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# Social interactions in different environments impacts and motivates reproductive displays in college students

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## Abstract

Social environments can have an impact on the interactions between the sexes, specifically pre-courtship behaviors. Sexual selection theory may explain social interactions of the sexes, where males display and attract mates more than females. These behaviors may intensify in a sexual environment. It was hypothesized that individuals would display more in a sexualized environment compared to a non-sexualized location. This research sampled  $N = 880$  participants at a university in a southern state in North America and asked which unisex sunglasses they preferred. While the most popular non-showy sunglasses were selected the most, showy new arrival sunglasses were selected more often when the surveyor's behavior was flirty, compared to normal behavior and dressing sexy. Thus, social interactions such as flirting between the sexes impacted the behaviors of others and increased the intensity of reproductive displays. At the location with sexualized behaviors and dress, individuals selected the non-showy sunglasses, possibly to draw attention to their bodies in swimsuits, whereas at the non-sexy location, new arrivals were chosen at a higher frequency, possibly to stand out when wearing normal clothes. The sexes chose to stand out at equal frequencies as did single participants and people in a relationship, suggesting that all individuals are trying to display and attract mates equally. Social environments impacted display behaviors and the motivation to display is discussed.

Keywords: Sociology, Psychology

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Sexual conflict background

Males and females have different reproductive costs, where females usually invest more energy into each offspring and have a limited reproductive output compared to males, leading to distinct differences between male and female behaviors across the animal kingdom (Trivers, 1972). Females are usually removed from the reproductive pool during pregnancy, resulting in costly competition between males for a limited number of females (Emlen and Oring, 1977). Males most successful in attracting and obtaining mates, through competition, are ultimately most represented in the following generations. Darwin's (1871) theory of sexual selection explains how competition in one sex for reproductive access to the other sex, creates both behavioral and morphological differences between the sexes. In humans, men can reproduce continually through most of their reproductive life compared to women and this likely creates conflict (Kvarnemo and Ahnesjö, 1996).

Thus, there are usually more males reproductively available than females, leading to males competing for access to a limited number of females (Cronin, 1991). This bias in male competition versus female choosiness has resulted in morphological and behavioral differences, such as human male facial hair, musculature, and aggressiveness (Ellis, 1916). Thus, sexual selection theory can likely predict social interactions between the sexes. Generally, males have to find available females and behave uniquely to separate themselves from other males when competing for females, usually through displays such as antler size (Malo et al., 2005).

### 1.2. Displaying behaviors in different social interactions

Males demonstrate riskier behaviors in displaying to females and communicate they are better than their competition (Andersson, 1994). Men are no different and according to government statistics, men have a greater risk of physical harm in their reproductive years than women because of these riskier behaviors (Center for Disease Control, 2004). Male risk-taking behaviors increase in the presence of women (Pawłowski et al., 2008) and have likely evolved through competition for women, either directly or indirectly. Risk taking displays by men have been shown to extend beyond physical risks and into economic decisions (Powell and Ansic, 1997). From an evolutionary perspective, these risk taking behaviors must be beneficial as a form of display and attract potential mates.

Women often select men based on traits other than physical appearance and often rely more on the male status (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990). Men in social

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