

TOWARD THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL SELF: A SEXUAL SELECTION PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this abstract is to develop a theoretical framework that draws heavily on the notions of evolutionary psychology and sexual selection as a means of providing insight into the forces that govern the construction of the ideal-self. Also, this abstract links how these evolutionary forces, along with the moderating role of self-monitoring, govern decisions pertaining to public consumption.

Evolutionary Psychology and Sexual Selection

Evolutionary psychology is the synthesis of psychology and evolutionary biology (Colarelli and Dettmann 2003). Evolutionary psychology seeks to trace current human behavior back to prehistoric humans in the belief that human psychology has remained largely the same due to the slow pace of evolutionary change (Saad and Gill 2000). Of particular interest to this abstract is the evolutionary concept developed by Darwin (1871) of sexual selection. Sexual selection states that traits of an organism are developed or evolve because they are attractive to the opposite sex. Sexual selection is related to the success of an individual over another of the same sex.

Through a series of cross-cultural studies, Buss (1989) found that across cultures males tend to value physical attractiveness and youth in their mates, whereas females value financial resources, wealth and status among their mates. For pre-historic males, ensuring that their genes were successfully passed on meant finding a mate healthy enough to bear children and survive the nurturing of those children. A key indicator of this was youth and beauty. Females did not hunt and were dependent on males to provide for them, therefore women required men who could provide food and resources for them and their children.

Sexual Selection, the ideal-self and the moderating role of self-monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to the amount a person observes social cues and allows their subsequent behavior to be dictated by these social cues (Snyder 1979). High self-monitors are especially conscious of social cues and use these cues to determine how they should present themselves in social situations. Low self-monitors rely on their values and beliefs related to who they are as a guide for determining behavior in social situations (Snyder and Gangestad 1986). Graeff (1996) found that high-self monitors are more likely to make public consumption decisions based on congruence with their ideal-self while private consumption is typically more aligned with products and brands congruent with the actual-self.

Sexual selection suggests that in order for a man to attract a suitable mate he should possess either enough resources or power to obtain the resources needed to care for potential offspring. The possession of these resources makes the man attractive to potential female partners. The interpretation of social cues by the high self-monitor may lead them to want to be a person (ideal self) of wealth and status; therefore, their subsequent purchasing decisions will be governed by that want. This results in purchases that are believed to transmit the traits of an ideal mate, as prescribed by sexual selection. In other words, it is believed that for high self-monitoring individuals the notions of sexual selection help guide public consumption purchasing decisions. It is from this logic that the following research propositions are suggested.

P1: In public consumption situations, high self- monitoring males will purchase more perceived wealth having/enhancing brands than low-self monitoring males

P2: In public consumption situations, high self- monitoring females will purchase more perceived youth having/enhancing brands than low self monitoring females.