



# Racial characteristics and individual differences in women's evaluations of men's facial attractiveness and personality<sup>☆</sup>

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Received 22 April 2003; accepted 22 April 2003

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## Abstract

Prior research investigating the perception of men's faces has not considered the hybrid nature of black and white racial characteristics. Fifteen faces ranging from "pure" black or white to "hybrid" black and white were rated in the present research. Main effects for race of face were hypothesized. Predominantly black faces were expected to receive higher ratings for dominance and gender identity characteristics. Predominantly white faces were expected to receive the highest attractiveness rating and higher ratings for nurturant and expressive characteristics. The results supported the hypotheses and are discussed in terms of parental investment theory and existing research.

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*Keywords:* Facial attractiveness; Personality; Parental investment; Masculinity/femininity; Facial perception

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## 1. Introduction

The face carries the most weight in the perception of men (Symons, 1995; Wade, 2000). Not surprisingly, a great deal of research has examined male facial attractiveness (see e.g. Bernstein, Lin, & McCellan 1982; Cunningham, Barbee, & Pike, 1990; Grammer & Thornhill 1994; Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, & Grammer, 2001; Jones, 1995; Keating, 1985; Scheib, Gangestad, & Thornhill, 1999; Zebrowitz, Montepare, & Lee, 1993). Yet, there is a void in the literature

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<sup>☆</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the 106th Annual American Psychological Association Convention, San Francisco, CA.

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examining the perception of both black and white men's faces. The hybrid nature of blacks and whites has not been considered (see [Bernstein et al., 1982](#); [Zebrowitz et al., 1993](#)).

White men's faces tend to be shorter and narrower with smaller features concentrated in the center of the face. Black men's faces tend to be longer and wider with larger features that are more spread apart ([Howells, 1973, 1989](#)). However, [Krogman and Iscan \(1986\)](#), [Davis \(1991\)](#), and [Spickard \(1992\)](#), report that blacks and whites can also be hybrids of one another due to racial intermixing throughout history. Consequently, they also overlap in facial characteristics ([Krogman & Iscan 1986](#)). Therefore, research should examine men's faces that are "all" black and "all" white as well as faces that are black and white hybrids.

Much of the research on facial attractiveness perception is from an evolutionary perspective. Evolutionary psychological research suggests that men are evaluated based on their perceived parental investment potential ([Buss & Schmitt, 1993](#); [Symons, 1995](#); [Trivers, 1972](#)). Dominance, maturity, warmth, attractiveness, masculinity, strength, and social competence are inferred from the male face. These characteristics, singly or in combination, are used to make inferences regarding men's phenotypic quality (absence of disease), gender identity, and sexual maturity. In turn, those criteria (phenotypic quality (absence of disease), gender identity, and sexual maturity), singly or in combination, influence inferences women make about men's parental investment potential. Men and women have qualitatively and quantitatively different levels of investment in an offspring's development ([Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990](#); [Trivers, 1972](#)). A man's level of investment in the offspring's development depends on his relationship with the mother ([Buss & Schmitt, 1993](#); [Trivers, 1972](#)). A man, at the lowest level of parental investment, can provide good genes, while at the highest level of investment he will be able to provide food, shelter, and security for the mother in the present and the family in the future ([Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994](#); [Trivers, 1972](#)). A woman will seek a mate who can provide these indirect resources. Women desire and select mates that are healthy, masculine, and sexually mature ([Buss & Schmitt, 1993](#); [Trivers, 1972](#)). Men whose facial dimensions index these characteristics receive the highest ratings from women. [Mazur, Halpern, and Udry \(1994\)](#) and [Kenrick \(1987\)](#) report that men with broader faces are perceived as more dominant. [Cunningham et al. \(1990\)](#) also suggest that men who receive the highest ratings of attractiveness, masculinity and strength are men who possess both mature and childlike features. Men with broad faces with large chins, large foreheads, and lower set eyes are rated as most attractive, most dominant, most masculine, and strongest. Additionally, [Johnston et al. \(2001\)](#) report that men with longer, broader, lower jaws and more pronounced brow ridges than the average male face are considered most attractive.

Personality (social desirability and social competence) can also be inferred from facial dimensions. [Zebrowitz et al. \(1993\)](#) report that men with rounded, more childlike features receive higher ratings for warmth. [Zebrowitz et al. \(1993\)](#) also report that black men, with their larger facial dimensions, are perceived as less socially competent than white men.

Since the face carries so much weight in the perception of men and we do not know how men with varying degrees of black and white characteristics are perceived the present study was conducted to fill this void. This research examined how women rate men's faces that range from "all" black to "all" white. Consistent with prior research ([Cunningham et al., 1990](#); [Zebrowitz et al., 1993](#)), a repeated measures design was utilized.

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