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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, & Garver-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.

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.

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.

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