

Intrasexual Competition among Males: The Influence of Conspicuous Consumption on the Attractiveness of Men

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Introduction

Although luxurious products are not necessarily more useful than cheaper products that perform the same function, most people spend high sums of money on conspicuous products. If it's not because they are more useful, then why does that happen? One possible explanation is that that has nothing to do with utility, however has to do with ostentation of resources and, consequently, with reproductive success (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2009; Veblen, 1965).

Men who signal the possession of more resources are considered more attractive by women (Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010; Wang et al., 2018). More resources indicate higher social status, and the higher the social status, the greater the male reproductive success (Dunn & Searle, 2010; Dunn & Hill, 2014).

That is in line with the sexual selection theory (Darwin, 1871). According to Darwin, species may change according to selective environmental pressures and the choice of the opposite sex. That is called intersexual competition. However, sexual selection can also occur via intrasexual competition. In that case, individuals of the same sex compete for reproductive access to the opposite sex.

There are evidence that much of the sexual dimorphism in the human species is due to an evolutionary history of competition between men (Puts, 2010). For example, on average, men tend to be larger than women, which may be an indication of an evolutionary history marked by conflicts between men, in which larger and more muscular men tend to take advantage. Likewise, a thicker voice, facial hair and the ability to build tools may have had a role not only in attracting the female sex, but also in competing with other men. In more peaceful contexts, such as the current historical period, it is possible that aggressive forms of competition have been replaced by less aggressive forms (weapon-like behaviors vs. ornament-like behaviors, e.g., Chen & Chang, 2015). One such form may be competition via ostentation of luxury products, such as conspicuous cars (Hennighausen, Hudders, Lange, & Fink, 2016).

Thus, ostentation of conspicuous consumption is linked not only to intersexual competition, but also to intrasexual competition. For example, Saad and Vongas (2009) found that men's testosterone levels increase when driving a luxury car in front of a female audience, but not driving popular cars, or when there is no audience. Hennighausen et al. (2016) found that men engage more in conspicuous consumption in contexts of intrasexual competition than in control situations.

Goal

This study aimed to verify whether the type of displayed consumption (popular or luxury car) would influence attractiveness of men judged by other heterosexual men.

Method

Participants

The participants were 190 heterosexual men, mean age 29.4 years ($SD = 9.19$).

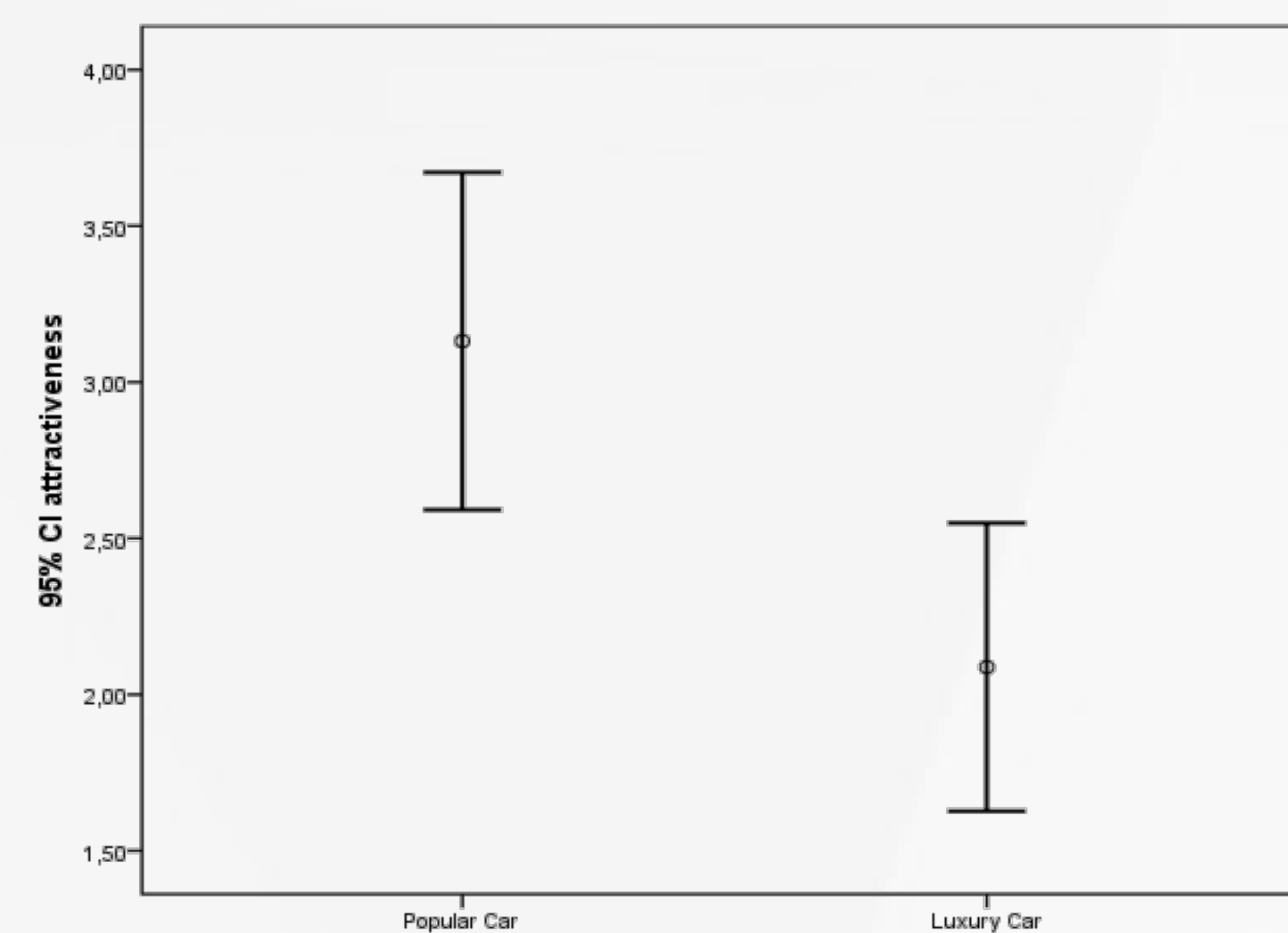
Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two types of questionnaires. One questionnaire showed a photo with a man in front of a popular car, and then the participants were asked to judge the attractiveness of the man in the picture ($N=99$). The other questionnaire was identical, except that the photo had a luxury car ($N=91$).



Results

Our results showed that the man in front of the luxury car was considered less attractive ($M=2.09$, $DP=2.21$), compared to the man next to the popular car ($M=3.13$, $DP=2.71$); $t(185.5) = 2.92$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.42$.



Discussion

Our results reinforces the idea that men considered rivals in the competition for the opposite sex (e.g. men with high purchasing power) would engage in behaviors that would depreciate the rival's advantageous attributes. As other studies shows (Saad & Vongas, 2009; Hennighausen et al., 2016), the exhibition of luxury products seems to play an important role in both intersexual and intrasexual selection.

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