

**WOMEN'S REACTIONS TO DOMINANT AND AGREEABLE MEN: HOW  
ARE INITIAL JUDGMENTS OF ATTRACTION AFFECTED BY PEER  
DISCUSSION**

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

CYNTHIA MARIA DEAN

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A & M University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

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RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2001

Group: Psychology 2

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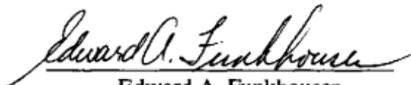
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## ABSTRACT

Women's Reactions to Dominant and Agreeable Men: How are Initial Judgments of Attraction Affected By Peer Discussion? (April 2001)

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This study examined the role of social influence in females' judgments of dominant and Agreeable males' dating desirability. Three hundred and sixty participants viewed one of four videotape segments that featured an interaction between two males in which the behavior of one male was manipulated to display dominant and/or Agreeable characteristics. Participants individually rated the dating desirability of the "target male" before and after completing the same ratings as a group. Analyses revealed evidence for a social influence effect, however, videotape segments were not qualified by time. That is, the ratings of each condition at Time 2 did not change differently as predicted. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for further studies this area.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank Brad Sheese, Dr. William G. Graziano, and the Social and Personality Psychology Team Research Assistants for aiding in the completion of this study.

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## INTRODUCTION

Men and women do not prefer all members of the opposite sex equally. Why are some characteristics of the opposite sex more valued over other attributes? Furthermore, how does the social context in which humans operate influence opinions on what is attractive? Given the applicability of these questions to individuals' everyday experiences, human attraction processes are becoming of increasing interest in psychological research.

The importance of understanding patterns in human attraction is tremendous. Charles Darwin viewed sexual selection as a process that ultimately causes evolutionary change. Moreover, Darwin considered "female choice" to be of profound importance because he believed that females were more selective in choosing mates than were males (Darwin, 1871). Darwin's notion was further refined by Trivers (1972), who suggested the driving force behind female attraction is that of investment in offspring; females would show a sexual preference for dominant and Agreeable males because these males have proven their ability, as displayed by dominance, and their willingness, as displayed by Agreeableness, to contribute to the survival of their offspring.

However, unlike other mammals, humans operate within a social context. The prospect for social influence in judgments of what is attractive complicates the attraction process in humans. Research has shown that females were more affected by social influence than were males (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Shebilske, & Lundgren, 1993).

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This thesis follows the style and format of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

In particular, negative supplemental information from peers has a particularly weighty effect on females' judgments on physical attractiveness in males, suggesting that perhaps negative qualities in a potential male partner may be more costly than positive qualities are rewarding (Graziano, Brothen & Bershceid, 1980; Kanouse & Hanson, 1972).

Graziano et al. (1993) found evidence that suggests negative input from fellow peers had a significant impact on females' ratings of men's *physical attractiveness*.

Research has also shown that females do not consider *physical attractiveness* in a male to be as important as behavioral characteristics such as dominance and Agreeableness (Garcia et al., 1991; Jensen-Campbell et al., 1995). If females' judgments of male physical attractiveness are influenced by other females' opinions, how will peer input affect their ratings of dominant and Agreeable men?

The present study was designed to examine the effect of social influence on females' opinions of dominant and Agreeable males. Participants in this study first viewed a video segment that featured two males interacting; the behavior of one male was manipulated to display dominant and/or Agreeable characteristics. Following the viewing, participants completed desirability ratings on the "target male." They were then asked to complete a group consensus ratings task. Finally, participants completed individual ratings for a second time.

We anticipated that given the inherent importance of behavioral characteristics, females will be more likely to obtain peer input when evaluating the desirability of dominant and Agreeable men. Specifically, peer discussion will interact with the dominance and Agreeableness of the stimulus males.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

A total of 360 female Introductory Psychology students at Texas A&M University participated in the study in exchange for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Participants were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2(dominance) X 2(Agreeableness) between-subjects factorial design.

### *Stimulus Materials*

Four videotape segments used in Jensen-Campbell et al. (1995) were adapted and implemented in the present study. Segments featured two males acting as a two-man jury in which the men had to come to a unanimous decision on a jury case. The behavior of one male, the "target male," was manipulated to display one of four characteristics: dominant, non-Agreeable; dominant, Agreeable; non-dominant, non-Agreeable; and non-dominant, Agreeable.

*Manipulations.* Dominance and Agreeableness were manipulated using verbal and non-verbal cues. In the dominant conditions, the confederate, or "target male" sat relaxed with his legs crossed, leaning slightly back in his chair. His speech was loud, rapid, and had a few speech disturbances. In the non-dominant condition, the confederate leaned slightly forward with his hands clasped at his mid-section and his head bowed. His legs were in a symmetrical position with both feet flat on the floor. His speech was soft, slower, and had more speech disturbances. In the Agreeable conditions, the confederate solicited the opinions of his partner, was sympathetic to the opinions of his partner, and was warm. In the non-Agreeable conditions, without being

overtly hostile or antisocial, the man criticized the opinions of his partner, was insensitive to his perspective, and was not especially warm.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited in groups of 8. When participants arrived, they were asked to complete a statement of informed consent. Participants then viewed one of four of the videotape segments and completed a ratings sheet that consisted of 15 items measuring overall dating desirability (i.e., How desirable is the male on the right as a short-term dating partner?). Each item was based on 9-point Likert-type scales (see Appendix). After completing these initial ratings, participants were asked to get together as a group and come to a consensus on the same dimensions. They were told that it would be helpful to the rest of the group if they discuss not only what rating they individually gave the “target male,” but also the reasons in which they have him this rating. Research assistants left the room during the group discussion. After the discussion, the participants individually rated the male on the same dimensions a second time.

## RESULTS

The 15 items in the desirability scale were averaged to create an overall desirability score. The overall desirability score at Time 1 and Time 2 served as our dependent measures. Repeated measures ANOVAs were performed for these measures. A two-tailed alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. To test our hypothesis concerning the differential effects of social influence on Agreeable and dominant characteristics of male dating partners, we conducted a 2 x 2 x 2 (Agreeable X Dominant X Time) repeated measures ANOVA. Our hypothesis suggested a 3-way interaction between Agreeableness, Dominance, and Time: This interaction was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 171) = .97$ , ns (see Figure 1). However, as expected, there was a main effect for Time  $F(1, 171) = 8.92$ ,  $p < .003$ . Time 2 ratings were significantly lower ( $M=3.46$ ,  $SD=1.23$ ) than ratings at Time 1 ( $M=3.64$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ) (see Figure 2). There was also a main effect for Agreeableness,  $F(1, 171) = 24.96$ ,  $p < .001$ . High Agreeable males ( $M=3.79$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ) were rated consistently higher than low agreeable males ( $M=3.08$ ,  $SD=1.21$ ). In addition, there was a main effect for dominance,  $F(1, 171) = 43.90$ ,  $p < .001$ . High dominant males ( $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ) were rated consistently higher than low dominant males ( $M=2.94$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ).

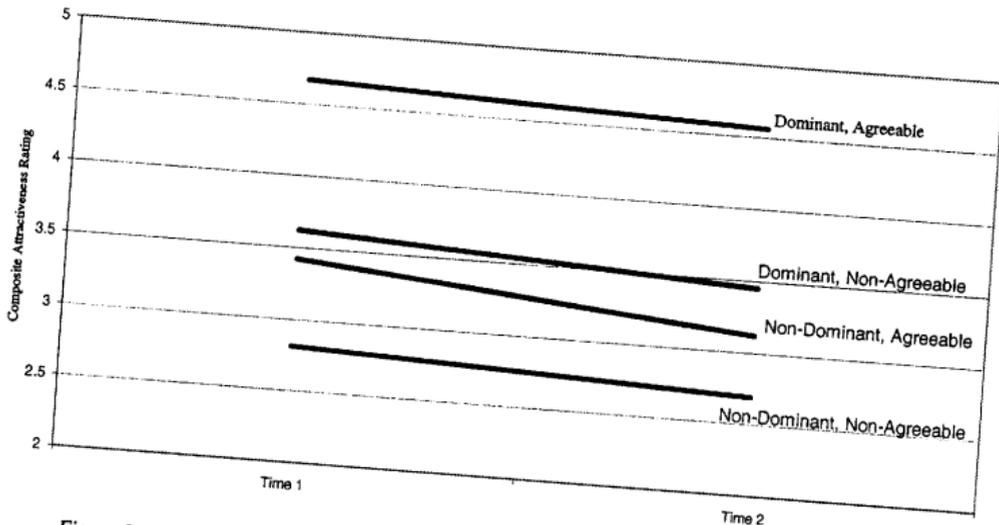
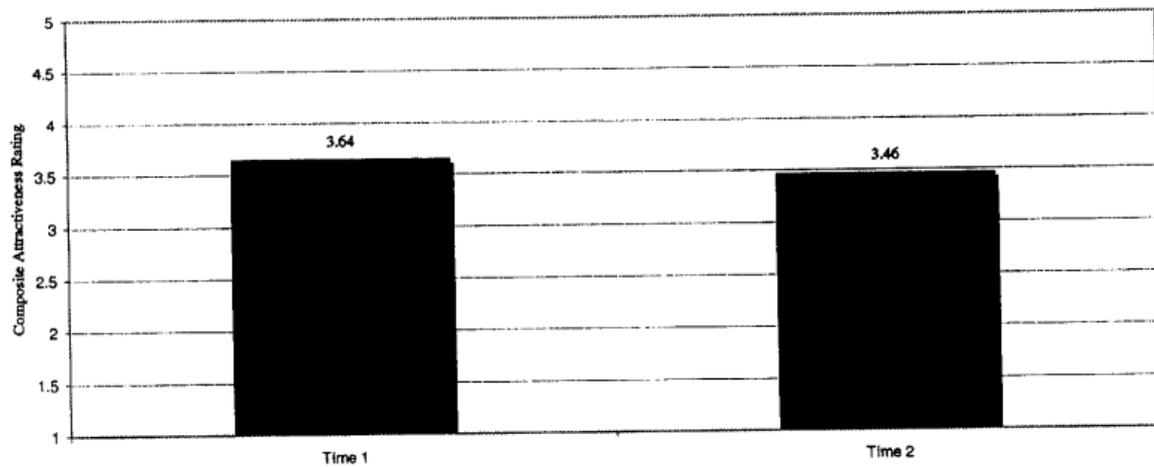


Figure 1. Agreeable X Dominant X Time Interaction Effect. Illustration of the order in which the four conditions were rated. Also depicted in the figure is the relation between dominance, Agreeableness, and time.



*Figure 2 . Main Effect for Time. Difference in the mean ratings of all conditions at Time 1 and Time 2.*

## CONCLUSION

Consistent with previous research, males demonstrating Agreeable and dominant behavior were found to be more desirable than those exhibiting non-Agreeable and non-dominant characteristics. Furthermore, there was evidence for a social influence effect, average ratings at Time 2 were significantly lower than ratings at Time 1. However, this study failed to support our main hypothesis: film segments were not qualified by time. The ratings of each condition at Time 2 do not change differently as predicted.

The selection of a romantic partner is an important form of social selectivity in humans. However, the precise psychological mechanisms underlying women's attraction to men are poorly understood. This research contributes to the knowledge about these mechanisms on three levels: (a) identifying desirable characteristics in a potential partner, (b) examining the effect of social influence on judgments of what is desirable; and (c) examining the role of negative supplemental information in social influence. The romantic partners that people ultimately choose influence the kinds of physical and psychological environments that they will experience. Moreover, there are prevailing reproductive consequences to this choice. Although the results of this study did not support the central hypothesis, they have important implications for further research.

Women's attraction to men is affected by more than one mechanism. Our research should be viewed as a first step toward understanding the multifaceted process of attraction. Further research efforts would best be directed toward understanding the whole, as opposed to particular aspects of attraction processes, such as what qua

does the opposite sex find attractive. Our lack of evidence for a “negativity bias” in social influence may suggest the need for the additional element of “Prospect of Future Interaction” in further research. That is, in the current study, the females were evaluating males that they did not expect to interact with, therefore, the behavioral characteristics in which the “target male” displayed were not particularly salient to the participants. The prospect of interacting with the “target male” may affect females’ ratings, in that their judgments of male desirability may be more influenced by negative supplemental information from peers. Additionally, future research should evaluate the social influence effect across different age groups. Past research, including the current study, utilized college students as participants. Are females of all age groups susceptible to peer influence? The lab setting also presents challenges to any psychological study. Observational data from a natural setting may better explain the effect of social influence on opinions of desirability. Analysis of the social influence effect brings up another question: is attention to peer evaluation a result of conformity pressure or is it simply collecting information that may be useful rather than testing validity of judgments?

Further research is needed to accurately explore the underlying mechanisms of attraction in humans. The current study utilized a broad approach to the research on attraction; it provides a template by which future studies may examine this important issue.

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## APPENDIX

### RATINGS SHEET

*Please rate the male on the right side of the monitor on the following dimensions. Use the following scale to make your ratings to the questions below.*

---

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all				Neutral				Very

---

1. How physically attractive is the male on the right?
2. How sexually attractive is the male on the right?
3. How good-looking is the male on the right?
4. How desirable is he as a date (i.e. short-term; 1-2 casual dates)?
5. How desirable is he as a long-term dating partner (i.e. exclusive long term relationship)?
6. How likable is the male on the right?
7. How intelligent does the male on the right appear to be?
8. How considerate was the male on the right?
9. How independent does the male on the right appear to be?
10. How assertive was the male on the right?
11. How exciting does the male on the right appear to be?
12. Would you expect the male on the right to be good as a father?
13. How honest does the male on the right appear to be?
14. Would you expect the male on the right to end up wealthy in the future?
15. Would you expect the male on the right to be successful in the future?

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### **Educational Background**

Texas A & M University  
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