

## MANIPULATED LUXURY-APARTMENT OWNERSHIP ENHANCES OPPOSITE-SEX ATTRACTION IN FEMALES BUT NOT MALES

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**Abstract.** Manipulated prestige car ownership has been shown previously to enhance male attractiveness. In the current study the illusion of status-linked property ownership was achieved by presenting a target male and female (matched for attractiveness) adopting a casual posture standing in either a ‘high status’ (luxury apartment) or a ‘neutral status’ (standard apartment) context. A between-subjects design was used with the photographic stimuli presented amongst other masking stimuli and rated for attractiveness by opposite-sex university undergraduate participants ( $N = 102$ ) on a scale of 1–10. The male model was rated significantly more attractive when presented to females in the high status compared to the neutral status context and was also adjudged to be significantly more attractive than the female target superimposed on an identical background. There was no significant difference in the female target models attractiveness ratings given by males across the two contexts. These results were obtained despite no sex-differences being found when separate participants were asked to rate the plausibility of each target model owning or renting the luxury property they were depicted in. These findings add to a growing body of work high-lighting the importance of contextual, evolutionarily relevant status cues in male attractiveness judgements.

**Keywords:** status, attractiveness enhancement, sex differences, context manipulation

### INTRODUCTION

Humans have evolved a complex array of psychological mechanisms specifically dedicated to the task of mate selection as a result of persistently encountering challenging mating problems over evolutionary time (BUSS 2003, 2007). TRIVERS (1972) theory of parental investment postulated that the sex that invests more in its offspring should be more ‘choosy’ when considering a potential mate. Making a poor mating decision has higher costs for the sex which invests the most. In humans women are the higher investing sex as a nine month pregnancy is the minimum obligatory investment needed to produce a child, notwithstanding years of subsequent lactation. A man’s minimum investment in producing the same child can theoretically take only one coital act (BJORKLUND and SHACKELFORD 1999; BUSS 2003, 2007). These sex differences in levels of minimum investment required when

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adopting a short-term mating strategy (such as a one off sexual encounter) suggests females should be the higher discriminating or choosier sex when selecting a mate, whereas men should be less choosy and be more vigorous with regards to intrasexual competition (competing against other males) for multiple females (BJORKLUND and SHACKELFORD 1999; BUSS and SCHMITT 1993; GEARY 1998). These sex differences in short-term mating strategies are supported by findings that men show more positive attitudes to low investment sex than women do (FISHER et al. 1988; OLIVER and HYDE 1993; TOWNSEND 1995; WILSON 1987), report higher levels of sexual fantasies involving multiple partners than women (ELLIS and SYMONS 1990; MALAMUTH 1996) and desire a greater number of sexual partners (SCHMITT 2003).

However, permanent or semi-permanent pair bonding is a ubiquitous feature of human behaviour. When a long-term (such as remaining with one partner for a number of years) mating strategy is adopted, males conditionally exhibit higher levels of parental investment and are more discriminating about who they mate with. Both sexes place similar high value on love, kindness, good health and intelligence in a prospective mate (BUSS 2003; LI et al. 2002; SHACKELFORD, SCHMITT and BUSS 2005). However, characteristics such as attractiveness and financial prospects are differentially appreciated across sexes (BUSS 2012; BUSS and BARNES 1986; EASTWICK and FINKEL 2008; LI and KENRICK 2006). Males have been shown to focus more on visual, physical attractiveness, whilst females have been shown to look for cues indicative of wealth and status (BUSS 1989, 2000; BUSS et al. 2001; EASTWICK and FINKEL 2008; LI et al. 2002; SHACKELFORD et al. 2005; SPRECHER et al. 1994; TOWNSEND and WASSERMAN, 1998; DUNN and SEARLE 2010). For this female preference for wealth and status in a long-term partner to have evolved, arguably, certain preconditions would have to have prevailed during our evolutionary past. According to BUSS (2012) ancestral men would have had to have the ability to accrue, control and defend resources and pre-requisites for survival. The amount of resources each man possessed and their willingness to invest these resources in a woman and her offspring would also have to have differed between men, as women would not have evolved a preference for resources if all men had equitable amounts and possessed an equal willingness to invest these in a partner and her offspring. Finally, the advantages of being with one man would also have had to outweigh the advantages of being with several men. These conditions are clearly evident in our species, with territory and tools being a resource that are accrued, controlled and defended by men worldwide and throughout recorded history. Men also vary greatly in the quantity of resources they have and how willing they are to invest these in a long-term partner (BUSS 2003, 2012). Further, with this line of reasoning in mind, as males differ in their inclination, ability or potential to invest in a female and her offspring, women should have evolved a preference for cues, whether direct or indirect, that accurately reveals such traits. The major advantage to a woman of being with one man during our evolutionary past would have been the females significantly increased likelihood of securing far more reliable resources for her offspring through a single spouse than through several temporary sex partners (BUSS 2007)

all of whom may be reluctant to commit time and resources to children who they do not relate to genetically and who could also feasibly pursue a strategy of enhancing direct fitness through multiple-matings. The social status of ancestral men would also have provided an appreciable indication of possession or potential to acquire resources, with those positioned at the top of the social hierarchy having many more resources than those with a lower social status (BUSS 2003).

Clearly when reviewing the evidence social status, along with ambition and slightly older age, are indeed qualities that women value in the opposite sex for a potential long-term partner (GOTTSCHALL et al. 2003, 2004; KHALLAD 2005). This female desire for males with high social status is supported by findings that women show a greater preference than men for earning potential or social status when asked what characteristics they consider important in a mate (BUSS 1989; BUSS and BARNES 1986; TOWNSEND 1989). Furthermore, financial security is more likely to be sought by women in personal advertisements whilst men are more likely to offer it (CAMERON et al. 1977; KOESTNER and WHEELER 1988). In contrast, men are generally not influenced by financial prospects when considering a potential mate (but see for example KENRICK et al. 2001) but focus more on physical attractiveness (BUSS 1989; BUSS and BARNES 1986; GOODWIN 1990; TOWNSEND 1989) as this provides cues to a woman's fertility and reproductive value (BUSS 2007; SINGH 1993). BUSS and SCHMITT (1993) examined female desirability of characteristics linked to social status in potential spouses for long-term mating, as contrasted with potential sex partners for short-term mating. Women highly desired success in a profession and the possession of a promising career in spouses only, but did not desire these characteristics in a sex partner suggesting that cues to future status are only desired when women are adopting a long-term mating strategy (but see for example, SUNDIE et al. 2011).

As outlined above the social status of men has a large impact on women's mate choices and preferences when adopting a long term mating strategy, as males with high social status have greater financial resources that the women can use to facilitate the survival prospects of their offspring (BUSS 2003). Men also strive to acquire wealth and status as obtaining these leads to increased mating opportunities thus promoting male fitness. Evidence supporting this has been documented across many polygynous societies where men have the ability to monopolize resources (ESCASA et al. 2010). Also, the amount of wives a man takes is predicted by his wealth (BORGERHOFF-MULDER, 1990; GOODALE 1971), with higher income men reporting greater frequency of sex, and having more biological children, than men of low income and high income women (HOPCROFT 2006). The children of men across cultures who are in a position of high social status have lower mortality rates than the children of non-high status men (GEARY 2000, 2005). These children also benefit in terms of psychological and physical health with mortality rates being low (ADLER et al. 1994). According to BUSS (2012) the closest proximity to ancestral conditions surviving today are evident in traditional hunter-gatherer societies and these are characterized by status hierarchies with resources accumulating at the top.

A study of 186 societies across cultures found that men with a high social status consistently possessed greater wealth and increased numbers of wives and provided better nourishment for their children (BETZIG 1986). This male parental investment is then one of the greatest benefits for women who chose to favour long-term mating strategies (BUSS and SCHMITT 1993). The man they choose to mate with may feed and protect their offspring, provide opportunities for learning, transfer power, status and resources (BUSS 1989). This female desire for males with financial prospects and social status has been supported by findings from a large-scale cross-cultural study (BUSS 1989; BUSS et al. 1990) in which males and females rated the desirability of 32 characteristics in a potential long-term mate. This study identified that universally women desired 'good financial prospects' and 'social status' in a mate significantly more so than men. This female preference for a prospective mate with wealth and status has also been identified in forty-eight cultural areas through analysis of folk tales (GOTTSCHALL et al. 2003). The ubiquitous nature of the above findings would appear to favour an explanation that the prioritized attraction for high-status men by women is an adaptation *par excellence* rather than an explanation based upon the transmission of cultural/media norms.

Research into modern Western mating behaviours, such as speed dating and online dating, has also demonstrated a female preference for potential partners with good financial resources. A study investigated female preferences during speed dating, in which people engage in four-minute conversations in order to establish whether they would like to meet up with a prospective mate again and found that females chose men who indicated that they had grown up in affluent neighbourhoods (FISMAN et al. 2006). It has also been found in online dating contexts that male income predicted the number of opposite-sex emails received but female income did not (HITSCH et al. 2006). EASTWICK and FINKEL'S (2008) speed dating study which included a longitudinal follow up supported previous research on traditional sex differences in the importance of physical attractiveness and earning prospects in an ideal partner and ideal speed date for males and females respectively. In Western societies having good financial prospects, access to economic resources and high social status can be measured and identified through looking at a person's bank balance or type of car the individual owns. These direct cues to male possession of resources and his level of social status, it would appear, evidentially influence a woman's perceptions of his ability to provide for her and her offspring in a long-term mating context which effects male physical attractiveness judgements. Enhanced male attractiveness has been shown previously by presenting male target models in contexts which lead to the perception that the target possesses wealth or a high social status by for example manipulating clothing or costume (HILL et al. 1987; TOWNSEND and LEVY 1990). This enhancement of male but not female attractiveness by manipulating perceived male wealth and status has more recently been demonstrated by DUNN and SEARLE (2010), who found that when a male was presented in a prestige car, females judged that male to be significantly more attractive than when he was presented to them in an inexpensive easily accessible car.

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Male judgments of female attractiveness did not vary across the conditions as the female target model's attractiveness ratings were similar in both contexts. SHULER and MCCORD (2010) demonstrated similar findings which support those of DUNN and SEARLE. They also attempted to manipulate the wealth and status of a male target model by placing him in close approximation to cars that were either very high in value (high status scenario), or much cheaper and more easily accessible cars (neutral scenario). They also found that the male was rated more attractive when he was being judged in the high status scenarios compared to the neutral scenarios. Although in modern Western cultures ownership of a luxury sports car can be seen as a powerful indicator of wealth and status, modern car financing means that ownership of a luxury sports car is not beyond the reach of individuals with more modest salaries (DUNN and SEARLE 2010). It is arguably more difficult again for such individuals who have not yet accumulated sufficient wealth and status to afford to own or even rent a luxury apartment in which case these cues can be an even more powerful and reliable indicator of wealth and status.

### **Current study**

Unlike previous studies that have manipulated wealth and status indicators that are potentially attainable by large numbers of men (clothes and cars), the current study manipulated ownership of the most 'status advertising' product known, a person's home. Male and female participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of the same opposite-sex target model (male and female target model matched for attractiveness) either presented in a high status context (stood in a relaxed position in a luxury apartment living area) or a neutral status context (stood in a relaxed position in the living area of an average apartment). Other cues that may enhance attractiveness judgements were omitted, for example both models were dressed casually with no other property or status enhancing cues present. In view of the previous findings emphasizing the importance of wealth and status cues for females when considering a long-term partner and how these can be manipulated experimentally, it was predicted that the female participants would rate the male target model significantly more attractive when presented to them in the high status context compared to the neutral context. It was also predicted that there would be no significant difference in the male attractiveness ratings given to the female target model across contexts as males have been shown previously to be oblivious to cues indicative of wealth and status when considering a potential mate's physical attractiveness.

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## METHOD

### Participants

#### Experimental study

Undergraduate level 1 and 2 psychology students from Cardiff Metropolitan University ( $N = 102$ ) were recruited (male mean age =  $21.9 \pm 3.4$ , female mean age  $21.3 \pm 3.7$ ) in lectures to take part in the study which was conducted on two consecutive days. On day one, female participants ( $n = 35$ ) rated the male target model in the neutral status context (control) followed by male participants ( $n = 14$ ) rating the female target model in the high status context (experimental). On day two, new female participants ( $n = 29$ ) rated the male target model in the high status context (experimental) followed by new male participants ( $n = 24$ ) rating the female target model in the neutral status context (control).

#### Preliminary and supplementary studies

20 ( $N = 10$  male/10 female) undergraduate students (male mean age  $22.1 \pm 2.2$ , female mean age  $23.1 \pm 6.5$ ) once again from Cardiff Metropolitan University participated in a preliminary study in which they estimated the age and attractiveness of four potential opposite-sex target models of which one from each sex was chosen for use in the main study (above). Also a separate group of  $N = 20$  (10 male, 10 female) undergrads were presented with the opposite-sex target model in the luxury apartment scenario (supplementary study) and asked to rate the model in terms of his/her likelihood of owning or renting the property that he/she was depicted in.

### Design

A between-subjects factorial design was used. The independent variables were sex (male/female) and status (high status luxury apartment background/neutral status standard apartment). The dependant variable was the attractiveness rating given for each opposite-sex target model on a scale of 1–10 (1 being very unattractive and 10 being very attractive).

### Materials

#### Target stimuli

*Selection of the target models.* The photographic stimuli were created by selecting pictures of four males and four females in casual clothing, stood in a relaxed position (to create the illusion of ownership), where the photo of the individual was almost full length (so that they could be realistically superimposed onto the high status and neutral status context backgrounds) extracted from the website “Hot or

Not". The age of the targets selected was between 27–32 years old as it was considered that they would have to be roughly 30 years old in order to be perceived as having realistically accrued sufficient wealth to obtain or even rent a luxury apartment. The target models (8 in total) were then rated by opposite-sex undergraduate participants ( $N = 20$ ) in a pilot study for attractiveness on a scale of 1–10 (1 being very unattractive and 10 being very attractive) who also had their age estimated. The target models were selected by comparing each individual models overall attractiveness scores and age to establish that there was no significant difference in the perceived age or attractiveness of the male and female models selected for the main study.

### **Development of the target stimuli**

A photo editing programme (Gimp 2) was used to remove the background from the photos of selected targets and these were then superimposed onto a background photo of a regular or standard living area of an apartment (selected from Google images) which then became the stimulus for the target models in the neutral status context. In order to create the high status (luxury apartment) context stimuli, a photo of a luxury apartment living area was selected from Google images and the target models were superimposed onto this background. After the initial target stimuli had been created, it appeared that the male and female target models selected did not "fit" well with the high context scenario due to the style of clothing worn, hair style and visible tattoo's on the female which arguably diminished the illusion of ownership sought by the experimenters. Every effort was made by the researchers to foster this illusion of ownership in the creation of the target stimuli and therefore a new male and female target model from the pilot study were selected and superimposed onto the same neutral and high status contexts chosen for the original targets. The new target models could more realistically be perceived as "owning" or even "renting" the high status luxury apartment they were presented in and the new stimuli created using these models was employed for use in the main study. In order to quantify this perception of ownership, 10 separate male and female undergrads were presented with the high status contexts and asked to indicate on a scale of 1–10 the likelihood of the models owning or renting the property. The male and female target models presented in the stimuli used in the experimental conditions were still matched in terms of age and attractiveness (see *Figure 1* below).

### **Masking stimuli**

Masking stimuli (random photos of the opposite sex) were also extracted from the website "Hot or Not" (9 males/9 females) resulting in 10 photographic stimuli to be judged for attractiveness by each sex. These 'distracter photos' were employed and presented in such a manner as a way of minimizing the participant's ability to second guess the nature and purpose of the study.

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*Figure 1.* Images of the male and female target stimuli as presented to participants. Each target model was presented in both a neutral (above) context (presented in an average apartment) and in a high (below) status context (presented in a luxury apartment)

### Rating scale

Ratings scales were provided for participants to record the attractiveness of the opposite sex photographic stimuli presented on a scale of 1–10 (see above).

### Procedure

Data collection took place on two separate days. Participants were recruited during lectures to take part in the study and offered a course credit. Those who wished to participate (all students present in the two lectures attended) were given a consent form and a rating scale on which to judge the target stimuli's attractiveness. Participants were then instructed to rate the opposite-sex photos that were to be presented on the scale of 1–10 (see above) and informed that they would be presented with the photographic stimuli for 5 second intervals with a 5 second inter stimulus interval and brief message (e.g. "*Figure 2 coming up next*"). The stimuli were presented to

the male and female participants separately on PowerPoint and displayed at the front of the lecture theatre using a projector. Model presentation was counterbalanced i.e. on day 1 females were exposed to the neutral context male photo, males were exposed to the high status female photo and vice versa on day 2. Once all data had been collected, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions relating to the nature of the study and debriefed.

### Method of analysis

Data was analysed using 'SPSS 19.0'. This programme was used to conduct a two-way between-subjects ANOVA exploring main effects, interaction and appropriate simple main effect analyses.

## RESULTS

### Target models matched for age and attractiveness

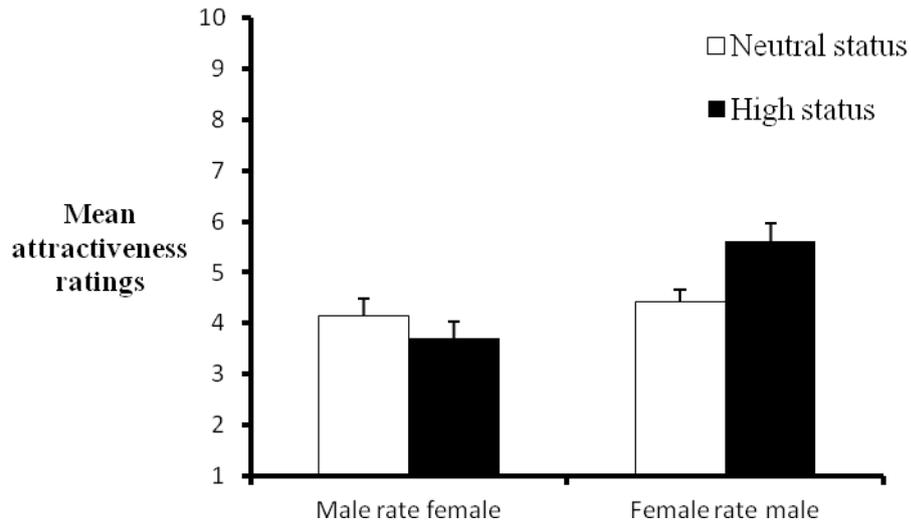
A pilot study was conducted prior to the creation of the target stimuli in order to establish that there was no significant difference between the perceived age and attractiveness of the male and female target models to be employed in the main study. An independent  $t$  test found no significant differences between the target models age ( $t_{18} = -1.42, p > .05$ ) or attractiveness ( $t_{18} = -1.78, p > .05$ ). Thus, any differences in attractiveness scores given between sexes revealed in the main study could be attributed to the experimental manipulation of wealth and status alone. Another statistical comparison revealed no sex differences were evident when participants were asked to adjudge the likelihood of the models depicted in the photos owning or renting the property they were presented in (male =  $7.2 \pm 1.6$ , female =  $6.9 \pm 1.9$ ,  $t_{18} = 1.82, p > .05$ ).

### The effects of context on opposite-sex attractiveness ratings

Data was analysed using a  $2 \times 2$ , between-subjects ANOVA with a between-subjects factor of sex (male/female) and a between-subjects factor of context (neutral/high status). Analysis showed a significant main effect of sex ( $F_{1, 98} = 8.7, p < 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ ), no significant main effect of context ( $F < 1$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .004$ ), however there was a significant sex  $\times$  context interaction ( $F_{1, 98} = 6.9, p < 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ ). Further simple main effect analyses showed no significant difference between male and female attractiveness ratings in the neutral status context ( $F < 1$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .001$ ), however the male was judged as being significantly more attractive by females when presented in the high status context compared to males rating the female presented in the high status context ( $F_{1, 98} = 12.8, p < 0.01$ , partial

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$\eta^2 = .12$ ). The second simple main effect analysis showed no significant difference in males attractiveness ratings for the female in either context ( $F_{1,98} = 1.3, p > 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), however the male was adjudged as being more attractive by females when presented in the high status scenario compared to the neutral status scenario ( $F_{1,98} = 9.5, p < 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ).



*Figure 2.* Male and female target models mean attractiveness ratings as given by opposite-sex participants in both the high status (luxury apartment) context and the neutral context. The male target model is rated as being significantly more attractive in the high compared to the neutral status context and as being significantly more attractive to females when presented in the high status scenario compared to male ratings of the female in the same scenario. The female was rated as being of comparable attractiveness by males irrespective of context. Values = mean  $\pm$  SEM

## DISCUSSION

In this study wealth and status was manipulated through presenting target models (matched for attractiveness) in a 'high status' context comprising the target posing casually within a luxury apartment (with the endeavour to create the illusion of ownership) or 'neutral status' context (target posing in an average apartment). The results showed that the male target model was found to be rated as significantly more attractive when presented to female participants in the high status context compared to the neutral status context despite there being no physical differences present in either photograph as he was presented superimposed onto each scenario, thus presented to participants dressed in identical clothing, positioned identically and with the same facial expression. There was no significant difference in the at-

tractiveness ratings given to the female target model (who was also superimposed onto each context and therefore had no physical differences present in her appearance) across the two contexts and surprisingly male participants rated her slightly less attractive in the high status context compared to the neutral context, however this difference was not statistically significant. The experimental photographs did equally convey to opposite-sex raters this illusion of ownership as both sexes in a separate rating exercise rated the plausibility/likelihood of the target models owning or renting the property similarly.

The finding of no enhancement in the female model's attractiveness ratings in the 'high status' scenario supports previous research findings (DUNN and SEARLE 2010). DUNN and SEARLE (2010), also depicted a female in a 'high status' (seated in a prestige car) compared to a 'neutral status' (seated in an inexpensive car) context showing no significant difference in the attractiveness ratings men gave the woman across the two contexts. This suggests that men are oblivious to, or at least de-emphasize, external status cue information when judging female attractiveness and instead appear to focus more on visual physical attractiveness of the female as supported by previous research (Buss 2000; EASTWICK and FINKEL 2008; LI et al. 2002; SHACKELFORD et al. 2005; SPRECHER et al. 1994). In support of this sex differential focus on status, DEWALL and MANER (2008) using eye-tracking technology, discovered that male and female participants evidenced higher fixation rates on high status males compared to females, however, female attractiveness was shown to more potently captivate both male and female attention. Whether or not women are motivated to accumulate wealth and status to attract men is debatable. Whatever the motivation, contemporaneous women account for almost half of all millionaires in the UK and around 1 in 4 of *Management Today* magazines annual list of the top 100 Entrepreneurs – (www.thisismoney.co.uk, 2011). Websites now exist that cater to women who flaunt their wealth in an attempt to attract men such as "EliteMeeting" and "RichSingles". However, the results of this and other studies suggest that if women are attempting to increase the likelihood of attracting males through status enhancement, then this may indeed be a futile endeavour. Fitness enhancement as measured by frequency of sex and higher numbers of biological children has been shown to occur more so in high income males compared to high income females (HOPCROFT 2006).

The current studies results showing that male attractiveness can be enhanced experimentally by manipulating the perceived wealth and status of the male when being judged by the opposite-sex supports previous research findings (DUNN and SEARLE 2010; HILL et al. 1987; SHULER and MCCORD 2010; TOWNSEND and LEVY 1990). SHULER and MCCORD (2010) reported similar findings to DUNN and SEARLE (2010) by also experimentally manipulating the perceived level of status and resource acquisition of a male model by placing him next to cars of varying values in order to convey the illusion of ownership. Female participant's attractiveness judgements were also shown to be higher when the male was positioned next to more expensive prestige cars which are indicative of a high level of social status.

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This enhancement of male attractiveness as judged by females through perceived acquisition of wealth and status is not limited to Western societies. In contemporary tribal communities, where the indigenous villagers remain hunter-horticulturalists such as in Conambo, Ecuador, social status of a male is still measured demonstrably through warrior-ship and hunting ability (ESCASA et al. 2010). Status has also been shown to be associated with physical size, age and degree of social support (VON RUEDEN et al. 2008). Male hunting ability is a good indicator of his potential to provide resources to a female mate and her offspring (BLIEGE BIRD and SMITH 2005). It has also been found in the Tsimane of Bolivia that successful male hunters have more attractive wives, higher levels of fertility and are rated as more influential than those who are unsuccessful (GURVEN et al. 2009).

As referred to earlier, previous research has found that male attractiveness can be enhanced by manipulating perceived status through clothing worn (HILL et al. 1987; TOWNSEND and LEVY 1990). The luxury apartment cues used in the current study are clearly an honest advertisement of wealth and status as it is very difficult to acquire or even rent an expensive apartment without first accumulating sufficient resources and status to be able to reside in such a property. Although previous cues used such as clothing worn and prestige car ownership are sufficient to enhance the perceived wealth and status of an individual, it is arguably easier in modern Western societies to obtain such items even for individuals with more modest salaries due to such facilities as car financing and loans. However, ownership of an expensive luxury house is clearly indicative of considerable wealth and status as it is financially well beyond the reach of those individuals who have not yet been able to obtain sufficient wealth to purchase or even rent such a property. Displays of luxury expenditures that consumers make (a term known as conspicuous consumption) and even wasteful extravagance of such consumables have been found to enhance social status leading to favourable treatment in social interactions which also increases mating opportunities and furthermore yields fitness benefits (NELISSEN and MEIJERS 2011). For example men have been shown to increase their motivation to engage in publicly displayed consumption strategically in a mating context (GRISKEVICIUS et al. 2007). Also, it appears that engagement in conspicuous acts of consumption result in elevation in testosterone (T) levels (SAAD and VONGAS 2009). It appears then that it may be adaptive for men to display luxury consumption for example through purchasing a sports car or expensive house/apartment as a way of enhancing their social status, leading to more mating opportunities and higher levels of fitness. Research has shown that the higher the man's socio-economic status the higher the chance that he will actually marry (POLLET and NETTLE 2007).

In the current study every effort was made to create the illusion of ownership in the depiction of the target models in the luxury apartment scenario and the target models selected were around the age of 30 years old (as it was considered that they would need to be at least 30 to have realistically had enough time to be able to accumulate the wealth necessary to be able to afford such consumables). That said it

may be perceived as unrealistic that a male of 30 would have obtained such wealth to be able to afford to buy such an expensive luxury home. This however was not the case. The findings do suggest that female participants perceived the male model in the 'high status' context to have acquired a high level of resources and status due to the attractiveness enhancing effects observed in the results. Future studies using similar methodologies employed in the current research could explore the effects of experimentally manipulated wealth and status on attractiveness ratings when the target models presented are considered as a potential short-term partner compared to a potential long-term partner. Previous research would suggest that the 'high status' contextual cues which have been shown to enhance male attractiveness when being considered in a long-term mating context would no longer apply when being considered as a short-term partner only. This is due to the fact that a woman's focus appears to be redirected from status and economic resource cues to more physical cues which signal health and genetic fitness of the male such as facial symmetry, height, or body-build (BUSS and SCHMITT 1993; GANGESTAD and SIMPSON 2000; LI and KENRICK 2006; WIEDERMAN and DUBOIS 1998). Future research studies will also examine the effects of the menstrual cycle on female judgement of the attractiveness of a male model presented in a status enhancing context. In support of previous research findings that females who are ovulating focus much more intently on physical attractiveness cues in males signalling gene strength and genetic fitness (GANGESTAD et al. 2005; PILLSWORTH and HASELTON 2006; PROVOST et al. 2008), then perhaps status cues would be less likely to have an 'attractiveness enhancing' effect. Although the current study did claim that the focus was on long-term mating strategies and opposite-sex characteristics desired in a potential long-term mate this was not controlled for as the participants were not told to rate the opposite-sex targets for attractiveness whilst considering them only as a potential long-term mate. Therefore, some participants may have made judgments of attractiveness based on short-term mating considerations. As a point of emphasis, researchers have argued that wealth and status cue information is afforded diminished consideration by females seeking a male as a short-term partner, as they focus more on physical attractiveness and cues signalling genetic fitness (BUSS and SCHMITT 1993; GANGESTAD and SIMPSON 2000; LI and KENRICK 2006). However, a recent study has shown that flamboyant advertisement of wealth and status is projected by men seeking short-term as opposed to long-term mating strategies, that women perceived men who ostentatiously consumed as being interested in short-term mating and perhaps more importantly their desirability to the opposite sex was enhanced when they were considered as a short-term but not as a long-term partner (SUNDIE et al. 2011). Future studies could also attempt to extricate evolutionary from cultural explanations for the attractiveness-enhancing effects of status cues using contemporary cues peculiar to non-Western societies that represent status in that given culture (e.g. exploring the attractiveness enhancing effects of a large herd of cattle in traditional pastoral communities). Additionally, the conception of a methodology that can demonstrate

unequivocally that women desire high status men in order to secure investment and not simply to avoid poverty would be welcome.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, experimental manipulation of wealth and status using luxury apartment cues resulted in enhancement of male but not female attractiveness. The findings from the current study support previous research findings in which female judgement of male attractiveness has been enhanced using experimental manipulation of status cues such as clothing or prestige sports car ownership (DUNN and SEARLE 2010; HILL, NOCKS and GARDNER 1987; SHULER and MCCORD 2010; TOWNSEND and LEVY 1990). Female preference for wealth and status is not exclusively Western however, as status and economic resource cues have also been shown to predict male attractiveness across cultures (ESCASA et al. 2010). To date no previous research has used such powerful cues indicative of wealth and status as the luxury apartment cues used in the present study and the use of such cues resulted in a dramatic increase in attractiveness ratings given to the male model depicted in the high status scenario compared to the neutral status scenario. The lack of an attractiveness enhancement effect in female ratings across the two contexts is also supported by previous research in which a female model depicted in a 'high-status' or 'neutral-status' context was rated similarly in attractiveness (DUNN and SEARLE 2010). The research findings from the current study may have important practical applications for the marketing and advertising industry (see SAAD 2007 for an illuminating and insightful criticism of the failure of marketing, as a discipline, to incorporate Darwinian logic into mainstream psychology research). Research into the evolutionary basis of characteristics men and women desire in a partner or desire in themselves to help attract a partner can be used in marketing and advertising to attract consumers by enhancing product desirability and therefore facilitate product sales.

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