

Your Parents Prefer that You Date a Moderately Attractive (Rather than Unattractive or Attractive) Man

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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.
- 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; 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 hypothesize that both women and their parents will be strongly influenced by the physical attractiveness of the target men and will prefer the attractive to the unattractive men (even when the unattractive men have the most desirable trait profiles).

METHOD

Participants


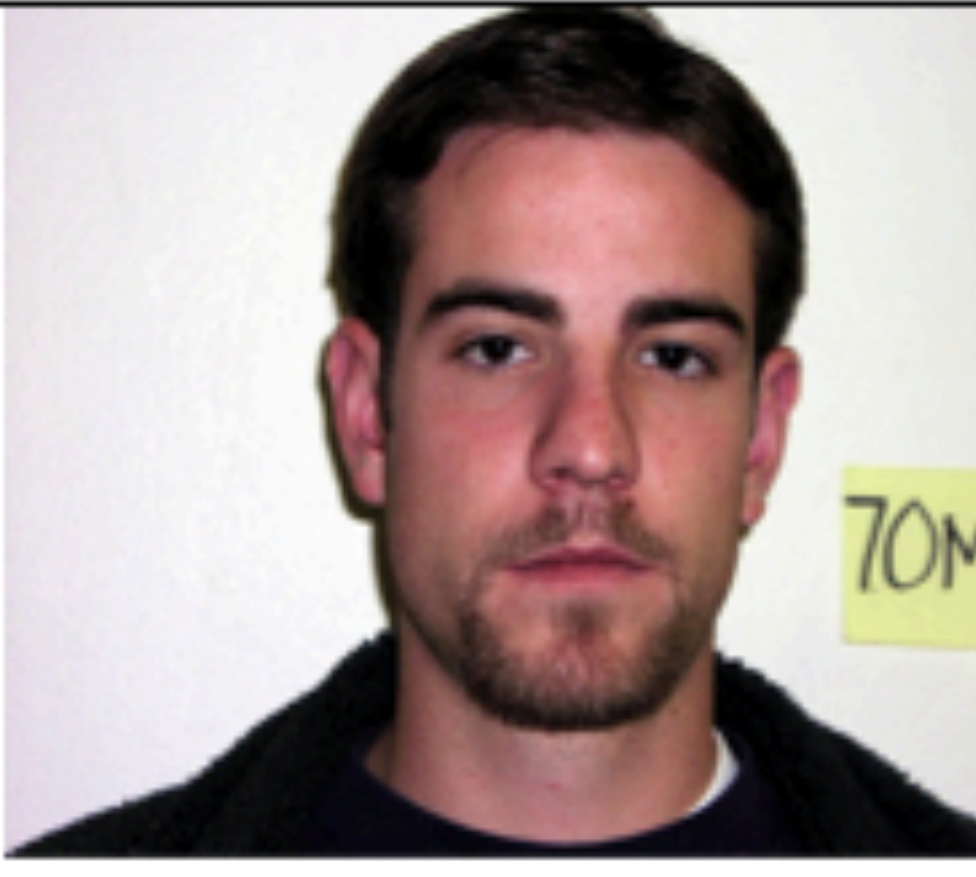
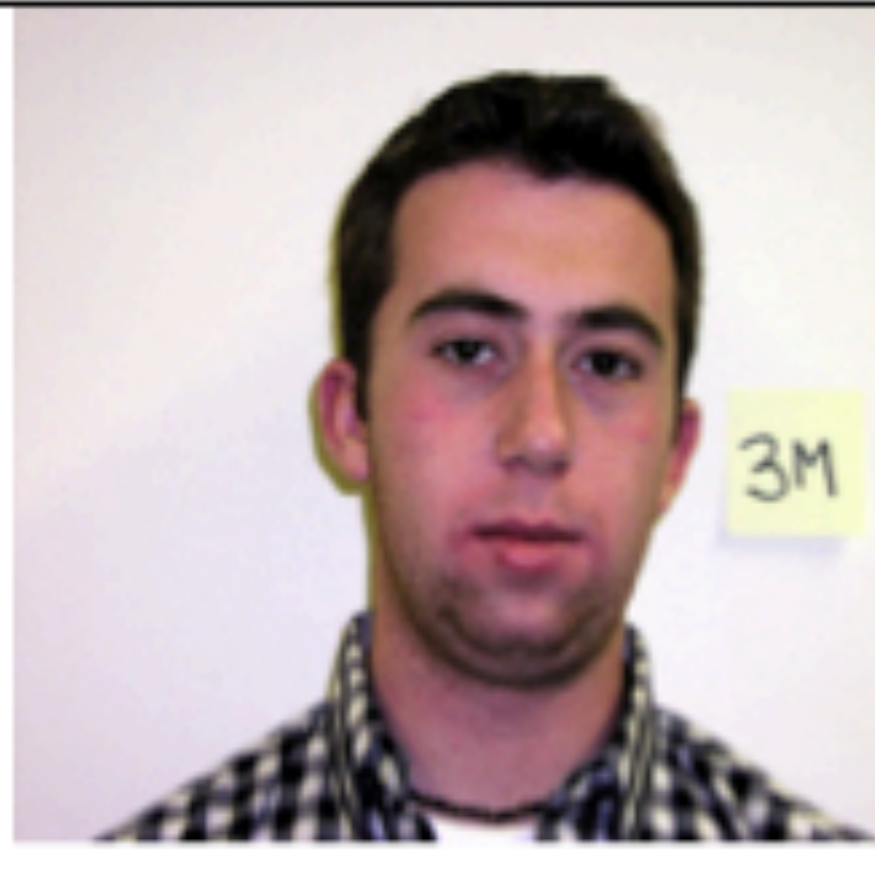
- We assessed mate preferences among matched samples of women and one or both parents.
- Participants included
 - 133 women (aged 15-33, $M = 18.32$)
 - 61 mothers (aged 37-61, $M = 49.05$)
 - 84 fathers (aged 31-64, $M = 51.02$)
- The participants were primarily Caucasian ($N = 101$, 76% for daughters, $N = 51$, 85% for mothers, and $N = 65$, 77% for fathers). Fourteen daughters (11%), six mothers (10%), and nine fathers (11%) identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latina, five daughters (4%) and one father (3%) identified as African American, four daughters (3%), two mothers (3%), and three fathers (4%) identified as Asian American, and four daughters (3%), one mother (2%), and four fathers (5%) indicated other ethnic backgrounds.

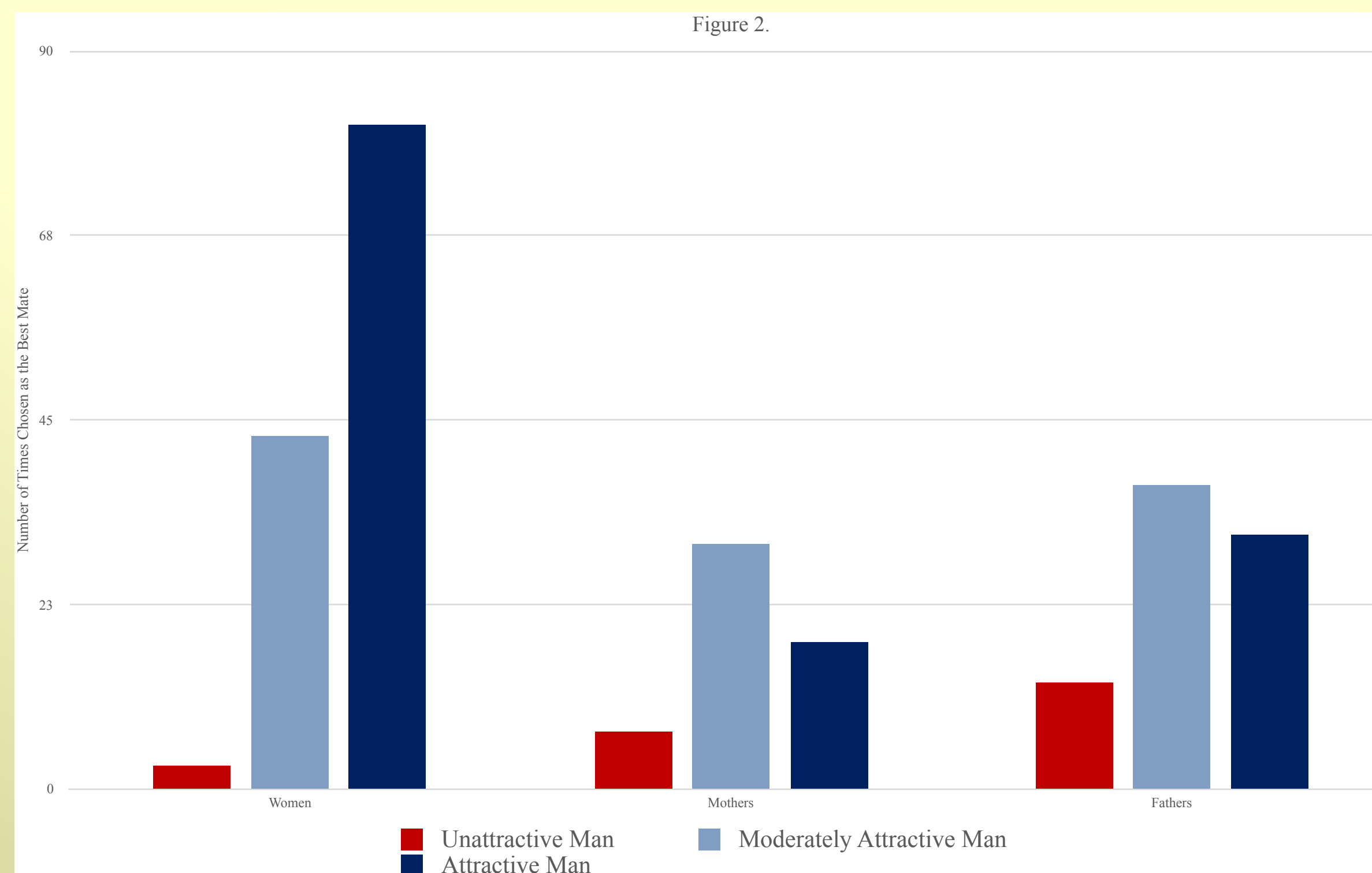
Materials

- 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 choose the most desirable mate for themselves or for their daughter.

RESULTS

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.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

- As shown in Figure 2, women were most likely to choose the most attractive man as the best mate for themselves while their parents were most likely to choose the moderately attractive man as the best mate for their daughters.
- Due to low numbers of participants choosing the unattractive man as the best mate, this condition was excluded from the chi square analyses.
- Parents were more likely to choose the moderately attractive man with the most favorable traits for their daughters rather than the attractive man with the less favorable traits. Women continued to choose the most attractive man for themselves, regardless of the personality trait profile.
- Specifically, in condition 6, women were more likely to choose as the best mate the attractive man (paired with the less desirable friendly trait profile, $n = 12$) rather than the moderately attractive man (paired with the most desirable respectful trait profile, $n = 5$) while mothers and fathers were more likely to choose the moderately attractive man ($n = 10$ for mothers, $n = 6$ for fathers) rather than the attractive man ($n = 3$ for mothers, $n = 4$ for fathers) for their daughters. This chi square contingency test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 40) = 6.97, p = .031$).
- Similarly, in condition 2, women were more likely to choose as the best mate the attractive man (paired with the least desirable pleasing trait profile, $n = 9$) rather than the moderately attractive man (paired with the most desirable respectful trait profile, $n = 7$) while mothers and fathers were more likely to choose the moderately attractive man ($n = 7$ for mothers, $n = 8$ for fathers) rather than the attractive man ($n = 3$ for mothers, $n = 2$ for fathers) for their daughters. This chi square contingency test did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2(2, N = 36) = 3.86, p = .145$).
- Although daughters did not choose the moderately attractive man more often than the attractive man, for parents if the target man was at least moderately attractive, he was chosen more frequently as the best mate when he had the most desirable trait profile.
- These results raise the possibility that parents might actively avoid attractive mates for their daughters even if they are purported to have good personalities, perhaps because attractive men are less likely to stay in long-term relationships (e.g. Ma-Kellams et al., 2017).

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