

Status and Physical attractiveness were exchangeable?

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ABSTRACT

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In the present study, we investigate how man's social status influences the cognition of his sex partner with the use of 56 male and 100 female undergraduate students. Each subject was randomly assigned to an experimental condition and asked to evaluate a target female stimulus in eleven measures, including "beauty". The experimental condition, where the sex of the subjects, existence of a lover of the target female, and the man's social status were varied, thus, consisted of a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design. Results of MANOVA yielded two significant main effects for the association and the sex of the subjects. However, the results did not support the hypothesis that a woman associated with a man of high social status will be perceived to be beautiful and socially desirable. These results were discussed from the standpoint of characteristics of Japanese young people.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes it is said that "Beauty is potent but money is omnipotent". And in fact, we tend to regard beauty and money as exchangeable possessions in the market place of human value and resource. In the present paper, we deal with the exchange between the effect of woman's physical attractiveness and the effect of man's social status. It is known that in a mate selection process, such a compatibility becomes a great concern. The subjects to be exchanged are changed over time. In the first stage of courtship, more emphasis is placed on attractiveness of appearance and social and economical aspects. In the latter stage, more attention is paid to emotional gratification and psychological satisfaction. Among the subjects being exchanged, for example, income, possession, educational level, family background, occupational and social status, much attention was paid to physical attractiveness. On women's beauty, many studies indicated that it is a very important factor and attractive women

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frequently gain an advantage over unattractive women (see Adams, & Crossman, 1978; Bull, & Rumsey, 1988; Patzer, 1985). On the compatibility of physical attractiveness, Murstein (1972) compared the real engaged or "going steady" couple's discrepancy of physical attractiveness with simulated couple's discrepancy using statistical randomized procedure and found the real couple are similar to each other as compared with the expected couple in their physical attractiveness.

The reason why physical attractiveness has a high value in interpersonal interaction was not fully explained. However, in some animal societies, it is known that certain stimulus, including epigamic body color, or shape plays an important role for charming the opposite sex (Ford & Beach, 1951; Wilson, 1980). In fact, Darwin (1859) referred the marking of bantam as example in his famous work. Although there is some controversy and criticism, many researchers make reference to this mating selection phenomenon (Dawkins, 1976; Krebs & Davies, 1981; Wickler & Seibt, 1983). Furthermore, by using the concept of Darwin's sexual selection, Buss (1987) extended the discussion to human mating system and suggested that physical appearance of females could correspond to their health and youth, because they demonstrate their fertility and reproductive capability. He predicted "Males, more than females, will value physical appearance in potential mates because appearance in females, especially what is considered attractive, correlates strongly with age and health, which provide powerful cues to reproductive value (1987, p. 342)".

In addition to this sociobiological view, Sigall and Landy (1973) reported from a social psychological standpoint that associating with a physically attractive girlfriend increases evaluation of a man. They called this

phenomenon "radiating beauty effects". In this case, mating with a physically attractive partner had value. Although these radiating beauty effects were not confirmed in Japan (Onodera & Miura, 1990), other possessions or attributes could have the same effects. Besides the compatibility of physical attractiveness with physical attractiveness demonstrated by Murstein (1972), some researchers found that physical attractiveness is compatible with another desirable and non-physical attribute. For this compatibility of different attributes, one of the popular questions is whether attractive women would match with prestigious men. Bull and Rumsey (1988) reviewed many studies concerning this topic and concluded "From the research on whether attractive women do marry prestigious men it does seem that some evidence exists to support this contention" (p. 34).

In the present experiment, we examine how the man's social status has influence on the cognition of his opposite sex partner. If the man's social status has the parallel effect of physical attractiveness of women, we can expect that a woman with a high status man would be perceived to be socially more desirable, or even more beautiful than a woman with a low status man. Furthermore, we should like to report how the sex difference of subjects would have an effect on those factors.

Method

Subjects made judgments of characteristics of a woman from a short description and two pictures. One was the picture of the woman, and the other was one of a man either associated or unassociated with the woman. In addition to a sex factor of subjects, the two main factors – the man's social status (high –

low) and the relation between the man and the woman (associated-unassociated) were controlled by using a printed description. Thus, eight conditions were constructed and the design of the experiment was man's status (high vs low) \times association (associated vs unassociated) \times sex of subjects (male vs female).

Subjects

Subjects were one hundred fifty six undergraduate students (56 males and 100 females) in an introductory psychology course of a university and a college.

Status conditions

By using the printed biographical sketches, the status of the man was controlled. The man was depicted either as a young president in a promising computer company he established, or as a mere clerk in a computer company. Other brief descriptions concerning him—he was assumed to be 30 years old, intellectual, warm, kind and sincere, and not to be so anxious about his future—were identical in both conditions. There is no information about the characteristics of the woman through all the conditions.

Association conditions

Based on the printed information, the association between the man and the woman was controlled. In the associated condition, the man was described as having gone steady with her for five years and planning to propose marriage to her. In the unassociated condition, there was no specific information about their relationship.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted during regular class periods. A paper with two black-

and-white photographs was distributed to each subject. One photograph showed the face and upper torso of a woman, and the other those of a man. These model-persons photographed were a female undergraduate student and a male postgraduate student. On the paper distributed to each subject, the description concerning the photographed man and some questions were printed. Depending on the four different versions of the descriptions, the subjects were randomly assigned one of each condition. However, they believed that the same version was distributed to all students. To avoid their finding out the difference among the materials, it was emphasized that the subjects should judge by themselves and not to look at the other's response. Subjects were told that the purpose of the research was to study how they could accurately judge others on the basis of a very few cues. Then, the subjects responded to eleven dependent measures and two manipulation check measures.

Dependent measures

On the questionnaire, a 7-points scale (1 – not at all; 7 – very high) was printed. On the basis of this scale, the subjects rated a target woman in terms of: (1) beauty; (2) intelligence; (3) kindness; (4) self confidence; (5) activeness; (6) cheerfulness; (7) sex appeal; (8) strong will; (9) femininity; (10) tenderness; (11) friendliness. In addition, the subjects rated how he would earn monthly income and acquire savings. The results of these two items were used for a manipulation check of the man's status.

RESULTS

Analysis of income and savings indicated that our control of the man's status was valid. Table 1 shows the means of two man-

ipulation check items.

Table 1. Mean scores of income and saving (in YEN)

	man's social status	
	high(N=79)	low(N=77)
income	1,591,608(267.10)	255,532(8.97)***
saving	40,901,456(8214.75)	2,392,865(213.82)***

1)Figure in parentheses indicates Standard Deviation.
2)***p< .001

Because of the great differences of variance, we conducted t-tests for separate variance estimates. Results of both income and saving variables showed significant difference (income: $t = -4.44$, $df = 78.18$; saving: $t = -4.17$, $df = 78.11$). In contrast, the association factor and the sex factor did not have any significant effects for the income and the saving variables. Clearly subjects perceived the man in a high status earning much income and saving much money.

For the association factor, we did not include check items. So, validity of manipulation must be checked in the results of analysis.

Three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), using Wilks's criterion, was performed to test the effects of three independent variables, status factor, association factor and sex factor, on the eleven dependent measures.

This analysis did not show any significant interaction. Only interaction of status by association showed a weak tendency ($F(11,138) = 1.479$, $p < .146$). In the univariate analysis of variance, significant interaction effect was found only in "intelligence" ($F(1,148) = 7.168$; $p < .008$) and this interaction was due to high scores in the high status-associated condition.

Next, we examined lower effects. MAN-

OVA yielded two significant main effects, sex of subjects effect ($F(11,138) = 3.067$; $p < .001$) and association effect ($F(11,138) = 2.595$; $p < .005$). In the univariate analysis of variance for the subjects's sex, two items, "beauty" and "friendliness" indicated significance. Female subjects rated both traits high (beauty: $M(\text{male}) = 3.18$, $M(\text{female}) = 3.72$, $p < .001$; friendliness: $M(\text{male}) = 4.52$, $M(\text{female}) = 5.00$, $p < .022$). Although other items did not reach significance level, female generally rated most items higher than males (except "sex appeal" and "strong will").

Table 2 showed the mean scores of which the items revealed greater association effects.

Table 2. Mean scores of items for association effect

	relation between the target woman and man		
	associated(N=80)	unassociated(N=76)	p
beauty	3.50(.98)	3.55(.99)	.417
intelligence	5.08(1.11)	4.70(.95)	.021
kindness	5.14(.94)	4.67(1.17)	.010
self confidence	4.24(1.19)	4.37(1.19)	.765
activeness	4.14(1.39)	4.57(1.44)	.080
cheerfulness	4.99(1.14)	5.00(1.23)	.829
sex appeal	2.44(1.03)	2.68(1.19)	.095
strong will	5.10(1.26)	4.58(1.11)	.003
femininity	4.51(1.24)	4.29(1.16)	.368
tenderness	5.04(1.14)	4.65(1.04)	.033
friendliness	4.93(1.21)	4.72(1.30)	.457

1)Figure in parentheses indicates Standard Deviation.

Subjects perceive the associated woman to be intelligent, kind, tender and purposeful. Regarding the activeness and sex appeal, there is a tendency that unassociated woman was perceived to be active and sexually attractive. Examining univariate results, we found that male subjects perceived the woman unassociated with a man to be more sexy (unassociated - male subjects condition; mean = 3.034 vs other conditions; mean = 2.370 ~ 2.472). This indicates male subjects

showed a favor to unassociated woman and it is not so difficult to interpret this result. However, interpreting the result of "activeness" was very complicated. In the univariate analysis, significant three-way interaction was obtained for this measure. Mainly, this interaction was due to high evaluation in "low status-unassociated condition" by male subjects (mean = 4.800) and "high status-unassociated condition" by female subjects (mean = 4.840) and low evaluation in "low status-associated condition" by male subjects (mean = 3.667 vs other conditions; mean = 4.170 ~ 4.318). Other significant dependent measures all indicated that associated women were perceived to be socially desirable.

DISCUSSION

We could not find any evidence that status and physical attractiveness were exchanged. Results of overall effects of dependent measures by a multivariate analysis did not show significant two-way interaction of status by association. Only intelligence measure showed a significant two-way effect by a univariate analysis. Although this effect is interpretable and provides some suggestions to future studies, in the present analysis, this result is not reliable and we can't draw any inference based on it.

The most reliable result obtained was the association effect. The woman associated with her boyfriend was perceived socially desirable in many measures.

This main association effect was obtained in the previous study (Onodera & Miura, 1990). In that study, we conducted two experiments and examined effects of physical attractiveness and association. Consistent association effect was observed in the both experiments. Therefore, having other sex partners seemed a very important factor for

interpersonal cognition in Japan. Considering the high facilitation for establishing a close relationship with the opposite sex in adolescence, and that our subjects are college students, it may be appropriate to say that this result can apply especially to young Japanese people. However, granting that it is so, this main association effect was not reported in previous studies using the association as one of the factors (Sigall & Landy, 1973; Meiners & Sheposh, 1977). Thus, high evaluation for a woman associated with a boy-friend is reflected as a distinguishing sense of value in Japanese young people. In a sense, their concern for having friends of the opposite sex seems to be in a more primitive stage. They paid much attention to the superficial dimension of interpersonal relationships, that is, whether she has an intimate boy-friend or not. And they make no account of what person she is associated with and how their relationship is.

Japanese young people may have a strong desire to associate with friends of the opposite sex, but many of them may have not achieved that yet. This explanation is partly supported by an immense popularity among young Japanese of blind date type programs (or OMAI type) on TV. It is possible that many shy, young people who can not approach the other sex find a compensatory satisfaction in these programs.

Considering these facts, the recognition of the exchangeability between beauty and wealth in Japan could be valid for the older generation.

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