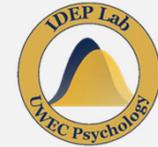




# She's Just Not That Into You: Discrepant Levels of Attraction Between Opposite-Sex Friends

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## Introduction

- In studies that ask young men and women to think about their opposite-sex friends, or to bring an opposite-sex friend into the lab, men report stronger physical and sexual attraction to their female friends than women do to their male friends.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Moreover, young men tend to over-estimate their female friend's level of attraction to them, whereas women under-estimate their male friend's attraction to them.<sup>1,2,4</sup>
- In two recent studies involving opposite-sex friendship dyads gathered via natural sampling, however, the sex difference in attraction was weaker<sup>5</sup> than that documented in previous studies. It is difficult to know whether the smaller sex difference is a valid reflection of friendship dynamics or whether it is due to variation in question prompts (i.e., asking about physical attraction as opposed to romantic or sexual attraction) or sampling method (i.e., natural sampling as opposed to asking people about their friends).
- In this study we utilized natural sampling to acquire a set of male-female dyads, and asked male and female partners about their level of romantic attraction to one another. We predicted that (1) young men would report higher levels of romantic attraction to their opposite-sex friends than women would; (2) men would over-estimate their female friend's romantic attraction to them; and (3) women would underestimate their male friend's romantic attraction to them.

## Procedure

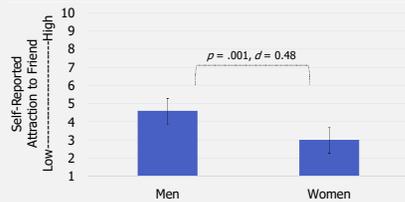
- Researchers went out in male-female pairs to a popular lounging/eating area on campus.
- When researchers identified a male-female dyad sitting in the area, they began a 90-second observation of the dyad that involved a behavioral checklist, observer judgments of the dyad's relationship status, and observer judgments of each dyad member's level of romantic attraction. The 90-second observation and ratings were conducted for a separate component of the project.
- After the observation, the male researcher and female researcher each interviewed one member of the dyad about (1) the dyad's actual relationship status (friends or romantically involved); (2) that member's level of romantic attraction to their partner; and (3) their perception of the other dyad member's level of romantic attraction to them. Romantic attraction ratings were made on a 10-point scale (*not at all to extremely*).
- 53 dyads were friends and 38 were romantically involved.

## Discussion

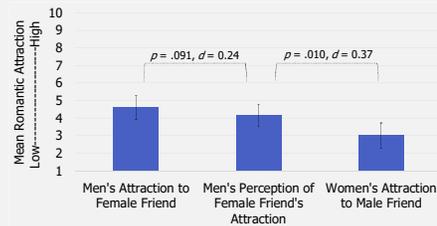
- As part of a broader project on judgments of male-female dyads, we collected a sample of naturally occurring friendship pairs. We used this new sample to determine whether the small sex difference in attraction documented in two recent samples<sup>5</sup> was due to those researchers' use of natural sampling (acquiring male-female dyads by locating them as they spend time together during the day) or to the specific type of question those researchers posed. In the current study we acquired a naturally occurring sample of friends, as in the recent studies, but we asked participants about their level of *romantic* (as opposed to *physical*) attraction. The sex difference in attraction that we documented was moderate in magnitude, similar to that found in most other studies.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Thus, we conclude that there is a robust difference between heterosexual men's and heterosexual women's feelings toward their opposite-sex friends, particularly when asked in terms of *romantic attraction*.
- We also showed that men over-estimate, and women under-estimate, the level of romantic attraction their friend feels towards them. These misperceptions have been documented before.<sup>2,4</sup> In addition, male and female friends' actual attraction levels toward one another were only weakly, and not statistically, correlated ( $r = .17, p = .234$ ), another finding we have documented before.<sup>2</sup> Thus, men's attraction to their female friends is not a reliable predictor of how their female friends feel in return (and vice versa). In fact, men's and women's *perceptions* of their friends' attraction to them were not correlated with their friends' actual attraction to them ( $p > .130$ ). Such discrepancies between perception and "reality" imply that male-female friends may be at risk for experiencing misunderstandings – and hence conflict – about their feelings and the status of their relationship.
- A primary limitation of this study was that our sample was limited to heterosexual men and women. With purposive sampling, future research could include homosexual friendship pairs and homosexual dating couples to investigate the degree to which gay friends and lesbian friends experience attraction toward one another, and whether gay friends and lesbian friends accurately perceive each other's level of romantic attraction. Before we are able to conduct studies of this manner, we would need to collect data on the prevalence of homosexual friendships to determine if they are as common as heterosexual, opposite-sex friendships.

## Results

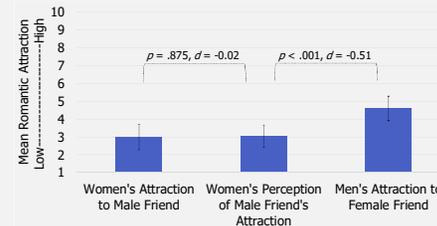
### Friends:



Prediction 1 was confirmed. Men reported more romantic attraction towards their female friends than women did towards their male friends. Error bars represent  $\pm 2SEM$ .

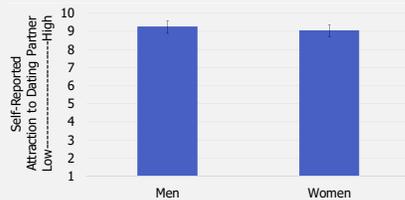


Prediction 2 was confirmed. In the friendship pairs, men's mean attraction to their female friend ( $\sim 4.6$ ) did not differ statistically from how attracted they thought their female friend was to them ( $\sim 4.2$ ). Both of those values were higher than women's actual attraction to their male friends ( $\sim 3.0$ ), demonstrating that men *over-estimated* their female friends' romantic attraction.

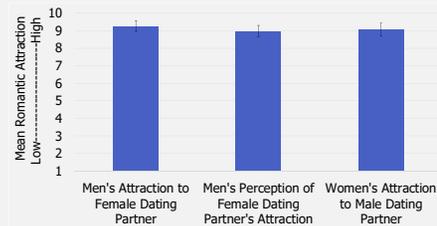


Prediction 3 was confirmed. In the friendship pairs, women's mean attraction to their male friend ( $\sim 3.0$ ) did not differ statistically from how attracted they thought their male friend was to them ( $\sim 3.0$ ). Both of those values were lower than men's actual attraction to their female friend ( $\sim 4.6$ ), demonstrating that women substantially *under-estimated* their male friends' romantic attraction.

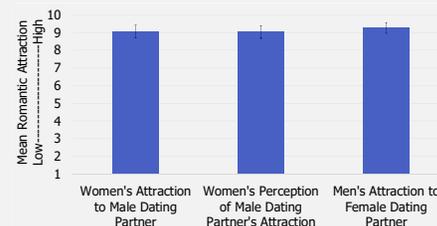
### Dating Couples:



For comparison, we show romantic attraction levels between dating partners. In dating couples, men's and women's romantic attraction levels to one another were similar and very high.



In dating couples, men were highly attracted to their dating partner and correctly perceived their female partner as highly attracted to them.



In dating couples, women were highly attracted to their dating partner and correctly perceived their male partner as highly attracted to them.

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