

Do women perceive other women in red as more sexually receptive?

July 11 2014

Previous research has shown that men perceive the color red on a woman to be a signal of sexual receptivity. Women are more likely to wear a red shirt when they are expecting to meet an attractive man, relative to an unattractive man or a woman. But do women view other women in red as being more sexually receptive? And would that result in a woman guarding her mate against a woman in red? A study published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* sought to answer these questions.

Perceptions of Sexual Receptivity

Nonverbal communication via body language, facial expressions and clothing conveys information to others, occasionally with unintended social consequences. Researchers from the University of Rochester, Trnava University, and the Slovak Academy of Sciences collaborated to study what information the color red conveys to women.

Three experiments were involved in the study. The first experiment asked individuals to compare a digital image of a woman wearing red versus a woman wearing white. Participants were asked questions about the woman's sexual receptivity, such as "This person is interested in sex," which required moving a bar along a sliding scale from "No, not at all" to "Yes, definitely." Participants rated the woman in red as more sexually receptive than the woman in white. Sixty-nine percent of participants reported they were in a committed relationship, and the

results of the experiment showed that participant's relationship status did not have a significant effect on their perceptions of women in white versus red.

Derogation and Mate-Guarding

The researchers tested whether participants would derogate a woman in red and the likelihood of guarding their mate from a woman in red in subsequent experiments. "Derogation [involves] speaking poorly of another person to make them seem inferior, undesirable, or unlikeable, while making oneself seem superior and more likable by

contrast," lead researcher Adam Pazda explains. "Mate-guarding is the act of protecting one's own romantic partner from romantic or sexual encounters with others." The researchers specifically tested whether women would derogate on the topics of fidelity ("I would guess that this woman cheats on men"), and financial resources ("I would guess that this woman has no money").

The third and final experiment altered the conditions slightly. Instead of comparing white and red, the researchers chose to compare green and red in an effort to eliminate the possible bias of associating white and purity. "Using green allowed us to equate both hues on lightness and chroma, which allowed for a more rigorous, controlled test of the red effect," Pazda said. The participants were located in an Eastern European country, rather than the U.S. as in the two prior experiments. To determine intent to mate-guard, participants were asked: "How likely would you be to introduce this person to your boyfriend?" and "How likely would you be to let your boyfriend spend time alone with this person?"

Results from the last two experiments confirmed that women found another woman in red to be more sexually receptive, versus white or

green. In terms of derogation, participants who viewed a woman in red were more likely to derogate the woman's sexual fidelity, but not financial resources. Participants did not show any difference between sexual fidelity derogation and financial resource derogation in relation to a woman in white. Women were more likely to guard their partner from a woman dressed in red if they are in a committed relationship, relative to a [woman](#) in green.

More information: Pazda, A.D., Prokop, P., and Elliot, A.J. (2014). Red and Romantic Rivalry: Viewing Another Woman in Red Increases Perceptions of Sexual Receptivity, Derogation and Intentions to Mate-Guard. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(10).

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

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