

Men Are More Attractive If Other Women Look Research on Attraction

By Debora MacKenzie

What Makes Men Attractive?

Well, if other women look at him, he could get a lot cuter!

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn10966-beauty-is-in-the-eye-of-your-friends.html>

Beauty is in the eye of your friends

00:01 17 January 2007 by Debora MacKenzie

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It is a classic image: a group of young women sighing over the latest heartthrob. But do they all really share identical taste for, say, Brad Pitt, or that cute guy in physics class? A new study suggests that, in fact, women will look more favorably on the men that other women find attractive.

Female guppies, quail and finches tend to mate with males that look like the males they have seen other females paired with. Such "mate choice copying" can pay off. If it is difficult to choose the best mating material, or takes a lot of time and energy, it makes sense to go with what works for the other girls.

Yet although human mate selection suffers just such difficulties, there has been little evidence that women do this, until now.

Ben Jones at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, and colleagues, showed 28 men and 28 women pairs of male faces and asked them to rate their attractiveness. The photos had been already been rated by 40 women as of about equal attractiveness.

Striking difference

The researchers then showed the same faces alongside a third photo of a female face in profile, positioned so she was looking at one of them, and smiling - or not. The viewers were asked to grade the faces again.

Women found the men who were being smiled at suddenly more attractive, while men who apparently elicited no such smiling approval were pronounced less attractive.

Men, meanwhile, behaved in a strikingly different manner. They rated men who had been smiled at as less attractive. "Within-sex competition promotes negative attitudes towards men who are the target of positive social interest from women," the researchers conclude.

Or to put it another way, the next time you hear a man say "I don't know what she sees in him", remember the fact she's sees anything at all may be off-putting enough...

Journal reference: Proceedings of the Royal Society B (DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2006.0205)

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