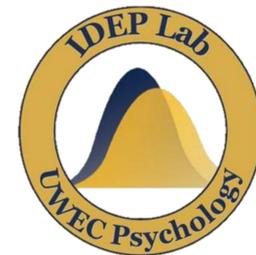




SEX DIFFERENCES IN ATTRACTION TO OPPOSITE-SEX FRIENDS: AN ARTIFACT OF SAMPLING METHOD?

April Bleske-Rechek, Whitney Joseph, and Heather Williquette
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



BACKGROUND

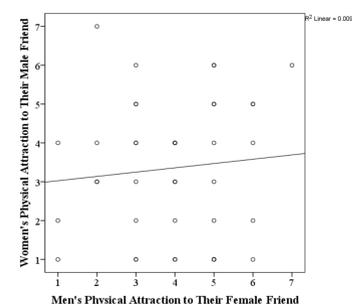
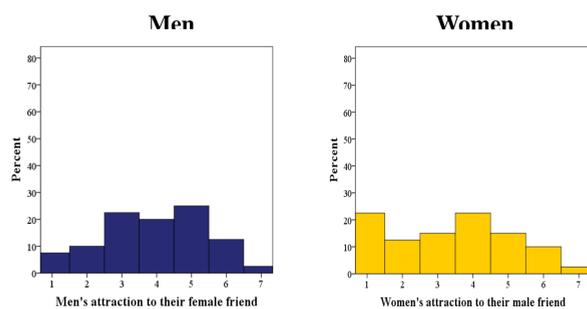
- Men's and women's disparate sexual strategies and mate preferences manifest in their opposite-sex friendship psychology. Men more than women view sexual attraction and mateship opportunities as a benefit of opposite-sex friendships (Bleske & Buss, 2000); desire physical and sexual attractiveness in an opposite-sex friend (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001); and prioritize physical attractiveness in their opposite-sex friends (Lewis et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2012).
- In studies in which young adults are asked to either think of an opposite-sex friend or bring an opposite-sex friend to the lab, men report more physical and sexual attraction to their friend than women do (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012; Kaplan & Keys, 1997) and more sexual and romantic interest in their friends than women do (Koenig et al., 2007).
- Do these sex differences in attraction and sexual interest occur because men and women have fundamentally different types of people in mind when they think of an "opposite-sex friend" to rate or bring to the lab? In the current research, we aimed to determine if the sex difference in attraction replicates in naturally occurring samples of opposite-sex friendship pairs.

METHOD

- For each study, two researchers approached pairs of individuals at the university student union and asked them if they were interested in participating in a study of dyads.
- The first sample was collected during the 2013-2014 academic year. Researchers approached male-female dyads; the final sample included 40 male-female friendship pairs and 37 dating couples.
- The second sample was collected during the 2014-2015 academic year as part of a larger study of assortment in personal relationships; the sample included same-sex friends as well, but here we report on attraction ratings from the 38 pairs of opposite-sex friends and 19 dating couples who participated.
- Each member of the dyad independently completed a brief questionnaire.
- In addition to demographics and other items that we included for purposes outside of this analysis, participants used a seven-point scale to report the degree to which they were physically attracted to their partner (*Not at all* to *Moderately* to *Extremely*). Each member of the dyad also reported the status of their relationship: *just friends*, *in a romantic relationship*, or *other* (e.g., "it's complicated").

RESULTS

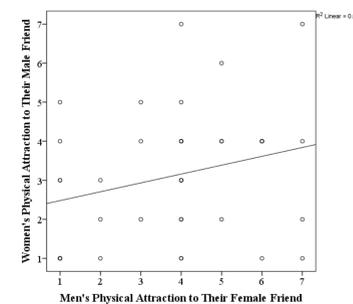
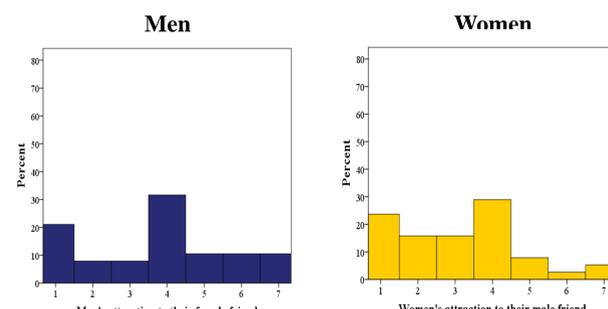
SAMPLE 1: FRIENDS (N=40)



In these naturally occurring samples of opposite-sex friends, men and women varied widely in how physically attracted they were to their opposite-sex friend. In the first sample, 60% of men and 50% of women reported being at least moderately attracted to their friend; in the second sample, 68% of men and 46% of women reported being at least moderately attracted to their friend.

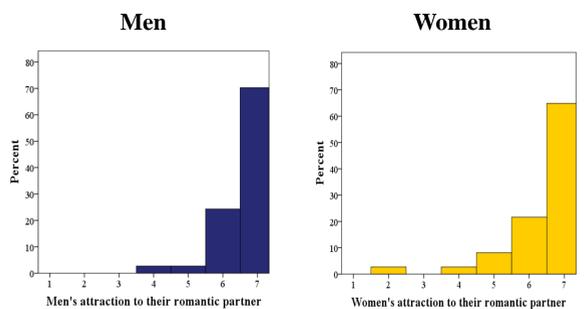
Similar to what has been documented in previous samples of friendship pairs (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012), one friend's attraction to their partner did not predict their partner's attraction toward them, Sample 1 $r(40) = .10, p = .556$; Sample 2 $r(38) = .26, p = .112$. (See scatter plots at left and right.)

SAMPLE 2: FRIENDS (N=38)

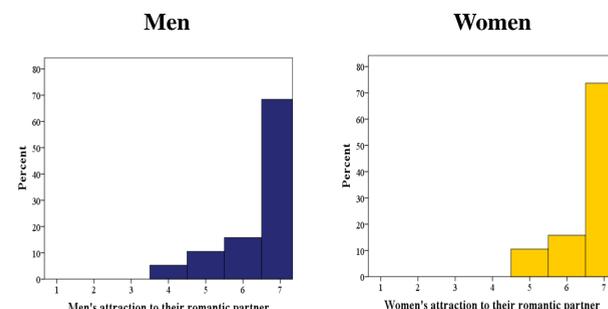


SAMPLE 1: DATING COUPLES (N=37)

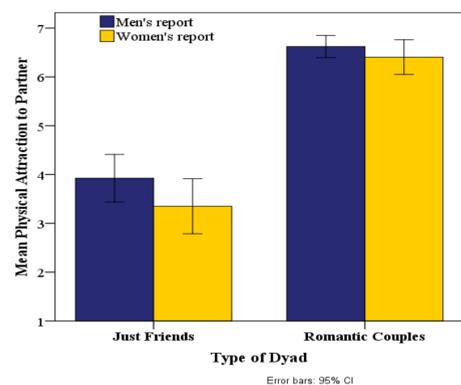
In stark contrast to the varied levels of attraction men and women reported toward the opposite-sex friend they happened to be with when we surveyed them, the men and women in romantic couples were nearly all highly attracted to one another. In both samples, approximately 2/3 of men and women reported being "extremely attracted" to their romantic partner.



SAMPLE 2: DATING COUPLES (N=19)

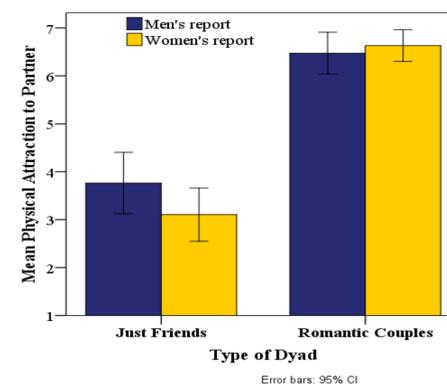


SAMPLE 1: FRIENDS AND DATING COUPLES



Men's and women's mean level of physical attraction to the opposite-sex friend they were with when we surveyed them was low-to-moderate. In contrast to what has been documented in previous samples of young adult friends, these men and women did not differ significantly in their reported level of physical attraction, and the magnitude of the sex differences was weak, Sample 1: $t(39) = 1.64, p = .109, d = 0.26$; Sample 2: $t(37) = 1.83, p = .076, d = 0.30$.

SAMPLE 2: FRIENDS AND DATING COUPLES



DISCUSSION

- In past studies of opposite-sex friendship, men and women have been asked to nominate a specific friend to describe or participate with them. In those studies, men have consistently reported more physical and sexual attraction toward their friends than women have.
- To test the possibility that sex differences in attraction occur because men and women have fundamentally different types of people in mind when they think of an "opposite-sex friend," we sampled pairs of friends naturalistically, by approaching dyads who were spending time eating or chatting together in a student lounging area.
- In these natural samples, men did not report significantly more attraction toward their opposite-sex friends than women did; in fact, both men's and women's attraction ratings varied widely.
- Our findings suggest that men's and women's everyday experiences with opposite-sex friends might differ from their mental characterizations of opposite-sex friends. We speculate that men more often mentally define an opposite-sex friend as "a member of the opposite sex to whom I am attracted and would pursue given the opportunity," and women more often mentally define an opposite-sex friend as "a friend of the opposite sex."

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