

Can the Color Red Improve Men's Perceived Mate Value?: Examining the Interactive Effects of Facial Masculinity and Color on Female Evaluation of Potential Mates

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Color, Masculinity, Fertility & Attraction

- Being paired with the color red increases perceived attractiveness ratings for men and women, and status ratings for men (Elliot, et al., 2010; Elliot & Niesta, 2008)
- Men are more likely to have a masculine face if they display high dominance, an indicator of social status (Kruger & Fitzgerald, 2011).
- At peak fertility:
 - women are more sensitive to red stimuli, finding men paired with red more attractive (Prokop, Pazda, & Elliot, 2015).
 - Women report greater attraction to masculine-faced men (Little & Jones, 2012), even if in a relationship if their partner has low facial masculinity (Gangestad, Thornhill, & Garvar-Apgar, 2010).

The Current Experiments

The goal of the present studies was to (a) test whether the color red would have a compensatory effect on attractiveness for less-masculine men and (b) whether these effects are moderated by women's fertility status.

Method

- 2 (facial type: masculine, feminine) x 2 (color: red, white) between subjects designs
- **Facial Type:** morphed face of college-aged male with male and female composites (45% composite, Study 1; 40% composite, Study 2) to make face appear more masculine and more feminine, respectively.
 - **Color:** Black and white photo of altered face appeared on a white or red background

Method (continued)

All participants viewed the photo and completed measures of attraction, social status, and demographics on the computer.

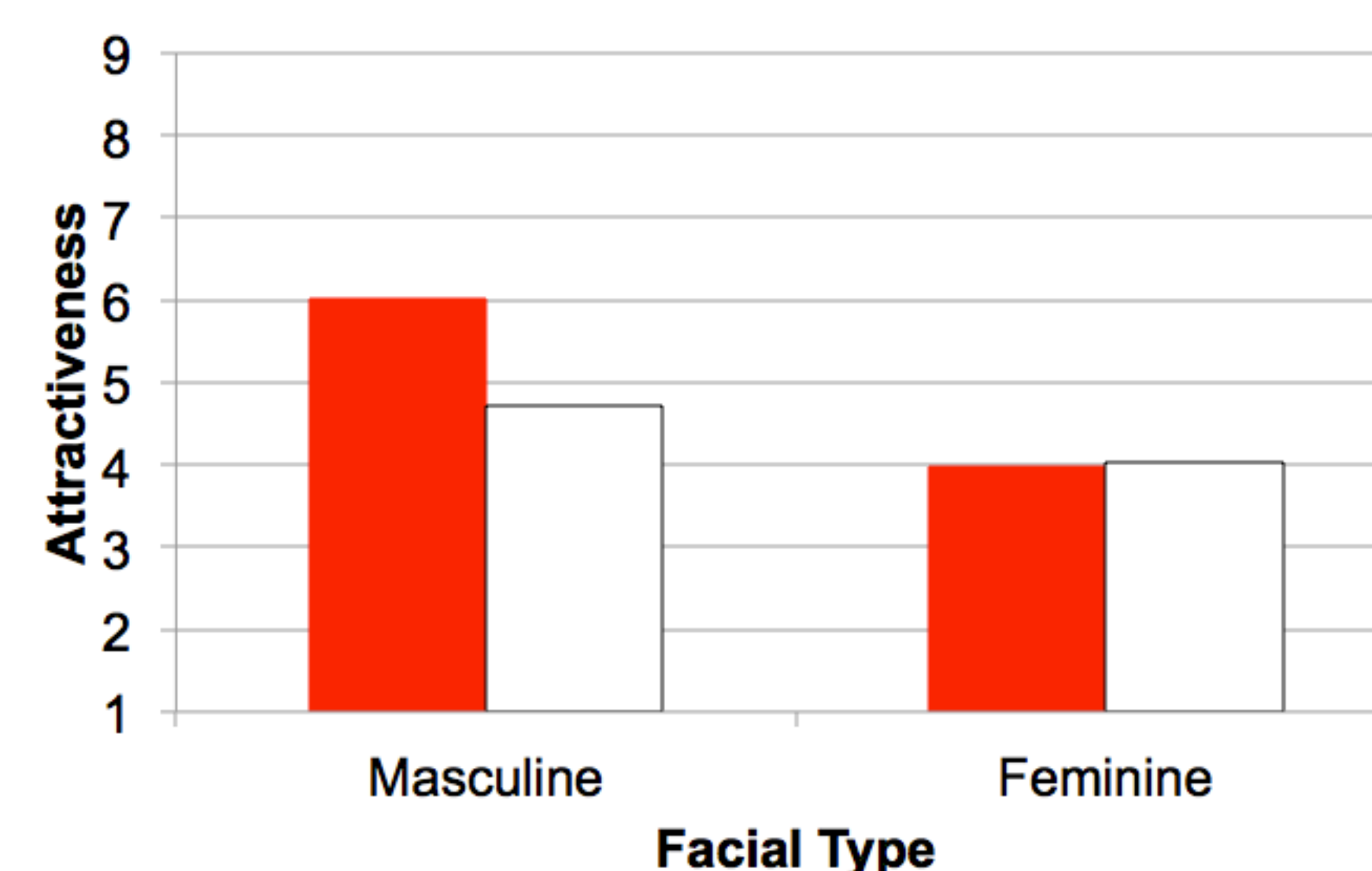
Study 1: 84 undergraduate, heterosexual women (age_{mean} = 19.10), completed the study in the lab

Study 2: 91 heterosexual women from Mturk completed the study online (age_{mean} = 28.23). Participants also completed measures allowing to calculate conception risk (Wilcox et al., 2001) using the reverse method.

Results

Study 1: There was a significant facial type x color interaction, $F(1,80) = 4.01$, $p = .0487$, such that the color red improved attractiveness for the masculine face, $F(1,80) = 16.06$, $p = .0001$.

Figure 1. Interaction of facial masculinity and color on attractiveness ratings



There was a significant main effect of color on status, $F(1, 80) = 7.88$, $p = .0063$, such that photos on a red background were rated higher in status than those a white background.

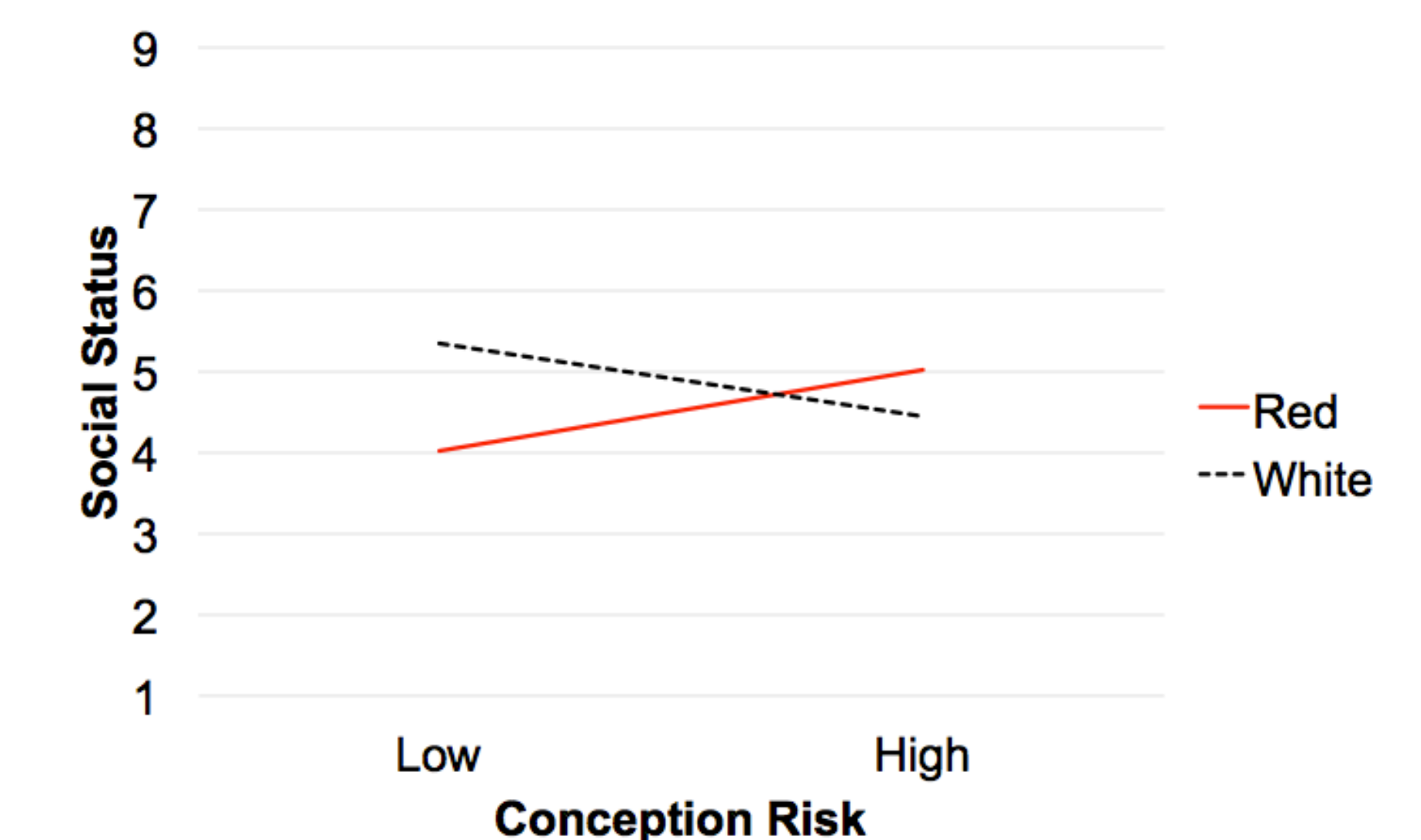
Social status mediated the association between color and attractiveness ratings controlling for facial type, 95% CI [-0.8621, -0.1393].

Study 2: Social status was regressed on the full factorial of facial type, color, and conception risk, controlling for relationship status.

There was a main effect for face type such that the masculine face was rated more attractive, $F(1, 73) = 7.94$, $p = .0062$, and higher in status, $F(1, 73) = 4.94$, $p = .0294$ than the feminine face.

There was an interaction of color and conception risk, $F(1,73) = 4.88$, $p = .0303$, such that when viewing the photo on the red background, conception risk is positively associated with status.

Figure 2. Interaction of color and conception risk on social status ratings



Social status mediated the association between conception risk and attractiveness when viewing photos on the red background, 95% CI [1.4184, 27.8973]

Discussion

Our findings suggest that the color red may serve a compensatory effect for feminine-faced men indirectly by increasing perceived social status, particularly for women at peak fertility (study 2)

Additional research is needed to test the robustness of these effects with a new, larger sample and determine whether the boost in attractiveness that red gives masculine men is driving the observed effects.