). Women and their parents were asked to rate men’s attractiveness, personality favorability and overall dating desirability. Women and their fathers were also asked to choose which man they thought would make the best mate for themselves or for their daughters.

METHOD

Figure 1.

| Cond |  |  |  |
|------|---|---|---|
| 1 | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. |
| 2 | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. |
| 3 | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. |
| 4 | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. |
| 5 | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. |
| 6 | He describes himself as friendly, dependable, and mature. | He describes himself as respectful, trustworthy, and honest. | He describes himself as having a pleasing disposition, ambitious, and intelligent. |



HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS

- Hypothesis 1:** We predicted that both fathers and daughters would prefer the attractive and moderately attractive men more than the unattractive man, regardless of personality traits.
- Both women and their fathers rated the attractive man as the most desirable mate ($M = 4.08$), followed by the moderately attractive man ($M = 3.80$), and then the unattractive man ($M = 3.24$; $F(2, 166) = 25.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$). This analysis also yielded a significant interaction, fathers’ desirability ratings declined steadily but women’s dropped steeply from moderate to unattractive ($F(2, 166) = 4.09$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .05$).
- Hypothesis 2:** We predicted that attractive and moderately attractive men would be rated as having more pleasing personality traits than unattractive men.
- Women and their fathers rated the attractive man’s personality most favorably ($M = 5.11$), followed by the moderately attractive ($M = 4.88$), and the unattractive man ($M = 4.71$; $F(2, 168) = 5.36$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .06$), regardless of the trait profiles ascribed to each man.
- Hypothesis 3:** We predicted that men with the most desirable trait profile (respectful) would be rated more positively than their peers only when they were attractive or moderately attractive, but not unattractive.
- Although this analysis did not reach statistical significance ($F(10, 156) = 1.72$, $p = .081$, $\eta^2 = .10$), only moderately attractive men were ever rated more favorably than attractive men, in Condition 2 when paired with the respectful trait profile (the most desirable trait profile, see Figure 2).
- Hypothesis 4:** Physical attractiveness ratings would correlate more strongly with dating desirability and explain more unique variance than personality favorability
- For women, attractiveness ratings were about twice as important as personality ratings in determining men’s dating desirability. However, for fathers, personality ratings more strongly predicted and correlated with dating desirability ratings for targets of all attractiveness levels.
- Hypothesis 5:** We predicted that fathers and daughters would make opposing choices as to the best mate for daughters; fathers should choose the man with the more favorable personality while daughters should chose the more attractive man.
- Fathers and daughters disagreed about the choice of the best mate 52% of the time. When they disagreed, women tended to choose the more attractive man ($n = 33$, 78.6%) as the best mate more often than their fathers did ($n = 9$, 21.4%) and fathers tended to choose the man with the better personality ($n = 28$, 70.0%) as the best mate more often than their daughters did ($n = 9$, 21.4%).

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