

**Original Article**

**THE INFLUENCE OF MALE FACIAL ATTRACTIVENESS  
ON WOMEN'S RECEPTIVITY**

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**Abstract**

Recent evidence suggests that women are receptive, albeit less than men, to offers of sex. It has also been established that women's preference for attractiveness increases when they seek brief, sexual relationships compared to longer forms of relationship. Here we further explore women's receptivity with respect to romantic relationship type and length, and investigate how male attractiveness influences this receptivity. Findings suggest that women are willing to consider the most attractive men for all types of romantic relationships. In addition, short-term relationships yielded the highest rates of receptivity, which suggests that this relationship type provides a trial period for potential long-term mates and consequently represents a compromise between purely sexual relationships and long-term, committed relationships.

**Keywords:** sexual offers, sex differences, mate preferences, romantic relationships

**Introduction**

Recent research (e.g., Weaver & Herold, 2000) suggests that women are receptive to offers of casual sex and that they will have intercourse with unfamiliar partners, although women are generally less open to the invitations than men. Furthermore, Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher (2005) found 6% of women were receptive to offers of casual sex with a strange man. There are many factors that could affect women's receptivity, such as their romantic relationship status, the form of the potential relationship, or the attractiveness of the male making the sexual offer. In this paper we explore these factors to determine their impact on women's receptivity. We specifically examine whether women are receptive to unfamiliar males who vary in their facial

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attractiveness, and who offer either casual sex (i.e., “a one night stand”), a short-term relationship, or a long-term relationship.

*Male versus Female Sexual Receptivity*

There are many theoretical reasons to explain why women have a lower receptivity to sexual offers than do men. Two of these theories are parental investment theory and social role theory (e.g., Fenigstein & Preston, 2007).

The evolutionary view, specifically parental investment theory (Trivers, 1972), posits that since women have limited reproductive resources, they must be cautious when deciding with whom to mate. Women have the potential to become pregnant, which is taxing on the body. Additionally, they must endure the demands of lactation and often, they are responsible for most of the childcare. Furthermore, during pregnancy and postpartum, when taking care of young children, women will be less able to obtain resources for themselves and their children. In contrast, men are able to mate repeatedly within a short timeframe and do not have the physical burdens associated with pregnancy. Thus, according to the evolutionary psychological view, women should be wary of engaging in sex without at least some assurance that the mate will provide resources towards any potential child.

Men, however, do not have the same consequences for their behavior, and thus, they can be more receptive to offers of casual sex and can seek extremely brief, sexual interactions. They do not need to be concerned with the somatic demands of pregnancy or lactation. Since men do not have these demands, the act of having a child does not need to involve a high level of investment. As a consequence of this minimal expenditure of energy, men may choose to not be involved in childcare, and instead they can invest their energy in mating as frequently as possible in order to ensure maximal reproductive success. It should be noted, however, that human males do provide more parental care than most other mammals (Clutton-Brock, 1989). Children who are raised without a father present have a higher risk of child mortality, especially in pre-industrial societies without stable, predictable and accessible food supplies and medical care (Geary, 1998; Hill & Hurtado, 1996). Thus, the benefits of having a father present might mean that it is important for women to be selective and choose partners who are interested in long-term relationships.

From an evolutionary view, the benefits for men to pursue a primarily sexual, short-term relationship are more numerous than those for women. For example, men can produce offspring with each woman they mate with, whereas women are limited to having one offspring approximately every nine months (i.e., the length of their pregnancy). As a result, men can have far more children than women, and each successful mating directly increases their reproductive success and the likelihood for their genes to carry on into future generations. Therefore, it is reasonable that, internationally, men desire more sexual partners over their lifetime than women (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993), and also seek more sexual variety (Schmitt & 118 Members of the International Sexuality Description Project, 2003).

Social role theory, instead of emphasizing biological differences, places importance upon socio-cultural explanations. According to social role theory, men are socially oriented towards being active when it comes to sex, and to think of sex in relation to pleasure (Eagly, 1987). Women, however, are socialized to view sex as an act performed when part of a relationship with emotional involvement. In addition, societal

norms lead men to be agentic and women to be passive when it comes to initiating sexual encounters, and these norms help to create a double standard such that men are sexually liberated while women are sexually restricted from engaging in commitment-free sexual activity (see Li & Kenrick, 2006 for a brief review). Therefore, whether one agrees with the evolutionary or socio-cultural account does not matter, they are not mutually exclusive and furthermore, both predict the same result: women will have lower receptivity to offers of sex, as compared to men.

*The Importance of Male Attractiveness on Female Receptivity*

Although women are sexually attracted to men who display characteristics that reflect the ability and willingness to maintain long-term relationships, such that they seek men who are socially respected, financially wealthy, ambitious, dependable, and emotionally stable (e.g., Geary, 1998) there is evidence that women also benefit from short-term relationships. Whereas men benefit from short-term relationships through the increased opportunity for having children, the benefits that women receive are more indirect. Fisher (1930) proposed that females, including human women, who engage in sexual relationships with men could benefit from the “good genes” that the male possesses. That is, women are seizing an immediate opportunity to access a male with high-quality (e.g., parasite resistant) genes that promote general health, physical attractiveness, and generally, a high reproductive success. In a similar vein, the “sexy son hypothesis” suggests that women have evolved preferences for men with phenotypic indicators of “good genes” instead of preferring men who display indicators of high parental investment in situations when obtaining any long-term paternal investment is unlikely (e.g., Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). For example, when all else is equal and a woman is seeking a short-term relationship, she should express a preference for a male who is physically attractive rather than one who is compassionate and likes children. If these women then produce sons as a result of the mating, these sons will carry the “good genes” and, in theory, be chosen as sexual partners.

This attention to male attractiveness is to be expected because women make large investments in their offspring, and hence, should choose mates with superior phenotypes, which may indicate superior genotypes. However, this attention should increase if women do not expect any interaction, and hence no paternal investment, after the brief sexual encounter. There exists a very large volume of research outlining women’s preferences for particular phenotypic traits. For example, it has been established that women prefer muscular men and men with chest and lower trunk hair which signals sexual maturity (Dixson, Halliwell, East, Wignarajah, & Anderson, 2003). Earlier work has also found that women prefer men with a moderate body build, as well as moderate to tall height (see review in Barber, 1995). Similarly, using auditory cues, Collins (2000) found women prefer deeper male voices (lower in frequency and with closer harmonics). Although they never saw the men, the women rated men with deeper voices as attractive, as well as older, heavier, with a more muscular body, and having a hairy chest.

In addition to selecting mates based on their phenotypic qualities, it is very probable that women attend to male attractiveness in an effort to avoid men who are sterile or impotent so they may actually conceive offspring (Campbell, 1995). Women presumably notice physical indicators of youth, strength, and libido when selecting mates (Campbell, 1995; Weisfeld, Russell, Weisfeld, & Wells, 1992) before questioning their resource capabilities or personality characteristics related to parenting. In other words,

without viable offspring, there is no need for resources. Evidence for this theory comes from research by Burbank (1994), who asked 15 Australian aboriginal women whether they would prefer to marry a young, old, or middle-aged man. The majority replied that they preferred a young man, although they realised that a young man would make a poor father.

Further support for the “good genes” theory comes from research that clearly shows that women have higher phenotypic standards for potential mates when the relationship is primarily sexual. For example, Kenrick and colleagues (1993) show that women express the highest expectations for a partner’s attractiveness when they are considering someone for a one-night stand than for a short-term or steady dating relationship. Similarly, Townsend and Roberts (1993) found that female law-students (i.e., women who are entering a professional occupation and can expect a reasonably stable, large salary) would consider an attractive man with low income as a sexual partner but not for marriage. More recently, Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, and Kenrick (2002) found that both women and men desire more physically attractive mates as the length of the relationship decreased. A more complex research design was used by Fletcher, Tither, O’Loughlin, Friesen and Overall (2004) who asked participants to choose between pairs of individuals who dichotomously varied on particular traits. Both women and men preferred highly attractive mates for sexual relations, whereas those who possessed high status and resources were the least favoured. Finally, using an economics model of necessity and luxury goods, Li and Kenrick (2006) found that women prioritized physical attractiveness, especially muscularity, as a necessity and not a luxury for a brief sexual encounter. It is important to recognize that women do consider the physical attractiveness of potential short-term and long-term partners. However, compared to these forms of relationships, the prioritizing of attractiveness for sexual relations is noteworthy (e.g., Li & Kenrick, 2006). Therefore, any hypothesis about the receptivity of women to brief sexual encounters (i.e., “one-night stands”) should include a comparison of how they would be receptive to other forms of interactions, such as a short-term or long-term relationship.

#### *Females as Sexually Receptive*

Some women seem particularly interested in extremely brief, sexual interactions. For example, in four studies in Canada, Weaver and Herold (2000) found that among women, aged 19-27 years, 13% reported having sexual intercourse with someone they had just met, and 36% reported they had sexual intercourse with someone although they were not in a committed relationship. Using a sample of 56 women at an American college, Li and Kenrick (2006) found that 64% of reported never having had casual sex, 20% have had it once, and 16% have had it more than once. When asked why they engaged in casual sex, by far the most selected reason was that they were “physically attracted to the person and thought it would feel good” (p. 480). A second study by these researchers showed that physical attractiveness was not only the most salient reason to have a sexual relation with someone, but also, that the traits to which they most attended were features related to muscularity, strength, fitness, and masculinity.

Similar results pertaining to sexual receptivity were obtained by Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher (2005) who report the results of an “accidental” study by an Austrian magazine reporter. The reporter individually approached 100 women in a variety of locations and asked if they would be willing to have sex with him right then. He had a

6% acceptance rate, with an additional 3 women offering their phone number for a later meeting, 10 asking for a later date instead, 8 declining and citing their relationship status, and 5 saying that they would normally accept but were in a rush. According to Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher (2005), the reporter was completely unaware of the academic literature on this topic.

One notable exception to these findings is Clark and Hatfield (1989). In their research, male and female confederates of average attractiveness approached opposite sex people on a university campus and asked “would you like to go out tonight,” or “would you like to come over” to the confederate’s apartment, or “would you like to go to bed” with the confederate. The most startling result was that for sexual offers, whereby the majority of men (71%) but not one woman accepted the offer.

As the reviewed literature indicates, women have a psychological mechanism whereby they have flexible standards when considering a potential mate for a primarily sexual versus long-term relationship. Furthermore, as we reviewed, survey-based studies (e.g., Li & Kenrick, 2006) indicate that women are open to sexual interactions and can imagine the characteristics that they want in sex partners, as compared to someone they want for a short-term or long-term relationship. In addition, Canadian and American statistics show that a sizeable percentage of young women have engaged in sex with a stranger (Li & Kenrick, 2006; Weaver & Herold, 2000). What is missing from this body of work, however, is empirical evidence that directly examines who women would consider as sexual partners, versus who they would consider for short-term or long-term relationships. Therefore, in the current study, we seek to investigate this issue, but to do so by presenting women with a set of candidate males with whom to have sex, where the candidates vary in attractiveness. We are also curious as to whether the same men would be considered for all forms of relationship, or if women categorize potential mates according to the type of desired involvement.

Perhaps receptivity depends in part upon individual choice; in situations where women can choose the mate they will probably be more likely to agree to sex. That is, in past research, such as Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher (2005), an individual male represented all men. Rather than providing women with a selection of men and arriving at a receptivity rate, one single man asked them for sex. It is possible that women are receptive, but that the male who made the request in the Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher study, for example, was not truly desirable to all women. Thus, former reports characterize how receptive women were to a single man, rather than how receptive they might be when they can select a desired partner.

We address this issue in the current study by providing women with a selection of men to consider. Furthermore, rather than use a situation where men actually approach women and ask for sex, we simply ask women if they would consider having sex with the men, again providing them with active choice. Given that there may exist social stigmas about asking women if they would have sex without any relationship, we use the phrase, “one-night stand (i.e., brief sexual relationship).” In contrast, the phrase, “short-term relationship” was used to reflect a more involved interpersonal relationship than one that was a single sexual interaction.

In addition to these issues, there has been no investigation of how receptivity to offers of sex compares to offers for short-term or long-term relationships. We hypothesize that, based on the theories previously outlined, women will show the lowest receptivity towards one-night stands. There has also been no examination of how

women's romantic relationship status impacts their receptivity. We hypothesize that women in committed relationships will be less likely to agree to sex or establishing new relationships than women who are romantically uninvolved. Finally, we hypothesize that male facial attractiveness will play an important role in women's receptivity of sexual offers, and to a lesser extent, to offers for short-term and long-term relationships which presumably involve more interpersonal interaction.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

A total of 94 heterosexual women (age in years,  $M = 20.1$ ,  $SD = 2.2$ ) were tested. Of these, 37 reported that they were romantically uninvolved (i.e., "single" and 57 were involved in romantic relationships. The majority of these women (50) reported that they were involved in a committed relationship, whereas only 7 reported that they were in casual, dating relationships. All participants were students at a large metropolitan university in Toronto, Canada, and as such, they were of heterogeneous ethnicity and religious affiliations. They received credit towards a psychology course as compensation for their time.

### *Measures and Procedure*

There were three phases to the testing session. In the first phase, participants rated the attractiveness of 30 male faces and 35 female faces, using a scale from 1 (extremely unattractive) to 7 (extremely attractive). The faces were presented on custom software in a random order. Although the purpose of the study was to examine the influence of male facial attractiveness on women's receptivity, female faces were included to disguise the purpose of the study. The photographs of the faces were standardized, such that the models all portrayed a neutral expression, wore a black smock and removed jewelry (stimuli described in Geldart, Maurer, & Henderson, 1999).

The second phase consisted of paper-and-pencil surveys. These included a demographic survey, the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), the Self-Monitoring Survey (SM; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), and a menstrual cycle inventory. Note that, due to individual variation in menstrual cycle length, all cycles were standardized to a length of 28 days, and then divided into five phases (see Fisher, 2004). Participants completed these surveys in private and then returned them in an unmarked sealed envelope to the researcher.

In the third phase, the participant was again seated at the computer and was instructed to read the following paragraph:

"The following men are single and live close to this university. For each photograph, please record whether you would be interested in meeting this person for a one-night stand (sex), short-term relationship, and long-term relationship."

Then, each of the 30 male faces were shown again, individually, accompanied by a set of check-boxes at the bottom of the screen with the questions: Would you consider him for a one-night stand (yes or no), short-term relationship (yes or no) and long-term relationship (yes or no). After the three answers were recorded, the program progressed

to another male face at random. Participants were not permitted to change a response after the initial selection.

It should be noted that all participants were tested individually and in a private room, alone. Given that there are social stigmas that may prohibit women from feeling free to admit to desiring sexual relationships (Eagly, 1987), it was necessary to provide the highest possible level of anonymity and privacy.

## **Results**

A cursory exploration of the data revealed that there were two classes of faces. The first class consisted of the majority and received very low levels of agreement by women (i.e., < 4%). The second class of faces had higher than 10% agreement, and there were no faces between 4% and 10%. Therefore, based on this observation, we decided to examine the properties of this second class of male faces. Five of the 30 male faces received 10% or more (range = 10% to 19%) agreement by women in the one-night stand condition, 8 received 10% or more (range = 11% to 40%) for the short-term relationship condition, and 6 received 10% or more (range = 12% to 29%) for the long-term relationship condition. To test the hypothesis that women are receptive to those whom they find attractive, paired-samples *t*-tests were performed, comparing the faces that received 10% or more of women's agreement with those that did not. For the one-night condition, attractiveness influenced receptivity,  $t(93) = 28.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . Average male facial attractiveness was higher for those whom women positively considered ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) versus those whom women would not consider ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .48$ ). The same was true for the short-term relationship condition,  $t(93) = 22.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $M = 3.02$  ( $SD = .78$ ) versus  $M = 1.75$  ( $SD = .55$ ), and for the long-term relationship condition,  $t(93) = 23.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $M = 3.25$  ( $SD = .81$ ) versus  $M = 1.80$  ( $SD = .57$ ), respectively (see Figure 1).

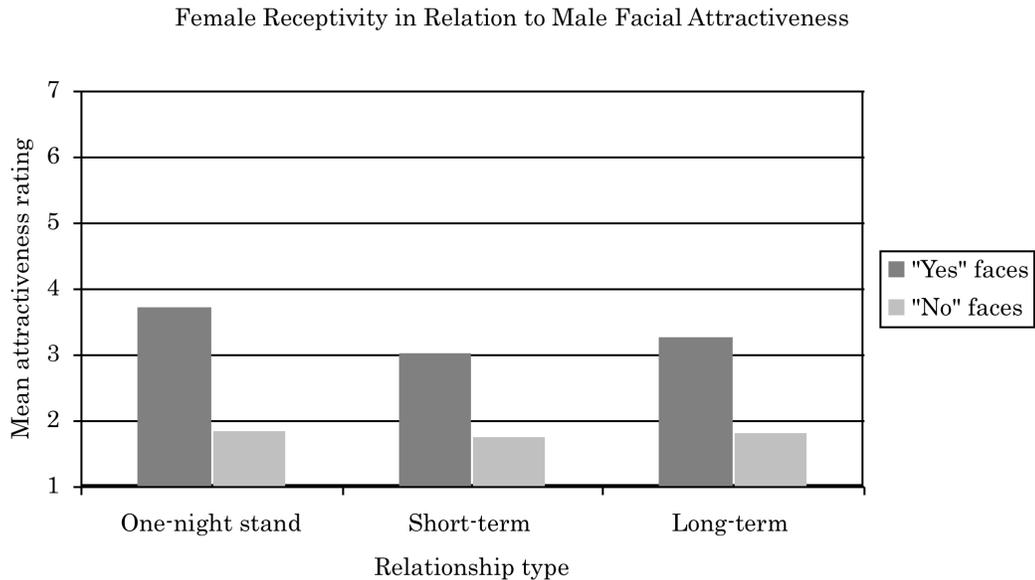


Figure 1. Male facial attractiveness influences women’s receptivity for each relationship type.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) model was created to test whether women’s romantic relationship involvement (uninvolved, casually involved, or committed) influenced ratings of attractiveness for the men who were considered in the one-night stand ( $F(2,91) = 1.32, p = ns$ ), short-term ( $F(2,91) = 1.94, p = ns$ ), and long-term condition ( $F(2,91) = 1.34, p = ns$ ). Relationship type was insignificant for each condition, indicating that women’s involvement in a relationship does not influence their perceptions of male attractiveness, at least for the men towards whom women express higher levels of receptivity.

In order to determine how receptive women are, we performed chi-square analyses for the three conditions (one-night stand, short-term, or long-term) by relationship type (uninvolved, casually involved, or committed), with the dependent variable being that the woman positively considered any of the male faces (i.e., at least 1 in the 30 faces received a “yes”). As seen in Table 1, this analysis revealed four significant differences, indicating that the significant majority responded in the indicated direction, and five insignificant differences, meaning that it was a “draw” as to whether they would positively or negatively respond. Most pertinent to the current study, women in committed relationships have a receptivity rate of 26% to one-night stands, women who were uninvolved 30%, and women in casual relationships 57%, which indicates that women are indeed receptive to casual sex.

Table 1. Current romantic relationship involvement of women and their receptivity by relationship type

	One-night stand	Short-term relationship	Long-term relationship
Single (n = 37)	30% $\chi^2(1) = 6.08$ $p = .01$	73% $\chi^2(1) = 7.81$ $p = .005$	49% ** $\chi^2(1) = .03$ $p = ns$
Casual (n = 7)	57% ** $\chi^2(1) = .14$ $p = .ns$	86% $\chi^2(1) = 3.57$ $p = .05$	57% ** $\chi^2(1) = .14$ $p = ns$
Committed (n = 50)	26% $\chi^2(1) = 11.52$ $p = .001$	62% ** $\chi^2(1) = 2.88$ $p = ns$	38% ** $\chi^2(1) = 2.88$ $p = ns$

Note: Each cell represents an individual chi-square test. \*\* indicates that the chi-square test was insignificant, such that the proportion of participants were not significantly accepting or not accepting the offer, for each relationship type. Further note that the results for the women in casual relationships must be viewed as tentative, due to the sample size.

Finally, to test whether these effects were due to SOI, SM, or menstrual cycle phase, a repeated measures Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) model was created. The repeated measure was the attractiveness rating of the men who received positive consideration in the three conditions (one-night stand, short-term and long-term relationship), with the between-subjects factor of relationship type (uninvolved, casually involved, or committed). SOI, SM, and menstrual cycle phase were entered as covariates. There was a main effect for the attractiveness ratings,  $F(2,66) = 19.92$ ,  $p < .000$ , but no significant interaction for the ratings with SOI,  $F(2,66) = .45$ ,  $p = ns$ , nor for the interaction with SM,  $F(2,66) = .22$ ,  $p = ns$ , menstrual phase,  $F(2,66) = .14$ ,  $p = ns$ , or relationship type,  $F(4,66) = 1.50$ ,  $p = ns$ . There were also no simple effects; SOI  $F(1,33) = 1.00$ ,  $p = ns$ , SM  $F(1,33) = .40$ ,  $p = ns$ , menstrual phase  $F(1,33) = .67$ ,  $p = ns$ , and relationship type  $F(2,33) = .49$ ,  $p = ns$ .

### Discussion

Recent research (e.g., Li & Kenrick, 2006; Voracek, Hofhansl & Fisher, 2005) indicates that some women are open to having casual sex, albeit at lower rates than men. This sex difference is possibly due to parental investment (Trivers, 1972) or social roles (Eagly, 1987), or perhaps due to both. In this study, we presented women with a variety of male faces and asked them whether they would consider these men for a one-night stand, short-term relationship, or long-term relationship. We found that a group of the same men, the ones rated as the most attractive, were considered for all forms of relationships. Furthermore, more women were willing to consider these men for a short-term relationship than for a one-night stand or long-term relationship, which suggests that short-term relationships have a unique set of properties. We also explored the characteristics of women who were receptive to one-night stands, but we could not determine what dimensions they have in common.

It is highly probably that social standards have changed over time, such that modern women feel more free to engage in sexual relationships. For example, recent data on “hookup” behavior (sexual relationships without emotional attachment; Garcia & Reiber, 2008) indicate that women have been routinely engaging in short-term sex on university campuses in the United States. These “real life” findings are highly important because, in reality, women can choose their mates, they can use alcohol to decrease inhibition, and they can observe potential mates in a social context.

Some of these distinctions are important in the present study. It should be noted that research such as Voracek, Hofhansl and Fisher (2005) was composed of a man actually asking women for sex, whereas in the present study, women were free to choose with whom they were potentially becoming involved. Furthermore, women might have believed that this was a hypothetical situation, and their rates of compliance would decrease in “real-life”. We could have altered the methods to say that any male you are receptive to (as indicated by saying “yes”) will in fact call you in the next 24 hours; however, we were concerned that participants might feel at risk and anxious as a result, and hence, contradict the ethics of psychological research.

Even with these limitations, it is interesting that some women were open to the possibility of brief, sexual relationships, and that the same men they would consider for sex were also considered for short-term and long-term relationships.

The only variable that women had available to base their decisions upon was facial attractiveness, and thus, it is sensible that the most attractive men would be those selected for one-night stands. However, in the absence of any other information, women also opted for the most attractive men for short-term and long-term relationships, which is an interesting result, especially since receptivity rates for the two forms of relationships was not uniform. Future researchers could provide women with mock dating advertisements, accompanied by a photograph, and manipulate personality dimensions, financial status and so on, in order to determine what characteristics women consider for each relationship type.

The heightened receptivity towards short-term relationships deserves further investigation. Short-term relationships might represent trial periods (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993), such that one can make use of the advantages of a one-night stand but also can see if mate is worthy of further consideration for a committed, long-term relationship. It is also well known that women are faced with social stigma if they behave promiscuously, such that a social double standard exists (e.g., Milhausen & Herold, 1999). Short-term relationships might present an opportunity for women to explore their sexuality without becoming thought of as overly promiscuous. Although it is possible that individuals have varying definitions of what is meant by a “short-term” or “long-term” relationship, it should be noted that not one participant asked for clarification. To be prudent, however, future researchers might want to supply a clear definition to ensure uniform conceptualization by participants.

As well, it is important to mention that women’s relationship status had a negligible effect on their ratings of male facial attractiveness, and on their receptivity to one-night stands, short-term and long-term relationships. Although past literature suggests that individuals in relationships have decreased ratings of attractive, opposite-sex individuals, probably as a relationship-maintenance mechanism (e.g., Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999; Simpson, Gangestad & Lerma, 1990), we did not find any effect due to relationship status. It could be partly due to the age of our sample;

young individuals may be experiencing their first relationships and hence, do not feel as committed to their mates as older individuals who have children. However, at least one other article (Fisher, Tran, & Voracek, 2008) has recently found relationship status to have no effect on opposite-sex facial attractiveness ratings. In any case, this result indicates that women in relationships are not “turned off” but instead still open to considering men as potential mates. There are a variety of reasons for the existence of this behavior. For example, a woman might need to find a new mate if her current partner leaves, is mate poached, or dies, and thus she must always be ready to find a partner. As well, she might be able to engage in hypergamy (i.e., “trade-up”) if she locates a better partner than the one she currently has.

In the current study, approximately one-third of women (28 out of 94; see Figure 2) were open to considering at least one of the men for a one-night stand. However, some women agreed to consider substantially more than one man (number of acceptances: range = 1 to 12,  $Md = 2$ ,  $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 2.89$ ; for comparison, number of acceptances for short-term: range = 1 to 15,  $Md = 3$ ,  $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 3.59$ , and for long-term: range = 1 to 15,  $Md = 3$ ,  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 3.32$ ). We attempted to locate the factors that might separate women who are very receptive versus unreceptive, but we were unsuccessful. Sociosexual orientation, self-monitoring, ovulatory status, and romantic relationship status do not significantly influence receptivity. Attractiveness ratings of the men who were considered for each type of relationship were not influenced by women’s sociosexual orientation, self-monitoring, relationship involvement, or menstrual cycle, which suggests that these variables do not adequately account for variation in women’s receptivity. To date, no study has been able to determine what factors, if any, distinguish women who are receptive versus not receptive. This issue is true for receptivity, but also when talking about desires for sexual variety. For example, Fenigstein and Preston (2007) found that 47% of women were interested in having more than one sexual partner, but the authors did not explore any factors that may help to identify this group. Although these women might be a minority, future research needs to address what traits or other factors might account for women who are receptive to offers of sex, who say that they will consider some men for one-night stands, and who express a preference for multiple sexual partners during their lifespan.

It should be mentioned that our results mirror those of Mikach and Bailey (1999) who found that women who report an unusually high number of sex partners were indistinguishable, with regards to SOI scores, mate value, physical attractiveness, self-esteem, and family history, from those who were more chaste. The only factors that Mikach and Bailey (1999) found that helped separate women with many versus few sexual partners was childhood gender conformity and current feelings towards masculinity and femininity; those with higher numbers of sexual partners were more masculine. The findings of the current study, and this past research, suggests more social or proximate, rather than evolutionary, explanations are needed, since attitudes towards femininity and masculinity might reflect social role acceptance rather than have a direct evolutionary underpinning.

Variation in Female Receptivity

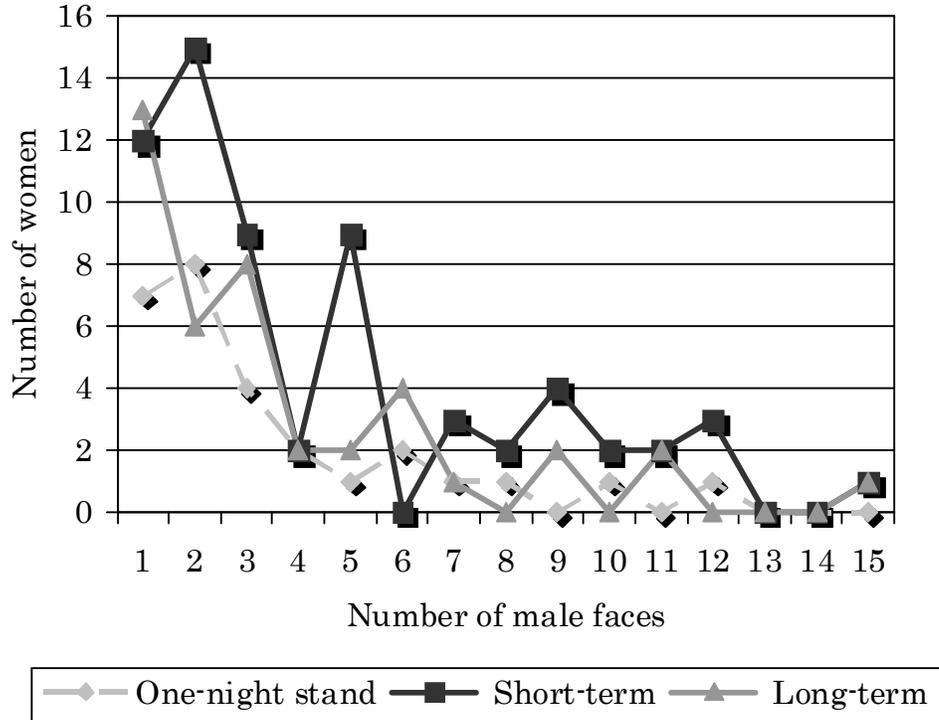


Figure 2. Women were most receptive to considering a man for a short-term relationship, compared to a one-night stand or long-term relationship. Furthermore, as shown here, there was considerable variation in the number of men that women were willing to consider for each relationship type.

In this study, we examined women’s receptivity to various relationship types (i.e., one-night stand, short-term relationship, and long-term relationship), and found that some women were willing to consider the most attractive men for all relationship types. Furthermore, short-term relationships yielded the highest rates of receptivity, which might indicate an opportunity for women to reap the benefits of a sexual relationship without the investment required in a committed, long-term relationship.

Received May 22, 2008; Revision August 19, 2008; Accepted September 4, 2008.

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