

Female intrasexual competition and reputational effects on attractiveness among the Tsimane of Bolivia

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Abstract

This study, conducted among Tsimane women of Bolivia, investigates the relationship between reputational reports and ratings of individual attractiveness. Reputations are, at least in part, created and maintained through linguistic avenues between group members and are thus open to manipulation by others. Taking this into account, we hypothesized that individuals might have the ability to influence the attractiveness of others indirectly by influencing their reputations. The data collected among Tsimane women show that reporting positive or negative information about other group members significantly predicts the rankings of attractiveness assigned to those group members. We found that characteristics surrounding motherhood, trustworthiness, housekeeping abilities, social intelligence, and wealth or status to be the most influential reputational reports on attractiveness. We found that reports of promiscuity had no significant affect on perceived

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attractiveness. Overall, the results demonstrate that attractiveness ratings reflected a significant reputational component.

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1. Introduction

Several lines of evidence suggest that reputations are important to individuals living in social groups because they can mediate access to resources (Gurven, Allen-Arave, Hill, & Hurtado, 2000), determine reciprocal partners (Brown & Moore, 2002; Gurven, Allen-Arave et al., 2000; Gurven, Hill, Kaplan, Hurtado, & Lyles, 2000; Ostrom, 2003), and provide useful information to potential mates about health status (Henderson & Anglin, 2003), investment strategies (Campbell, 2002), and sexual fidelity (Hess & Hagen, 2002). Experimental evidence from economic games shows that people are more likely to cooperate and punish noncooperators when reputation effects are built into the design than when anonymity precludes reputation effects (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Fehr & Rockenbach, 2003; Sigmund, Hauert, & Nowak, 2001).

Perceptions of physical attractiveness by self and others also appear to impact people's lives. Perceived attractiveness by others affects young children's social relationships and status (Boyatzis, Baloff, & Durieux, 1998; Maag, Vasa, Kramer, & Torrey, 1991) and a variety of outcomes as an adult, such as time spent with kin (Waynforth, 1999), self-income (Frieze, Olson, & Russell, 1991; Lynn & Simons, 2000; Roszell, Kennedy, & Grabb, 1989), income of spouse (Udry & Eckland, 1984), and occupational success for men and women in certain circumstances (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). While physical attractiveness may be most important in relationships with the opposite sex for reasons pertaining to health, pathogen resistance, and reproductive success (see Buss and Gangestad for reviews: Buss, 1989; Buss, 1998; Gangestad, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Gangestad, Thornhill, & Yeo, 1994), it also plays a role in same-sex relationships for both males and females (Gutierrez, Kenrick, & Partch, 1999; Joseph, 1985). Such same-sex effects only make sense if perceptions of physical attractiveness have effects on socially relevant outcomes. Women may care about the reputations of other women and utilize or manipulate information to change the perceptions of friends' and rivals' attractiveness to potential social network participants. These participants, made up of allies and opponents, may either help or inhibit access to real resources such as food, goods, mates, and friends. Indeed, there is evidence that perceptions of attractiveness may be affected by reputations regarding social behavior (Kniffin & Wilson, 2004) and social status (Townsend & Levy, 1990).

We propose that people integrate both physical and socially relevant information about other individuals in determining how to behave towards that person and in evaluating their desirability as a social partner. Mates, cooperators, friends, and enemies may be chosen by complex algorithms, based upon a wide variety of information that they may have regarding

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