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The Influence of Women's Self-Esteem on Mating Decision Making Across the Menstrual Cycle

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Overview

Men and woman have different strategies for selecting a mate.

Males pursue one of two strategies:

- *Short-term* – seeks multiple, short-term sexual partners
- *Long-term* – seeks more committed sexual partners

Men who pursue short-term mating are physically attractive and socially dominant yet unstable and unreliable, i.e., “sexy cads”

Men who pursue long-term mating are less physically attractive, but reliable and dependable, i.e., “good dads”

The *Dual-Mating Strategy* (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000) suggests women select mates based on their fertility:

- Women typically pursue “good dads”
- During peak fertility, they pursue “sexy cads”

Durante et al. (2012) proposed that during ovulation, women erroneously perceive “sexy cads” to be “good dads” to themselves and their offspring.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a person's overall assessment of self-worth.

Appearance self-esteem is a person's assessment of physical appearance, or their self-evaluation regarding their physical appearance.

Although general self-esteem may decrease at peak fertility, women are more physically attractive at peak fertility (Hill & Durante, 2009).

Objective

The present research examines how women's *appearance self-esteem* influences the extent to which women perceive sexy cads as good dads at peak fertility.

Method

Participants

- N = 401 (from Amazon's M-Turk)
- Women age 18-35, not on birth control, not pregnant or on birth control in last 3 months
- Paid \$1.50 for participating

Procedure

All participants first complete the following measures:

- State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton, T.F., & Polivy, J., 1991)
- Typical menstrual cycle length, first day of most recent cycle in order to calculate conception risk

Participants view photos of man in random order:

Sexy Cad:



“The man in the photo above loves the outdoors and being adventurous. He is an avid skier who has won several skiing awards. He is also described by people who know him as being very charismatic, and as a high status member of his social group.”

Good Dad:



“The man in the photo above is a successful accountant who has worked hard in his career and has won several promotions. He is also described by people who know him as being very dependable and stable, and as a good provider for others.”

After viewing each photo and profile, participants evaluate:

- Expected parental contribution and commitment of each man to the self and to another woman

Figure 1. Association Between Appearance Self-Esteem and Estimated Contribution from Attractive Target

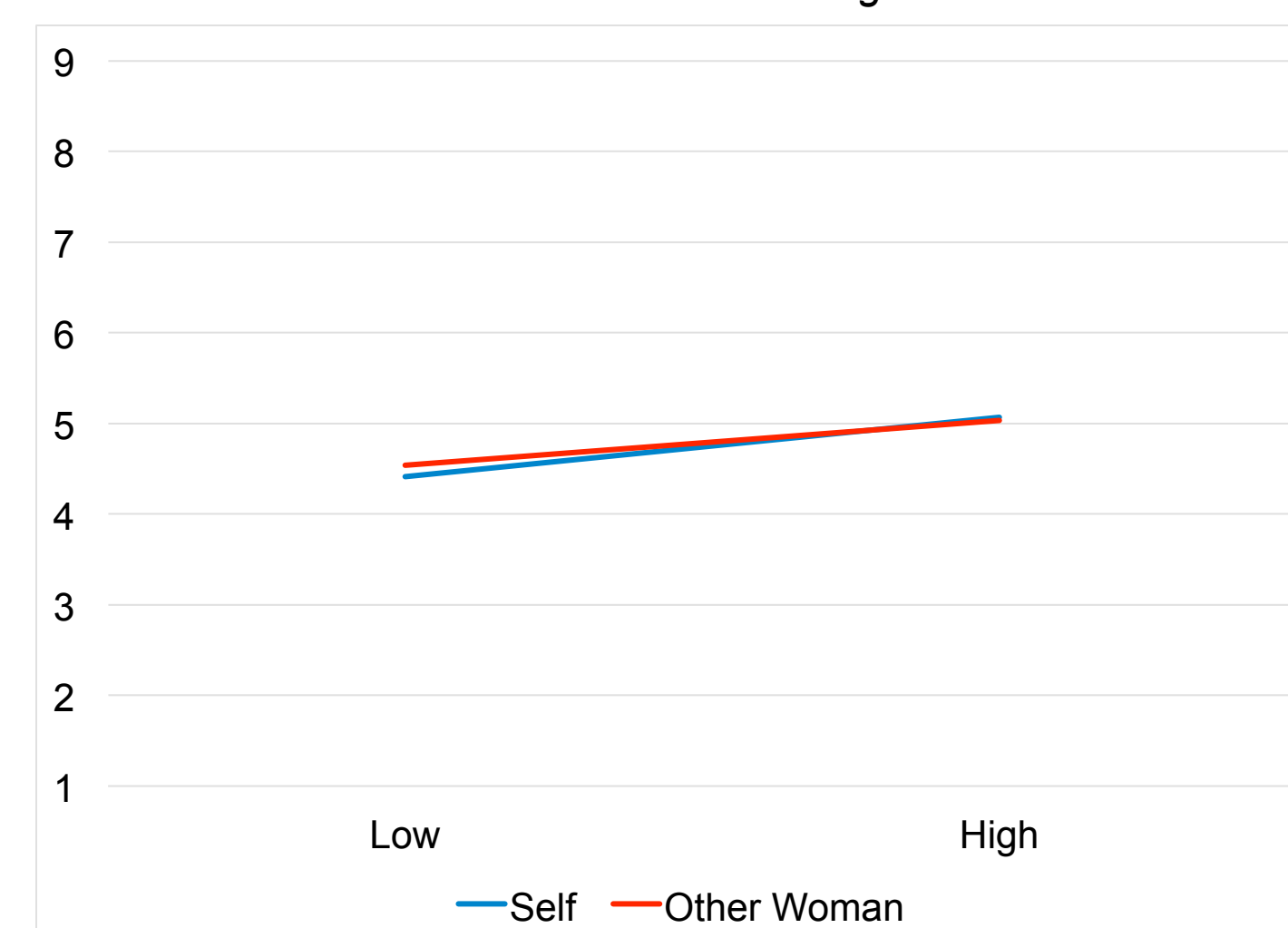
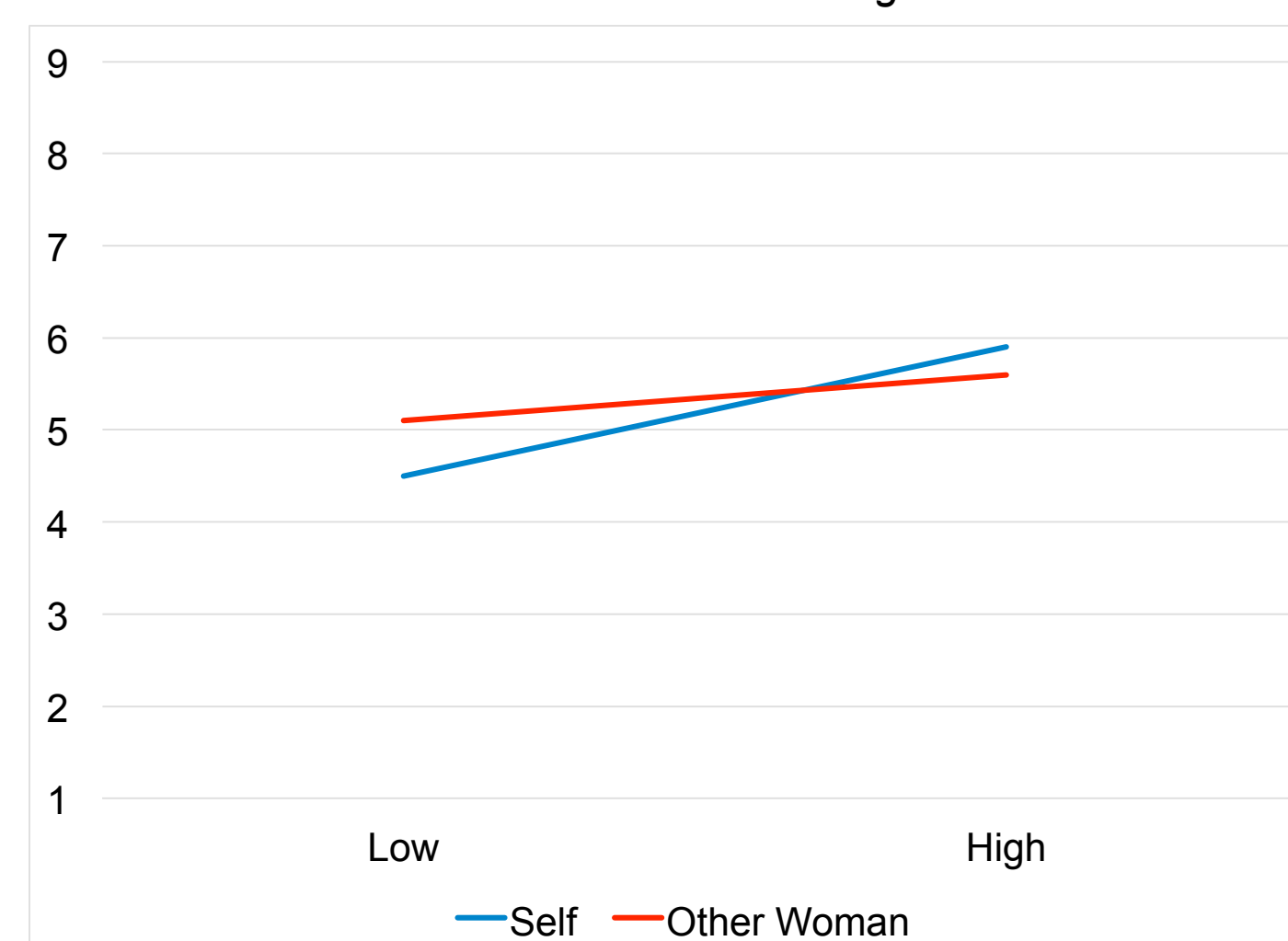


Figure 2. Association Between Appearance Self-Esteem and Estimated Commitment from Attractive Target



Results

Contributions:

Significant 4-way interaction of target man (sexy-cad, good dad), target woman (self, other woman), conception risk, and appearance self-esteem, $F(1, 401) = 4.67, p = .0314$

- When viewing the “sexy-cad”, appearance self-esteem was positively associated with perceptions of contributions for the self, $B = 0.33, SE = 0.09, F(1, 401) = 12.16, p = .0005$, and for the other woman, $B = 0.25, SE = 0.09, F(1, 401) = 6.77, p = .0096$
- Effect was stronger for the self than the other woman, see Figure 1.

Commitment:

Significant 3-way interaction of man (sexy-cad, good dad), target woman (self, other woman), and appearance self-esteem, $F(1, 401) = 25.64, p < .0001$

- When viewing the “sexy-cad”, appearance self-esteem was positively associated with perceptions of contributions for the self, $B = 0.70, SE = 0.10, F(1, 401) = 53.96, p < .0001$, and for the other woman, $B = 0.25, SE = 0.09, F(1, 401) = 6.98, p = .0086$
- Effect was stronger for the self than the other woman, see Figure 2.

No effects of appearance self-esteem for the “good-dad”

Discussion

Did not replicate Durante et al. (2012) finding that fertility interacts with mate preference.

Appearance self-esteem is influencing perceptions of contributions and commitment from the sexy-cad, only.

- Positive effects of appearance self-esteem on perceptions of contributions and commitment are stronger for the self.