

RUNNING HEAD: HOW WOMEN CHOOSE MATES?

How Women Choose Mates: The Effects of Age and Attractiveness of
Males as Rated by Females

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Literature review submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for Psychology 4105 (Honors Thesis).

Abstract

An evolutionary perspective of the maximization of reproductive success posits that men and women inherit different reproductive strategies, with women placing more value on traits that indicate a man's resource acquisition success and men placing more value on traits that indicate a female's youth, health and beauty. Also an attractiveness bias has been found in society, that attributes more positive qualities to people who are attractive. Men have been found to place more value on qualities of attractiveness when choosing a female prospective mate. The present paper provides research for this evolutionary hypothesis and research for the effects of an attractiveness bias.

How Women Choose Mates: The Effects of Age and Attractiveness of Males as Rated by Females

An evolutionary view of mate selection argues that mate choice is governed by the maximization of reproductive success and that male and female humans inherit different reproductive strategies. Consistent with this hypothesis, Symons (1979) suggested that there are specific physical attributes that serve as cues of reproductive capacity in a prospective mate. Two such physical attributes, age and physical attractiveness are presumed to distinguish the mate selection of males and females. Males and females seem to use these physical attributes when judging potential mates. Since possession of these attributes would alter one's reproductive success, youthful attractive females would be desirable for males because these features signify fertility; in contrast, in males, increasing years may signal the acquisition of resources without loss in fertility. Thus aging, in males, would not decrease their desirability to females.

Evolutionary Theory on Mate Selection

Female Reproductive Strategies

In 1979, the evolutionary psychologist Donald Symons published a study on mate selection suggesting that mate choice is governed by genetically-determined strategies that maximize

reproductive success. Reproductive success can be understood as the passing on of one's genes to a new generation; this is accomplished by having offspring or by supporting the survival of one's family group members. Since females are biologically limited to the number of offspring they can conceive, evolutionary pressures have selected for a more conservative sexual strategy in females. Paternal investment and resourcefulness are an integral part of the successful survival of offspring; hence, a high status male can provide for a woman and her offspring. It follows that social dominance and status, qualities reflective of resourcefulness, would be especially attractive to the female.

Some early cross-cultural research (e.g., Ford & Beach, 1951) demonstrates that male attractiveness tends to be based on skills and abilities as well as physical attributes such as appearance. Since some abilities require time to develop, it would seem to follow that females may prefer older males to younger males who have yet to develop skills or status.

Singh (1995), manipulated waist-to-hip ratio and found that among women aged 18-69 years, male targets with normal weight (fat) distribution were ascribed higher financial status than males with either under-or-overweight fat distributions. Women clearly attributed more resourcefulness to the men who

indeed looked more physically fit, a physical standard that is apparent across many cultures.

The preference of females for high-status males appears to be cross-cultural. In his pioneering study across 37 cultures, Buss (1989) found that in every culture, females ranked good earning capacity and ambition as the highest traits females favored in a potential mate and females also preferred older men. In contrast, males ranked youth and physical attractiveness as the most favorable traits in a mate; moreover, males preferred younger women.

Male Reproductive Strategies

In contrast to females, the reproductive success of males is not limited biologically. The *Guinness Book of World Records* vividly makes the point. The most prolific human parent in history was the emperor of Morocco, credited with 888 children. This is about 860 more than a woman could conceivably have, unless she had a knack for multiple births (Wright, 1994). Symons (1979) suggested that the behavioral strategies of males are directed toward specific attributes of females that enhance reproductive success. Health and youth are clearly two of these attributes. Indicators of health and youth might include clear complexion and eyes, full lips, firm muscle tone, good teeth, lustrous hair and cleanliness. Research will be later reviewed

in this report that strongly supports an attractiveness bias in the attribution of socially desirable traits towards attractive, compared to unattractive, females.

Symons (1979) also explains that the time frame between puberty and menopause marks a females' reproductive years; thus, males should be most attracted to women of childbearing age. Males who are attracted to prepubescent girls or postmenopausal women would not be successful in perpetuating the gene pool. In spheres that have been regarded as contemporary venues for mate choice, research seems to provide evidence of this hypothesis. For example, Kenrick and Keefe (1992) have examined singles advertisements. Regardless of their age, women were found to seek partners either slightly younger or 8-11 years older. In contrast, men in their twenties seek partners either slightly older or slightly younger and from their mid-forties on, men prefer younger women. As males age, they seem to seek partners younger than them, while females are consistently attracted to same-age and older partners.

Contemporary Research on Physical Attractiveness and Social Desirability

Contemporary social psychologists have examined many characteristics that help explain attraction. These include: physical contact, similarity, the evocation of positive affect,

situational factors like stress and partner scarcity. Perhaps no characteristic has received more attention than the impact of physical appearance. Two attributes about physical appearance that have been the focus of much attention are physical attractiveness and age. These two physical qualities are often used in the process of person perception, for the attribution of both positive and negative traits. Because of the consensus concerning the attributes that are associated with both age and physical attractiveness, such characterizations are regarded as the stereotypes of attractiveness and ageism.

Physical Attractiveness and Social Desirability

The study of physical attractiveness has been one of the more long-standing contemporary topics of inquiry in social psychology. Researchers have focused their attention on investigating how attractive individuals are rated on various socially desirable qualities. The methodology commonly used in these studies has been to display photographs of male or female individuals of varying attractiveness. The subjects are asked to rate the individual in each photograph in terms of both physical attractiveness and a number of socially desirable traits. These bipolar traits are commonly rated on a 7 point scale (e.g., friendly-unfriendly, intelligent-unintelligent).

In one of the earlier demonstrations of this method, Dion, Berschied and Walster (1972) had college students examine

pictures of highly attractive, average attractive and unattractive male and female targets. The unattractive targets were rated as less attractive than the average targets, who in turn were less attractive than the attractive photos. Moreover, the attractive photographs were attributed a host of more socially desirable traits. Compared to the average and unattractive targets, attractive targets were judged to be more exciting, intelligent, interesting, strong, modest, outgoing and responsive. This characterization prompted the authors to conclude "What is Beautiful is Good". In addition, attractive targets were anticipated to capture better jobs, have more successful marriages and have more fulfilling lives.

During the 20 years that followed the Dion et.al.(1972) landmark study, hundreds of studies have focused on the relationship between physical appearance and social desirability.

In a recent meta-analytic review of this attractiveness research, Feingold (1992) concluded that physically attractive people of both sexes were perceived as more sociable, dominant, sexually warm, mentally healthy and socially skilled but they were not perceived as possessing greater character traits(i.e., honesty, kindness, sincerity, etc.) than physically-unattractive targets. In the absence of nonphysical cues, sometimes a person's physical appearance may be the only variable available to make judgments about others.

Age and Social Desirability

People seem to believe that aging not only causes physical decreases but also personality changes. Aaronson (1966) sought to identify from the responses elicited from a sample of young adults, some existing stereotypes of personality changes that occur with aging. The respondents saw elderly people as conservative, inflexible, withdrawn, passive, dependent, nurturing, religious and suffering from various forms of physical and mental deterioration. Taken together then traits can be characterized as socially undesirable.

Basilli and Reil (1981) used both a sample of college students and a sample of elderly people to rate characteristics of groups of persons based on several classifications including age, (i.e, 35 years, 70 years of age), sex, occupation and ethnicity. Elderly people were found to be stereotyped mainly in terms of their age whereas young mature adults were stereotyped on many features. This distinction emerged from both the elderly and young subjects, making age an important characteristic we use to make judgments.

Braithwaite (1986), sought to examine how people would respond to age in scenarios that were presented about a woman who was either disabled, alert, active or impaired. The scenario was also generalized later so it could be a man or a woman and the ages of the characters presented in this study were 26 and 71

years of age. The elderly were perceived as more concerned for others but they were judged as less social and active. Also, it seemed that 71 years of age was synonymous with disability and 26 years of age with ability. The age of an individual was used as the basis for personality judgments, strongly suggesting that like unattractive physical appearance, physical cues are used to make unflattering judgments about others.

Physical Attractiveness, Age and Social Desirability

Age and attraction are two physical features which have a profound effect on our perceptions of others. It has been demonstrated that people have stereotypes of others based on these features. The ageism stereotype is associated with negative qualities while the attractiveness stereotype is associated with positive qualities. The two are related because aging is associated with reduced attractiveness in females more than males.

Henss (1991) looked at the effects of age and attractiveness in facial photos of both young and old men and women. He evaluated age estimates, perceived likeability and ratings of physical attractiveness. Overall, the target-age was negatively related to attractiveness; the older the model, the lower the attractiveness rating. The relationship between age and attractiveness of the target photo was strongest when the judge

and the target were of the opposite sex and the judge was young. When the judge was elderly and/or of the same age or sex as the target, there was a lower negative correlation between age of the target and attractiveness rating.

Johnson and Pittenger (1984) examined the lifespan generality of the attractiveness stereotype. They were interested in discovering how elderly and young judges perceived elderly targets in terms of attractiveness (and also how young judges perceived elderly subjects). They asked elderly and young subjects to rate the physical attractiveness of elderly target faces (ages 60-93 years). The subjects also rated the faces in terms of social attributes that is, personality, success in life experiences and occupational achievement. Both young and old subjects rated the attractive elderly targets as having more socially-desirable traits than their unattractive counterparts. Like their younger counterparts the elderly displayed an attractiveness bias when rating targets of a similar age. The failure to include young targets makes it unclear whether the elderly would demonstrate an attractiveness bias when rating young targets.

Bertolissi (1994) chose to evaluate the attractiveness bias by having male and female, young and elderly subjects rate target photographs of young and elderly, attractive and unattractive females. Each participant was randomly assigned one of the four

target photo conditions: a young attractive target, a young unattractive target, an elderly attractive target and an elderly unattractive target. Subjects were administered a 38-item adjective checklist on which to rate the personality of the target photograph. The results indicate that both the young and old judges exhibited the attractiveness bias; attractive target photographs whether young or old, were rated higher on socially desirable traits than the unattractive targets. Also, there were some interactions the elderly males rated a young attractive female target as more socially-desirable than an older attractive female target. The older unattractive female target was deemed by all subjects to be higher in social-desirability than the unattractive young woman. This pattern of findings lends support to the evolutionary hypothesis that men use physical appearance as a cue for attraction more than women. A future study might test the effects of age and physical attractiveness of females' attributions of socially-desirable traits (e.g., resourcefulness, success, dominance, etc.) in males. On the basis of the evolutionary hypothesis, one might predict that generally as males age, their acquisition of resources increases; therefore, age may not undermine physical attractiveness, for females.

The present paper provided research on the evolutionary theory of mate selection and showed that males and females use different reproductive strategies when choosing mates. Womens'

mate choices are based on characteristics of status, resourcefulness and dominance in males traits that signify their ability to be good providers. In contrast men base their mate choices on youth and physical attractiveness, traits that signify women's fertility.

An attractiveness bias has been associated with social desirability, meaning that attractive individuals are ascribed more positive traits than less attractive individuals. The age of an individual has also been reported to be linked with social desirability. Research suggests that younger individuals are ascribed more positive traits while older individuals are ascribed more negative traits (Henss, 1991). These age and attractiveness biases have been displayed by both young and elderly judges with a variety of photograph types.

Therefore, the aim of this paper was to link research to the attractiveness and ageism biases and to investigate Symons assumptions made on the evolutionary hypothesis. The reason for compiling this research was so that one could see the conditions that the attractiveness bias is tested under and also the results that have occurred. To date, no research has examined young and elderly females rating young and elderly male target photographs on personality and resourcefulness characteristics. In combining these two trait ratings, it would be interesting to see

the determinants women use in choosing mates and if they choose those same determinants (resource, status and age) as described by the evolutionary hypothesis.

Annotated Bibliography

Aaronson, B. S. (1966). Personality stereotypes of aging.

Journal of Gerontology, 21, 458-462.

This article presents us with some commonly held personality stereotypes of aging. The study attempted to identify from a sample of 20 young adults, existing stereotypes of personality changes that occur with aging. The subjects ranging from ages 18 to 42, were asked to check those adjectives from a rating scale that described the typical person at decade intervals from ages 5 through to 85. The choices were then analyzed and only those words checked by at least 11 people, were retained as typical descriptions for that age group. The correlation's of the study suggest a division of the life span into three categories: childhood, adulthood and senescence. The last stage senescence which is the aged division of life had such adjectives as inflexible, withdrawn, passive and dependent ascribed to it.

Bassili, J. & Reil, J. (1981). On the dominance of the old-age stereotype. Journal of Gerontology, 36, 682-687.

The stereotypes of groups identified by age and either by sex, occupation, or ethnicity were assessed in a sample of college students and a sample of elderly persons. A total of 12 target categories served as stimuli in the study.

Each category label contained two pieces of information: an age destination (35 years old or 70 years old) and one of six categories designations (sex, male or female, occupation, engineer or bus driver and ethnicity, Canadian Indian or White Canadian). Each stimulus label was rated on 61 bipolar adjective scales in the form of a questionnaire by 180 college students and 180 elderly people. The results show that young mature adults are stereotyped in terms of various features; however old people are stereotyped in terms of age. This is shown by both elderly subjects and their younger counterparts. The old age stereotype that emerged consisted mainly of the following attributes: conservative, traditional, present-oriented and moral.

Bertolissi, Susan. (1994). What is beautiful is young: The moderating effects of age and physical attractiveness on person perception. Unpublished thesis, Algoma University, Sault. Ste Marie, Ontario, Canada.

This study looked at the relationship between the ageism and attractiveness stereotype by having young and elderly, attractive and unattractive photos of females assessed in terms of social desirability by young and old, male and female subjects. Involved in the study were 160 subjects of those 80 were elderly and 80 were young. Of those groups half were male and the other half were female. The

subjects rated only one of four photos on four conditions: an attractive young female, an unattractive young female, an attractive elderly female and an unattractive elderly female. These photos were rated on a seven point adjective scale. Both elderly and young subjects evoked an attractiveness bias. Interestingly enough, elderly males preferred younger women. Also, elderly unattractive women were deemed more socially desirable than young unattractive women.

Braithwaite, V., (1986). Old age stereotypes: Reconciling Contradictions. Journal of Gerontology, 41, 353-360.

This study tested the hypothesis that age stereotyping with specific targets would occur when the targets were disabled, when information was minimal, when the context was commonplace and when the measuring instruments were psychometrically sound. Using between-subjects, 208 completed judgment tasks and reported on the impact that age had on their evaluations. The stereotyping paradigm revealed both positive and negative stereotypes of old age when the target was generalized but not when the target was specific. Also 71 years of age became synonymous with disabled and 26 years of age with able.

Buss, David. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. In D.

Massaro, Behavioral and Brains Sciences (pp. 1-49). Ann Arbor, MI: Cambridge University Press.

In this study, five predictions were made about sex differences in human mate preferences based on evolutionary conceptions of parental investment, sexual selection, human reproductive capacity and sexual asymmetries. The predictions centered on how each sex valued earning capacity, ambition-industriousness, youth, physical attractiveness and chastity. Predictions were drawn from 37 cultures, 33 countries and 5 islands. Overall, females were found to value cues to resource acquisition potential mates more highly than males. Characteristics signaling reproductive capacity were valued more by males than females.

Dion, K., Berscheid, E. & Walster, E. (1972). What is beautiful is good. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24, 285-290.

The present experiment was designed to determine whether physically attractive stimulus persons, both male and female were assumed to possess more socially desirable personality traits than physically unattractive stimulus persons and persons of an average attractiveness. The results indicate a what is beautiful is good stereotype, where attractive

individuals were ascribed such traits as sensible, outgoing, sensitive, more sexually warm etc.

Feingold, A. (1992). Good looking people are not what we think. Psychological Bulletin, 111, 304-341.

Feingold used a meta-analysis to examine findings in 2 related areas: experimental research on the physical attractiveness stereotype and correlational studies of characteristics associated with physical attractiveness. The experimental literature found that physical attractive people were perceived to as more sociable, dominant, sexually warm etc. The correlational literature found that good-looking people were less lonely, less socially anxious, more popular etc., than unattractive people.

Ford, C.S. & Beach, F.A. (1951). Patterns of Sexual Behavior. New York: Harper Row.

This research is early cross-cultural research demonstrating that male attractiveness tends to be based on skills and abilities rather than on physical attributes such as appearance.

Henss, Ronald. (1991). Perceiving age and attractiveness in facial photographs. Journal of Applied social psychology, 21, 933-946.

In two experiments, 492 male and female subjects from three different age groups estimated the age of adult men and

women on the basis of photographs and provided attractiveness ratings of the stimulus persons. In both experiments, there was a negative relationship between age and attractiveness for female stimuli. For male stimuli a negative relationship was found in one experiment only. Both experiments yielded two kinds of in-group-favoritism: the relationship between age and attractiveness was seen to be less negative when the judge and the judged were of the same sex and when the subjects themselves belonged to the oldest group.

Johnson, D., & Pittenger, J. (1984). Attribution, the attractiveness stereotype and the elderly. Developmental psychology, 20, 1168-1172.

The physical attractiveness stereotype was tested by the perceptions of elderly people. In the first study, college age and elderly observers rated the physical attractiveness of faces of elderly people (age 60-93). On the basis of these ratings, faces at three distinct levels of attractiveness were selected for use in the second study. In the second study, 72 young adult and 72 old volunteers viewed the selected faces and rated them in three areas of perceived social characteristics: personality factors, success in life experiences and occupational achievements. The typical physical attractiveness stereotype was found

for both groups of observers and in each of the three areas of judgment.

Kenrich, D.T., & Keefe, R.C. (1992). Age preferences in mates reflect sex differences in human reproductive strategies. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 15, 75-133.

They examined single ads: women (regardless of their age) were found to seek partners either slightly younger than themselves or 8-11 years older. In contrast, men in their twenties seek partners either slightly or slightly younger; however, from their mid-forties on, men clearly prefer younger women.

Singh, Deborah, (1995). Female judgment of male attractiveness. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69, 1089-1099.

Two studies were conducted to examine the role of male body shape (as defined by waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)) in female mate choice. College age women judged normal-weight male figures with WHR in the typical male range as most attractive, healthy and possessing many positive personal qualities. The second study, 18-69 year old women rated normal-weight male figures with differing WHRs and purported income. All women, regardless of their age, rated figures with WHRs in the typical male range and higher financial status more favorably.

Symons, D. (1979). The Evolution of Human Sexuality. New York: Oxford University Press.

Symon proposes a transcultural theory of attractiveness in which physical attractiveness is associated with fitness in the species. He believes that there are cues which reflect reproductive capacity in a mate. On this basis two physical attributes---namely age and physical attractiveness--- are presumed to distinguish the mate selection techniques of males and females. Important in his discussion is the perpetuating of one's genes by having offspring's or by supporting the survival of one's group.

Wright, R. (1994). Moral Animal: Why We Are The Way We Are. New York: Vintage Press.

Out of his discussion, he explains that the most prolific human parent in history was the male emperor of Morocco, credited with 888 children.

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Abstract

An evolutionary perspective of mate selection suggests that men and women should select mates differently. Mate selection is based on choosing partners that will help an individual have reproductive success. This means that women should tend to place importance on traits that signify status and resourcefulness, traits which indicate the man is a good provider; whereas men should place more value on youthful features and health which may signify fertility. In this study young and elderly women aged 18-54 and 59-86 rated four photo's that ranged in age and attractiveness: (a) an attractive young man, (b) an unattractive young man, (c) an elderly attractive man and (d) an elderly unattractive man. Subjects rated the photo on 38 personality traits and 6 traits described as resourceful by Buss (1989) on a 7 point Likert scale. Results were analyzed for an effect of an attractiveness bias and resourcefulness. The results indicate that the attractive male photographs were deemed as more socially desirable than the unattractive male photographs, therefore an attractiveness bias. For resourcefulness, the young female participants rated the male photographs as higher in resourcefulness than the elderly male photographs. Also the attractive male photographs were rated as higher in resourcefulness than the unattractive male photographs.

An evolutionary view of mate selection posits that mate selection is governed by the maximization of reproductive success. Therefore, men and women place importance on different traits for potential mates. The reproductive strategies of men and women are different. Women must invest more time and energy in their children, they carry, conceive and nurture the child for nine months and for the time until the child is able to care for themselves. Men have less investment in their children since they do not have the ability to carry the child, conceive or be pregnant for nine months. Their part in the birth may end immediately after the planting of the sperm and they can continue on producing many more offspring than women. Symons (1979) suggests that there are specific physical attributes that serve as cues which reflect reproductive capacity in a prospective mate. Two such physical attributes, namely, age and physical attractiveness are proposed by sociobiologists to distinguish the mate selection of males and females. Youthful females would be desirable for male's since fertility declines with age; in contrast, in males, increasing years may signal the acquisition of resources, without reduced fertility.

In 1989, Buss investigated sex differences in human mate preferences across 37 cultures (33 countries and 5 islands). Subjects were required to rate each of 18 characteristics (e.g. dependable character, intelligence, sociability...) on their desirability in choosing a mate. Interspersed among the 18 characteristics were the following "resource" target variables: good financial prospects, ambitious, industriousness, level of social status and good job prospects. Subjects were also asked whether they preferred or did not prefer, an older mate. Across all cultures, females compared to males, were found to place higher value in

cues to resource acquisition in potential mates.

Physical attractiveness has also been studied by social psychologists in the context of cognitive biases; specifically the assumption of traits based on physical cues. In what has now become a landmark study, Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972) showed subjects photographs of attractive and unattractive individuals and asked them to rate these target persons on 27 personality traits. Dion et al. (1972) that attractive individuals were perceived to be more sensitive, kind, sociable, interesting, outgoing, strong, poised and exciting than less attractive persons in short, more socially desirable.

The importance of youth in a female mate may help explain the male concern with physical attractiveness in a potential mate, a concern that Buss also documented in all 37 cultures (Wright, 1994). The features of youth (and fertility) which are the same features of beauty, large eyes and a small nose will change as a woman ages; hence as a woman ages she will be construed as being less fertile and less attractive. Since age and fertility are unrelated in a male mate, females would be predicted to be less concerned with physical attractiveness in a male spouse. Age like physical appearance is physically apparent and we use it to make inferences about social desirability in the absence of personal information. Some early research by Aaronson (1966) suggests that older people are perceived as more, inflexible, dogmatic, withdrawn, passive, and suffering from various forms of physical and mental deterioration. It is unclear whether these traits are more likely to be ascribed to elderly females, in contrast to elderly males.

In an effort to clarify age and attractiveness biases in the person perception of males and females, Bertollisi (1994) required young and elderly (male and female) subjects to evaluate one of four female target photographs that differed in both age and attractiveness: (1) young and attractive, (2) young and unattractive, (3) elderly and attractive, (4) elderly and unattractive.

Participants were asked to rate the target photograph on 39 bipolar traits as well as rate their own attractiveness. The results indicate that young female judges rated the target photographs as more attractive than the males rated the same photograph; the attractive target photos were rated higher in attractiveness than the unattractive target photos. The results of this study also indicate that an attractiveness bias was displayed by both young and elderly participants. The young male participants found the pictures of the females attractive but they did not find them as attractive as the young female participants. The elderly males also found the pictures to be attractive. In terms of social desirability, young male participants found the young and elderly attractive female photographs to be equal in social desirability; whereas the elderly men found the young attractive photographs to be higher in social desirability than the elderly attractive photographs. Also across all participants it was found that being young and unattractive was less socially desirable than being elderly and unattractive. Therefore, Bertolissi was able to conclude that what is young and beautiful is better; and what is ugly and young is worse.

The present study was designed to extend the Bertolissi study by examining age and attractiveness biases for male targets. Of specific interest was the evaluation of Buss' (1989) hypothesis about the importance of resource traits on males that differ in both age and attractiveness. While previous research confirms that females do exhibit attractiveness biases, it is unclear whether the ascriptions of socially desirable traits include those suggested by Buss (1989) as desirable for females in choosing mates. Relatedly, since these "resource" traits are not presumed to decrease with age (and may increase with age), it appeared worthwhile to include target photographs that varied in age. Presumably the attractiveness bias is considerably robust and is not expected to vary as a function of the age of the male target.

Young and elderly female subjects were asked to rate one of four photographs of a male on a series of bipolar traits. Included in the list were six traits (i.e. industriousness, ambition, social status, good financial prospects, good job prospects and preference for an older mate) as identified by Buss(1989) as reflective of "resourcefulness" in previous research. It was predicted that judges would attribute more socially desirable traits to attractive than unattractive male photographs. It was also anticipated that older male target photographs would be ascribed more resourcefulness traits than their younger counterparts. It was anticipated that regardless of what the man looked like, if he was older he would be deemed more resourceful by all female judges based on the assumption of the evolutionary hypothesis.

Method

Participants

Eighty females participated in this experiment. The elderly sample consisted of 40 females (aged 54-86) recruited from several senior centers. These participants received no compensation for their participation. The young sample consisted of 40 females (aged 18-37) recruited from the subject pool at Algoma University College. These participants received course credit for their participation.

Materials

Eight preliminary photographs drawn from various modern day magazines were judged by 10 women (aged 22-25 and 59-77) on a 7-point scale of attractiveness. The colour photographs all cropped at the shoulders, were not familiar to any of the judges. The photograph rated highest in attractiveness amongst the eight, was selected as the target photograph for the experiment.

The exact photograph chosen for this study was sketched by an artist in black and white and also aged to appear to be 50- 60 years old. These two sketches were further modified to

appear unattractive. In short, from a single young target, three versions were created to provide for 4 targets: (1) attractive-young (2) unattractive-young (3) attractive-elderly and (4) unattractive-elderly. To modify the young attractive male into the elderly attractive male, the artist modified features that appear to change one's age. Specifically the target's (a) hair was thinned and receded, (b) more lines were placed around his eyes and in various areas of his face, (c) ears were enlarged, (d) lips were thinned and (e) jowls were added around his chin. To modify the attractive young and elderly male into unattractive matched counterparts, identical modifications were made to each target. These modifications were designed to be consistent with culturally prescribed standards of unattractiveness; namely features of symmetry and prominence. Specifically the artist made the following modifications: (a) the placing of the left eye slightly higher than the right eye, (b) a bulbed and widened nose, (c) thinner and uneven lips, (d) larger ears, (e) slightly more weight on the face, (f) more hair on the eyebrows (i.e. a uni-brow look), (g) bulging eyes and (h) slight bags under the eyes. A manipulation check was completed in order to evaluate whether the modifications resulted in targets that appeared both unattractive and aged. Ratings by a panel of 8 judges confirmed that the target sketches were indeed consistent with the modifications. The images were then digitally scanned to reproduce equal image resolution.

Procedure

The participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine the accuracy of person perception. Their task would involve rating a target person on a series of given personality traits. Participants were tested in groups of 15-20 people. Each participant was given one of four targets that was either: (1) young and attractive, (2) young and unattractive, (3) elderly and attractive or (4) elderly and unattractive. Subjects were randomly assigned to one

of these four conditions, with the restriction of an equal number of young and elderly females in each condition ($n=10/\text{condition}$). The design of the study was a 2(Photo Age: young/elderly) X 2(Photo Attractiveness: attractive/unattractive) X 2(Age of Judge: young/elderly) between subjects design.

Subjects were required to rate the stimulus person on 43 bipolar traits on a 7 point rating scale, wherein the negative pole was assigned a score of "1" and the positive pole, a score of "7". Moreover, subjects were required to estimate the age of the photograph as well as their own attractiveness. To reduce response set, the list of traits were assembled so that the positive pole was not consistently on the right side of the scale. Thirty-eight of the 43 bipolar traits were drawn from Dion et. al.'s (1972) original study, as well as Braithwaite's (1986) study (see Appendix A). Six of the traits were drawn from Buss (1989) list of "resource" traits (see Appendix B).

Results

Three separate analyses focusing on the traits of attractiveness, social desirability and resourcefulness were conducted in a 2x2x2 between subjects anova with Photo Attractiveness(Attractive/Unattractive), Photo Age(Young/Elderly) and Participant Age (Young/Elderly) as the independent variables.

Attractiveness

Analysis of this trait was computed using a 2 (Photo Appearance: Attractive/Unattractive) x 2(Photo Age: Young/Elderly) x 2 (Participant Age: Young/Elderly) analysis of variance. A main effect was recorded for Photo Age, $F(1,72)=4.41$, $p < .03$. The young male photographs were seen as more attractive ($M=5.09$, $SD=1.59$) than the elderly male photographs ($M=4.32$, $SD=1.68$). As expected a main effect was also found for Photo

Appearance, $F(1,72)=4.41$, $p < .039$. The attractive male photographs were rated as higher in attractiveness ($M=5.09$, $SD=1.66$) than the unattractive male photographs ($M=4.32$, $SD=1.62$).

Social Desirability

The social desirability index was computed by summing across each subject's 38 personality trait ratings of the photograph. The 6 resourcefulness traits were excluded from this computation and will be analysed separately. A 2 (Photo Appearance: Attractive/Unattractive) x 2 (Photo Age: Young/Elderly) x 2 (Participant Age: Young/Elderly) analysis of variance was computed. A main effect for photo attractiveness was recorded, $F(1,72)=4.51$, $p < .037$. The attractive male photographs were thought to be higher in social desirability ($M=180.34$, $SD=27.66$) than the unattractive male photographs ($M=165.74$, $SD=33.62$). This finding confirmed the attractiveness bias that Dion et. al. (1972) also found.

Resourcefulness

The resourcefulness index was computed by summing across the 6 traits describing resourcefulness. A 2 (Photo Appearance: Attractive/Unattractive) x 2 (Photo Age: Young/Elderly) x 2 (Participant Age: Young/Elderly) analysis of variance was computed. A main effect for participant age was found, $F(1,72)=8.35$, $p < .005$. The young female participants rated the male photographs as higher in resourcefulness ($M=34.47$, $SD=4.24$) than the elderly male photographs ($M=30.96$, $SD=6.35$). A main effect for photo appearance was found, $F(1,72)=3.96$, $p < .05$. The attractive male photographs were rated as higher in resourcefulness ($M=33.93$, $SD=5.67$) than the unattractive male photographs ($M=31.51$, $SD=5.42$).

A main effect was not found for photo age $F(1,72)=.36$, $p > .5$ and this showed insignificance. On the contrary, young males were rated as higher in resourcefulness ($M=33.08$,

$SD=5.53$) than elderly males ($M=32.35$, $SD=5.80$). I was unable to confirm the evolutionary hypothesis that women prefer older mates because they see them as more resourceful.

Discussion

The present study demonstrated that young and elderly female judges exhibit an attractiveness bias: attractive male photo targets, whether young or elderly, were rated as higher in social desirability than their unattractive counterparts. In terms of judging men on a resourcefulness index, the present findings show that young female participants attributed more resourceful traits to the target photographs than elderly participants. Also the attractive male photographs were deemed as more resourceful than the unattractive male photographs. An insignificant finding in this study was that the young male target photographs were deemed more resourceful than elderly male target photographs.

The findings of social desirability in which the attractive male photographs were rated as higher in social desirability than the unattractive male photographs are consistent with the findings of Dion et. al. (1972).

The resourcefulness index was a new dimension added to the present study in order to test the evolutionary hypothesis that when a man gets older they supposedly acquire more resources, status... therefore, women should prefer older men because they can provide better support for her and her offspring's. This studies findings are not consistent with this evolutionary hypothesis or the Buss (1989) findings that women prefer older men and rank good earning capacity and ambition as the most desired traits in a mate, In fact, this study demonstrated that women ascribed more resourceful traits to the attractive male photographs than the unattractive male photographs and the age of the photograph was not a factor. This may suggest that younger female participants are more sensitive to these resourcefulness traits

than elderly female participants. Overall, the findings of this study do confirm findings of other studies on how attractiveness influences people's judgments of others. The findings of this study suggest that women rate men in the same way that men rate women, a surprising result. This result is surprising because this study based one of its hypotheses on the evolutionary hypothesis that women choose older men because they are resourceful and the basis of their choice is not on physical appearance- attractiveness. Therefore, this visible cue of attractiveness is an important determinant in how men and women both rate potential mate prospects, as demonstrated by this study.

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Appendix A

38 Personality Traits

Poised-awkward, modest-vain, boring-interesting, submissive-assertive, sociable-unsociable, independent-dependent, exciting-dull, productive-unproductive, uncertain-certain, organized-disorganized, friendly-unfriendly, selfish-generous, tolerant-intolerant, outgoing-withdrawn, kind-cruel, insensitive-sensitive, ambitious-not ambitious, happy-sad, dishonest-honest, unforgiving-forgiving, late-prompt, reliable-unreliable, hospitable-inhospitable, adventurous-not adventurous, popular-unpopular, wealthy-poor, creative-not creative, uptight-easygoing, not healthy-healthy, humorous-not humorous, intelligent-not intelligent, emotionally stable-emotionally unstable, loving-unloving, materialistic-not materialistic, romantic-not romantic, not satisfied-satisfied, pessimistic-optimistic, forgetful-not forgetful.

Appendix B

6 Resourceful Traits

Ambitious-Not Ambitious

High social status-Low social status

Good Financial Prospects-Not Good Financial Prospects

Good Job Prospects-Not Good Job Prospects

Industrious-Not Industrious

Prefer an older mate-Do not prefer an older mate