

What (whom) women want | Psychology Today

Find a Therapist Search for a mental health professional near you.

City or Zip

Submit (

Find Local:

Acupuncturists Chiropractors Massage Therapists Dentist and more!

City or Zip

Submit (

The second study (Waynforth, 2007) produced two effects, one of which already well-known and the other being a statistical artifact. Women first rated the attractiveness of men who were shown alone. Then they re-rated them when shown along with a picture of a woman. The familiar effect was that men benefit from being seen with an attractive woman and suffer from being seen with an unattractive one. The statistical artifact was that those men who were initially rated as unattractive showed the largest gains, and those who were initially rated as highly attractive showed the largest losses. This sort asymmetry is known as regression to the mean since the time of Sir Francis Galton. More interestingly, the study also revealed that choice copying decreases with a woman's sexual experience. Experienced women more confidently rely on their own judgment when picking a man.

The third study was the most intriguing. Jones and colleagues (2007) showed pairs of photos of men of average and equal attractiveness (thereby avoiding the dreaded regression effect). Between the men, they placed a photo of a woman who was looking at one man and who was either smiling or not. Female participants judged those men who were smiled at as most attractive and those who were not as least attractive. This is clear evidence for choice copying. Perhaps more surprisingly, the opposite was true for male judges. Following Darwin, Jones and collaborators speculated that men, more so than women, are worried about within-sex competition. To men, other men who attract beautiful women are scary.

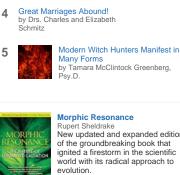
The fourth study was conducted in the Gilbert-&-Wilson research program on affective forecasting (Gilbert and colleagues, 2009). Gilbert and his team are always eager to demonstrate prediction errors, and here they found one in the context of speed dating. Most women in their study thought they could best predict how they would feel about a man they were going to talk to for 5 minutes if they considered his picture and written profile (which contained information about his age, height, music preferences, and such). In fact, a report by another woman who had just speed-dated this man was a much better clue. This study supports the idea that conformity is adaptive when the people we conform to actually possess relevant information. In this particular study, it was likely that the first female dater's reported enjoyment incorporated important elements that did not appear in the man's profile (e.g., his odor or body language). As usual, Gilbert and colleagues found the mot juste to go along with the story. La Rochefoucault advised "Before we set our hearts too much upon anything, let us first examine how happy those are who already possess it "

Interesting as it is, the work summarized here has one glaring hole. What about men? Do men engage in choice copying? Although I have no empirical evidence and only the ghost of Charles Darwin to appeal to, I think that overall the effect would be weaker among men. Why? Consider the difference in the certainty of parentage. Virtually all women know if their children are biologically theirs, whereas men can be haunted by visions of cuckoldry. The men may be present at birth, but the babies emerge from the mother's body. It follows that a woman who has children with a man who also has children with other women still knows what is happening to her genes. A man who courts a woman who is also courted by many others multiplies his uncertainties if there are children. In short, men have a disincentive to copy choice.

It looks good for the women then. By copying choice they save the cost of doing their own research to find the best man. Only at the limit, there is a hidden cost. If too many females gather around a few lucky males, even these lucky ones may be overwhelmed. Or, more prosaically, a man may say no to a woman who is attracted to him because of his attachment to another. The hidden cost to females is that those who rely on copying too much could end up without a partner.

Before we bemoan the costs to females, we must remember that those who pay the highest price for female choice copying are those males who do not trigger the herding effect. Female choice copying is one process that creates polygyny, and in a polygynous population the real losers are the many men who are left without any offspring. The ability of some males to claim a disproportionate number of females cannot be fully explained by the dominance or ruthlessness of these males. It may entirely be matter of female choice and female copying.

So what to do? In the movie "A beautiful mind," troubled genius John Nash -played by Russell Crowe-offered a solution (I don't know if this scene is based on a real event). Nash and two buddies are hanging out at a



by Stanton Peele

1 Abuse

> New updated and expanded edition of the groundbreaking book that ignited a firestorm in the scientific world with its radical approach to

Martha Coakley and Modern Witch Hunting - Ritual Child Sexual

Read more

Natrol Guard Your Immunity with Natrol® Immune Boost. Starts working as fast as 2 hours! Read more



Immune Survival Kit

Immune

Similasan Find your balance with Similasan Well Being. Read more

Current Issue



Heartbreak and Home Runs: The Power of First Experiences How early life experiences shape our character.

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

ISSUE ARCHIVES

SUBSCRIBE

