



## Reproductive strategies and relationship preferences associated with prestigious and dominant men

Daniel J. Kruger<sup>a,\*</sup>, Carey J. Fitzgerald<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Michigan, 1420 Washington Heights Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2029, USA

<sup>b</sup> Central Michigan University, 101 Sloan Hall, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859, USA

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### ABSTRACT

Women prefer dominant men as short-term mates and prestigious men as long-term mates. People associate short-term mating with masculine male facial features and long-term mating with feminine male facial features. The present study found that people associate dominant men with masculine facial features and short-term mating strategies, and prestigious men with feminine facial features and long-term mating strategies. Both men and women prefer high-prestige men for social relationships. Women prefer high-prestige men for long-term romantic relationships, yet prefer high-dominance men for brief sexual affairs. Although men were generally accurate in predicting women's partner preferences, men overestimated the degree to which women would find the high-dominance man more attractive for all types of relationships.

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### 1. Introduction

Primate males must compete for access to fecund females to successfully reproduce (Buss, 1988; Darwin, 1871). Intrasexual competition includes physical aggression, acquisition and retention of resources, and social alliances, which influence social status (Buss, 1988). Ambitious and assertive men who exert authority over others and intimidate competitors are using a *dominance* strategy to become the alpha male and obtain desired women (Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987). However, men may also achieve high social status through social alliances and demonstrating useful social aptitude and abilities. This is known as a *prestige* strategy, a focus on obtaining social clout through socially inclusive and competent actions (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

Studies on women's preferences for dominance and prestige in prospective male partners yield inconsistent results. Some show female preferences for social dominance (Sadalla et al., 1987), whereas others do not (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & West, 1995). One study indicated that women find high-prestige men to be more attractive and desirable than dominant men (Snyder, Kirkpatrick, & Barrett, 2008), and the authors suggest that women may avoid partnering with dominant men except for short-term relationships.

#### 1.1. Dominance

The methods by which men achieve and demonstrate high social status may correspond with their reproductive strategies. Socially dominant men are competitive, assertive, and authoritative, using their strong social skills to exhibit power over others (Jensen-Campbell et al., 1995; Sadalla et al., 1987; Snyder et al., 2008). A man who achieves social dominance can obtain and maintain access to resources and women. This strategy is seen in many non-human primates (Cowlshaw & Dunbar, 1991; de Waal, 1982). For example, male rhesus and Barbary macaques compete to achieve dominant social status, which increases the frequency of their reproductive activity (Berard, Nürnberg, Epplen, & Schmidtke, 1993; Paul, Kuester, Timme, & Arnemann, 1993).

Behaviors indicating social dominance may also provide women cues regarding a man's reproductive strategy. High-dominance men are viewed as socially aggressive and masculine, which suggests high levels of testosterone. Men with high levels of testosterone are more likely to engage in short-term mating behaviors and less likely to engage in parenting (Gray, Kahlenberg, Barrett, Lipson, & Ellison, 2002). However, research on dominant personalities and testosterone levels has not yet revealed a relationship (Johnson, Burk, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Because dominance-related behaviors serve as reproductively relevant cues, women may prefer dominant men as short-term mates but not long-term mates. Dominant men are able to provide immediate reproductive benefits (e.g., production of strong and healthy offspring, immediate resource provision, temporary

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 734 936 4927; fax: +1 734 615 2317.

E-mail address: [djk2012@gmail.com](mailto:djk2012@gmail.com) (D.J. Kruger).

protection from threats), which makes them desirable as short-term mates (Snyder et al., 2008), but the potential risks (e.g., desertion, being left to care for offspring) discourages long-term relationships.

### 1.2. Prestige

High-prestige men achieve status through social inclusion and special knowledge and capabilities, their peers elevate them to prominent positions (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Kracke, 1978). Although developing social prestige and a network of followers was initially thought to be uniquely human, chimpanzees prefer to learn and follow older high-ranking chimpanzees when learning new foraging techniques (Horner, Proctor, Bonnie, Whiten, & de Waal, 2010).

Features associated with high-prestige men suggest a long-term mating strategy. Contrasting with dominance, high prestige is not associated with physical aggression (Johnson et al., 2007). In fact, high prestige is related to low levels of testosterone, which is associated with a decreased likelihood of physical aggression and intrasexual competition (Johnson et al., 2007). Similarly, low testosterone levels are associated with fatherhood and an increased likelihood of offspring care (Gray et al., 2002). Therefore, high-prestige men may be more desirable as long-term mates.

Not all men who are low in testosterone and/or dominance behaviors are likely to achieve high prestige, as these social positions are limited. The prestige strategy may be a way for some low testosterone men to achieve high social status through non-coercive means. Although low testosterone men may be less likely to engage in risky and aggressive behaviors, their cooperation is highly valuable in a society, especially in reciprocal relationships (Trivers, 1971). Reciprocity and cooperation (in the form of food sharing) have been found to be prevalent in many hunter-gatherer societies (Berté, 1988; Gurven, 2004; Gurven, Allen-Arave, & Hill, 2001). In fact, Ridley (1996) argued that reciprocity and trusting others to reciprocate are necessary for the successful formation of society. Although testosterone was not measured in any of these anthropological studies, Kruger (2006) found that male participants were more likely to trust men with feminine facial features (indicating low testosterone) to accompany their girlfriend on an unsupervised weekend trip – indicating a higher level of trust than for men with masculine facial features. Also, men with low levels of testosterone tend to care for their offspring more than men with high levels of testosterone (Gray et al., 2002). Thus, trust and cooperation, food sharing, and reliable paternal effort may confer advantages to men with relatively low testosterone.

### 1.3. Dominance, prestige and facial masculinity

Male facial features are visual cues of reproductive strategies, as people associate short-term mating with more masculine facial features and long-term mating with more feminine facial features (Kruger, 2006). Although short-term mating has many reproductive benefits for men (e.g., production of several offspring, paternal desertion to conserve one's own resources), there are many costs as well, including decreased offspring survival rates (Hill & Hurtado, 1996) and greater intrasexual competition (Buss, 1988; Darwin, 1871). On the other hand, long-term mating allows a variety of reproductive benefits, such as increased offspring survival rates and decreased physical and economic costs associated with intrasexual competition. Thus, men must find an optimal trade-off between the reproductive costs and benefits of short-term and long-term mating (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Women must also find the optimal trade-off in mating preferences. A highly masculine male may show signs of having good genes promoting offspring health, but he may be prone to short-term relationships.

A male who does not show as many physical signs of good genes may provide more paternal investment (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

Masculine facial features (e.g., strong brow line, large jaw, prominent cheek-bones) serve as honest signals of a male's genetic compatibility with his developmental environment (Grafen, 1990), because as the product of high testosterone levels (Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004), they are physiologically costly to maintain (Folstad & Karter, 1992). Thus, masculine facial features indicate that a male would be likely to produce strong and healthy offspring (Andersson, 1994). Men who possess masculine facial features are also thought to be more aggressive and socially domineering (Kruger, 2006). Masculine facial features in men serve as reliable indicators of tendencies for greater emphasis on short-term mating strategies as well as characteristics valued by women in short-term mating partners. In fact, DeBruine, Jones, Smith, and Little (2010) conducted three experiments focusing strictly on the perception of attractiveness in photographs of male faces – eliminating extraneous details in the photographs such as hair, shoulders, and background, leaving only the face to be perceived – and found participants rated masculinized male faces to be significantly more attractive than average and feminized male faces. People also perceive masculinized faces as more dominant than feminized faces (Watkins, Jones, & DeBruine, 2010). However, hypothetical preferences also indicate that high mating effort trades off with paternal effort, and men with highly masculine features are seen as less reliable as long-term providers of resources and parental care (Kruger, 2006).

Feminine facial features are associated with low levels of testosterone (Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004). Lower testosterone is associated with high prestige (Johnson et al., 2007), and fatherhood (Gray et al., 2002). Thus, feminine facial features serve as cues for long-term mating strategies, and women preferred men with feminine facial features as potential long-term mates (Kruger, 2006). Yet, no research has examined the potential association between facial femininity and prestige-based personalities.

Although very masculine and feminine male facial features may elicit strong mate preferences, extremely high or low levels of testosterone are not representative of the male population. Most men probably possess a combination of these features, which may be to their reproductive benefit – as women prefer to date and marry men who have a combination of masculine and feminine facial features, as opposed to a man with a very masculine or feminine face (Cunningham, Barbee, & Pike, 1990).

## 2. Theory

Past research on personality traits and reproductive behavior has connected reproductive strategy, perceived attractiveness, and degree of facial masculinity (Jensen-Campbell et al., 1995; Kruger, 2006; Sadalla et al., 1987; Snyder et al., 2008). The present study aims to further the literature in this area by examining perceptions of male social and reproductive behaviors and facial masculinity based on personality traits related to differential forms of high status – dominance and prestige. We generated the following hypotheses:

**H1.** Participants will associate aggressive social behaviors, short-term mating behaviors, and masculinized faces with descriptions of men exhibiting a high-dominance personality.

**H2.** Participants will associate cooperative social behaviors, long-term mating behaviors including high paternal investment, and feminized faces with descriptions of men exhibiting a high-prestige personality.

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