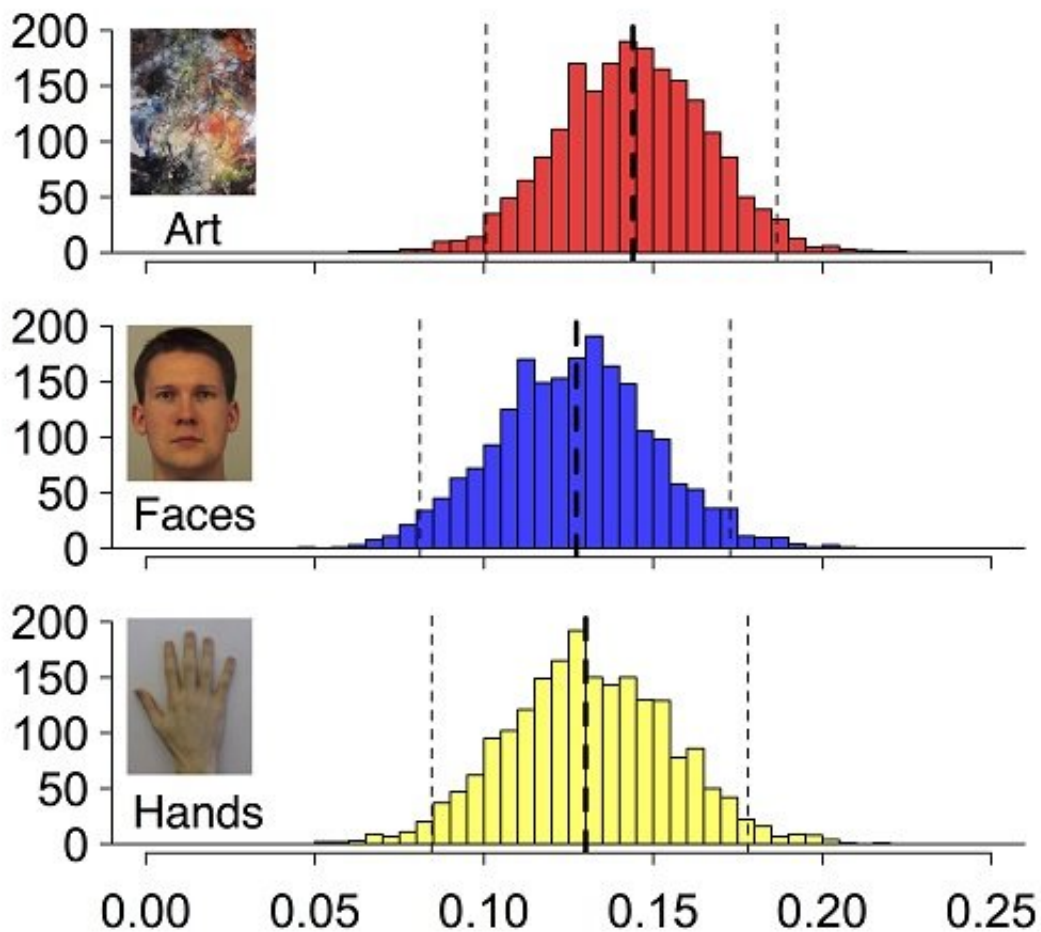


Mate-choice copying in humans – are all the taken men good?

January 29 2018



Social influence by condition. Credit: Street et al

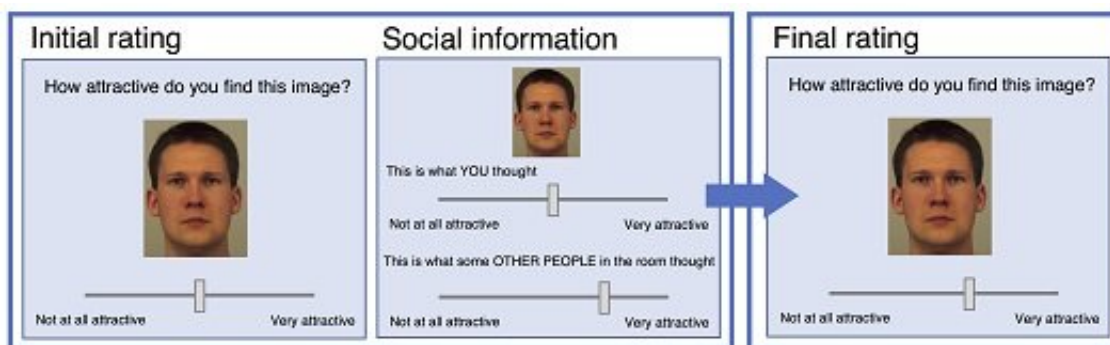
A new study by researchers from the Universities of St Andrews, Durham, Exeter and Arizona State finds that men get an 'attractiveness

boost' from being chosen by others – but so do abstract works of art.

The study, led by Dr. Kate Cross from the School of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of St Andrews, published in *Scientific Reports* today (29 January), casts doubt on the theory that evolution favoured [women](#) who were attracted to other women's partners.

Mate-choice copying is a tendency to find potential partners more attractive when they have already been chosen as a partner by someone else. Many species of bird and fish show mate-choice copying, which helps females to select high-quality males as sexual partners and therefore provides an evolutionary advantage.

Some high-profile studies have appeared to show mate-choice copying in humans. The theory is that women are especially attracted to men who are already partnered because they can be assumed to be kind and faithful – which makes them 'good mates'. However, previous evidence has been thrown into question by the new study, which showed that women also copy the choices of others when asked about the attractiveness of other types of stimuli such as art.



Credit: University of St Andrews

Dr. Cross, lead author of the study, said: "Women in our study found men's faces more attractive if other women had given that face high ratings. But the same goes for pictures of abstract artworks. Women appear to copy the mate preferences of other women, but this might simply be because humans have a general tendency to be influenced by the opinions of others."

The study also showed that including lesbian and bisexual women in the experiment didn't change the results – which suggests that women are influenced the same way, whether or not they view men as [potential partners](#).

Joint author of the paper, Dr. Sally Street, Assistant Professor from the Department of Anthropology, Durham University, said: "Social influence affects every area of our lives, and this could include [partner choice](#). But there isn't, at the moment, clear experimental evidence of a specialised mate-choice [copying](#) mechanism in humans."

When making judgements about attractiveness, it seems the opinions of other people matter, regardless of who, or what, is being judged.

More information: Sally E. Street et al. Human mate-choice copying is domain-general social learning, *Scientific Reports* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-018-19770-8](#)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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