Male Physical Attractiveness as a Potential Contaminating Variable in Ratings of Heterosocial Skill

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RESEARCHERS have had difficulty isolating the specific behaviors that comprise heterosocial skill. Lipton and Nelson (1980) have found differences between anxious and nonanxious American subjects, and Arkowitz (1977) suggested that observers’ ratings of global skill may be contaminated by physical attractiveness.

Subjects consisted of 20 self-reported heterosocially anxious American men who volunteered to participate in a treatment program for heterosocial anxiety. Mean age was 22.2 years and mean number of dates over the two months prior to the study was 3.47.

Each subject completed the Survey of Heterosexual Interactions (Twentyman & McFall, 1975) before participating in 10-min pre- and post-treatment in vivo conversations with a female confederate. He was then photographed, and his physical attractiveness was measured objectively by having 10 undergraduate women independently compare his photograph to each of 45 male photographs and judge which man was “more attractive” (Paschall, 1975). The average number of photographs against which a subject was judged “more attractive” constituted the measure of attractiveness. Thus, attractiveness was judged independently of heterosocial skill.

Videotapes of the pre- and posttreatment conversations were then rated in random order by six experimentally naive undergraduate women. Two raters were trained to use the Heterosocial Skills Behavioral Checklist (Barlow, Able, Blanchard, Bristow, & Young, 1977), which groups items into