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Physical Attractiveness and the "Nice Guy Paradox": Do Nice Guys Really Finish Last?[1]

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The nice guy stereotype asserts that, although women often *say* that they wish to date kind, sensitive men, when actually given a choice, women will reject nice men in favor of men with other salient characteristics, such as physical attractiveness. To explore this stereotype, two studies were conducted. In Study 1, 48 college women were randomly assigned into experimental conditions in which they read a script that depicted 2 men competing for a date with a woman. The niceness of 1 target man's responses was manipulated across conditions. In Study 2, 194 college women were randomly assigned to conditions in which both the target man's responses and his physical attractiveness were manipulated. Overall results indicated that both niceness and physical attractiveness were positive factors in women's choices and desirability ratings of the target men. Niceness appeared to be the most salient factor when it came to desirability for more serious relationships, whereas physical attractiveness appeared more important in terms of desirability for more casual, sexual relationships.

KEY WORDS: mate selection; physical attractiveness; nice guy.

A common perception, both in the general public consciousness and in the mass media, is that, in terms of romantic relationships, "Nice guys finish last." According to this belief, women are perceived to display contradicting attitudes and behaviors toward whom they choose as dating partners. Although women often portray themselves as wanting to date kind, sensitive, and emotionally expressive men, the nice guy stereotype contends that, when actually presented with a choice between such a "nice guy" and an unkind, insensitive, emotionally closed, "macho man" or "jerk," they invariably reject the nice guy in favor of his more macho competitor.

Examples of this sentiment can be found readily in the popular press. In an article paper that was published in *Mademoiselle*, the author stated

> Not long ago, I watched my friend Laney, an assistant county prosecutor who spends her days putting criminals behind bars, try to choose between a sweet guy who sent her poems and flowers and petted her cats, and a guy who wore sunglasses indoors and found a way to hit on every woman who came his way. Laney fell madly in love with the second guy.
>
> "But the first guy adores you," I said. "I don't even think the second guy even likes you very much."
>
> "Sorry," she said, "but the first guy is dull." (Hollandsworth, 1994, p. 121)

An informal search of the Internet revealed multiple web sites devoted to the topic. One site depicts the frustration felt by one of these self-identifying nice guys in relation to his dating experiences:

> Dear Sandy, Why does it seem like girls always go for the guys that treat them like crap? It seems like they look more for looks in a man than anything else . . . It makes me mad that women seem to fall for these

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> assholes who usually only care about sex. I like to think I treat a girl right by actually listening to her, buying her flowers when I think she is not feeling good, opening the door for her, etc. Why do women always fall for these jerks? and why do guys like me who care about them always finish last and usually never have a girlfriend? (Virtual Voyage, Inc., 1999).

On the surface, the belief that "nice guys finish last" governs mate preferences seems to contradict the findings of studies that have examined the traits women most desire in men. One of the most prominent research paradigms for examining mate preferences follows the work of Buss and Barnes (1986), who asked 92 married couples which factors they considered most desirable in a mate. Factor analysis revealed nine significant factors related to partner preferences; the most important was whether the partner was kind/considerate (made up of the subfactors: kind, understanding, loyal, considerate, and honest). Women placed an even greater emphasis on this dimension than did men. In a second study, which utilized undergraduates (Buss & Barnes, 1986), the factors of kind and understanding were ranked highest overall, and there were no gender differences in preference. Other researchers have found similar results; kindness/considerateness is one of the top features reported by participants in their rankings of preferred mate characteristics (e.g., Buss & Angleitner, 1989; Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999; Goodwin, 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995).

Several recent studies have demonstrated or shown that the attributes preferred in a mate depend upon the relationship context. Sprecher and Regan (2002) found that participants tended to place more emphasis on extrinsic qualities (i.e., physical attractiveness and prior sexual experience) when listing preferences for a casual sexual relationship as opposed to more serious romantic relationships. Intrinsic qualities of intelligence, warmth, and kindness were less important when considering casual sexual partners than when considering more serious romantic partners. Regan (1998a, 1998b) found that women placed greater emphasis on a potential short-term partner's physical attractiveness than on a potential long-term partner's physical attractiveness. Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher, and Cate (2000) found that participants preferred that a short-term partner score higher than a long-term partner on sexual attributes (e.g., physical attractiveness, high sex drive, and sexy looking). In all three of these studies, however, attributes such as kindness, warmth, and openness (i.e., "niceness") were still very important across relationship contexts, and generally were rated as more important than external attributes overall. Li, Bailey, Kenrick, and Linsenmeier (2002), in a preference study in which they asked participants to spend a "budget" on various partner attributes, also concluded that kindness is an essential characteristic in mate selection. The authors stated that their results "also suggest that people may desire as kind a mate as possible, so much so that they continue to invest in increasing kindness as their mate budget increases" (p. 953).

Although the studies reviewed above demonstrated that women *prefer* to date "nice guys," almost all relied solely on self-reported preferences rather than on actual behaviors. Actual behaviors are not always highly related to self-reports. For example, Sprecher (1989) asked participants to read a script in which a member of their same sex supposedly described a target member of the other sex on variables of physical attractiveness, expressiveness, and earning potential. In the physical attractiveness manipulation, participants were told that the target had previously been rated as high or low on attractiveness by a previous rater. The participants then rated how much they would be attracted to the target and afterward rated how much they thought the three variables (attractiveness, earning potential, and expressiveness) had contributed to their liking of the target. Expressiveness was reported as the most important factor, when, in fact, physical attractiveness was the most important factor behaviorally. Wiederman and Dubois (1998) found a similar discrepancy between self-perceptions and behavior, particularly among women. Descriptions of potential short-term mates were experimentally manipulated so that they varied along six dimensions: physical attractiveness, financial resources, generosity, sexual experience/interest, current relationship status, and desired level of relationship commitment. The physical attractiveness manipulation was the most important factor in predicting ratings of desirability for men and women alike. Men accurately acknowledged that physical attractiveness was the most important characteristic that influenced their ratings of a desirable partner. Women rated desired level of relationship commitment as the most important factor that influenced their mate selection when, in fact, it was one of the least important factors behaviorally. Furthermore, in a comprehensive meta-analysis, Feingold (1990) examined gender differences in the importance placed upon physical attractiveness by men and women across different research paradigms. Although men tended to place a relatively higher degree of importance on physical attractiveness than did women across all methodologies, the

effect sizes for this difference were higher in those studies that used self-reports as opposed to behavioral methods.

Taken together, these findings reflect a fundamental tenant of the nice guy stereotype: that women report that they *want* kind, sensitive men, but, in fact, they *choose* men for other reasons. Physical attractiveness may be a particularly salient attribute that may outweigh kindness/considerateness when it comes to women's actual choices. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of physical attractiveness in our daily lives (e.g., Bersheid & Walster, 1974; Gallucci, 1984; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). However, despite the prevalence of the nice guy stereotype in popular culture, few researchers have used behavioral measures to assess this phenomenon directly. Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, and West (1995) examined the relationship between male dominance and prosocial behavior (i.e., how nice they are) with regard to women's mate preferences. More specifically, the authors were interested in how women rated men with various mixtures of these qualities in terms of their dating desirability. They found that the more agreeable the target man, the more the women liked him and the more desirable he was rated as a dating partner. Herold and Milhausen (1999) gave female participants a script that depicted the following scenario: "You meet two men. One, John, is nice but somewhat shy. He has not had any sexual experience. The other, Mike, is attractive, a lot of fun, and has had intercourse with 10 women. Both wish to date you. Whom do you choose?" (p. 337). Overall, 54% of the women reported that they would choose John (the nice guy), 28% would equally prefer either John or Mike, and 18% indicated they would choose Mike (the "bad boy"). Women were more likely to express a preference for the nice guy if they, themselves, viewed sex as less important, had had fewer sexual partners, and preferred that their dating partners have fewer partners. Although the results of this study indicated that nice guys were most often preferred, the differences in the two men's descriptions in terms of attractiveness, outgoingness, and sexual experience may have confounded the results. Many women preferred nice guys as friends or long-term boyfriends but bad boys as sexual partners. Bad boys were also described as being more physically attractive and willing to manipulate women into sexual activity.

In this article, we report the results of two studies in which we examined the nice guy paradox in a more direct, behavioral manner. For Study 1, we developed an experimental manipulation in which women chose between target men of varying levels of niceness. Our goal in Study 1 was to test the relevance of competing hypotheses: If women's self-reported preferences (as observed in the mate preference literature) match their behaviors, women would be expected to choose a nicer dating partner. If the nice guy stereotype is more accurate, women would reject a kind, sensitive man and choose a more macho, insensitive "jerk." A third possibility was that women would reject either extreme. They would choose neither a very sensitive man nor a very macho man but instead would prefer a more neutral, "middle-of-the-road" individual.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

The participants were 48 female undergraduate students at a private liberal arts college in the Northeast. The mean age of the participants was 20.53 years ($SD = 1.20$); ages ranged from 18 to 23 years old. Sixty-seven percent classified themselves as politically liberal, 6% as conservative, and 27% as other. All participants rated their sexual orientation as predominantly heterosexual, based on a score of 5–7 on a variation of Kinsey's 7-point continuum scale of sexual orientation (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Participants were recruited by approaching students in the campus student center and in student dormitories and asking them to volunteer. All participants were entered into a drawing for $50 as an incentive to participate.

Procedure

Participants were given a script in which a woman ("Susan") is participating in a game show that resembled aspects of the popular TV game show "The Dating Game." Susan is presented with the opportunity to date one of two male contestants ("Todd" or "Michael") and must choose between them based upon their responses to her questions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. In Condition 1, the "Nice Todd" condition, Todd gave responses that would be associated with a nice guy. He was portrayed as kind, attentive, and emotionally expressive. In Condition 2, the "Middle Todd" condition, Todd gave more neutral, middle-of-the-road responses. In Condition 3, the "Jerk Todd" condition, Todd was portrayed as a somewhat insensitive, self-absorbed, macho jerk. In all three conditions, Todd is competing against

Michael, who gives neutral, middle-of-the-road responses, and whose responses are identical in all three conditions. (In pilot tests, all of Todd's and Michael's responses were independently rated across all conditions and shown to correspond with their underlying constructs.) An example of one of the varying reposes given in each condition is presented below:

> *Susan:* Okay, Bachelor #1: What is your definition of a "Real Man?" And are you one yourself?
>
> (Condition 1, Nice) *Todd:* A real man is someone who is in touch with his feelings and those of his partner. Someone who is kind and attentive and doesn't go for all that macho stuff. He's also great in the bedroom and puts his partner's pleasure first. I'd definitely say I'm a real man.
>
> (Condition 2, Middle) *Todd:* A real man knows what he wants and he knows how to get it. Someone who works hard and plays hard, and who is good to the woman he loves. He's also great in the bedroom. I'd definitely say I'm a real man.
>
> (Condition 3, Jerk) *Todd:* A real man knows what he wants and he knows how to get it. Someone who knows who he is, but keeps other people guessing and on their toes—he doesn't go in for all that touchy-feely stuff. He's also great in the bedroom and can tell his partner what he likes. I'd definitely say I'm a real man.
>
> *Susan:* Bachelor #2, same question . . .
>
> *Michael:* A real man is relaxed. He doesn't let the world get him down. He's confident, solid, and keeps a positive attitude at all times. He's also a great kisser—and I'm definitely one of those!

Each participant read only one version of Todd's responses, depending upon the condition to which she was assigned, and the labels of "Nice," "Middle," and "Jerk" were omitted. After reading the script, participants were asked to state which of the target men (Todd or Michael) they thought Susan should choose and whom they would choose for themselves. Participants were also asked the reason(s) for their choices using a free-response item for each choice. To assess whether participants' preferences differed across varying relationship contexts, the respondents then rated both Todd and Michael along several 7-point Likert-type scales that assessed how desirable each would be in the following roles: as a marriage partner, as a steady boyfriend, as a platonic friend, as a sex partner, or as a "one-night-stand." Todd and Michael were further rated along dimensions that corresponded to those identified by Buss and Barnes (1986): exciting, intelligent, easygoing, assertive, kind/considerate, sincere, and funny/humorous. Each of these factors was rated using a single 7-point Likert-type scale.

Results and Discussion

There was a direct linear progression in the data about whom Susan should choose. Nice Todd was chosen the most frequently (relative to Michael), followed by Middle Todd, and, finally, Jerk Todd. A chi-square test for independence yielded a significant difference among groups, $\chi^2(2) = 18.35$, $p < .001$. The same pattern was found when participants were asked whom they would choose for themselves, $\chi^2(2) = 12.93$, $p < .002$. See Figs. 1 and 2.

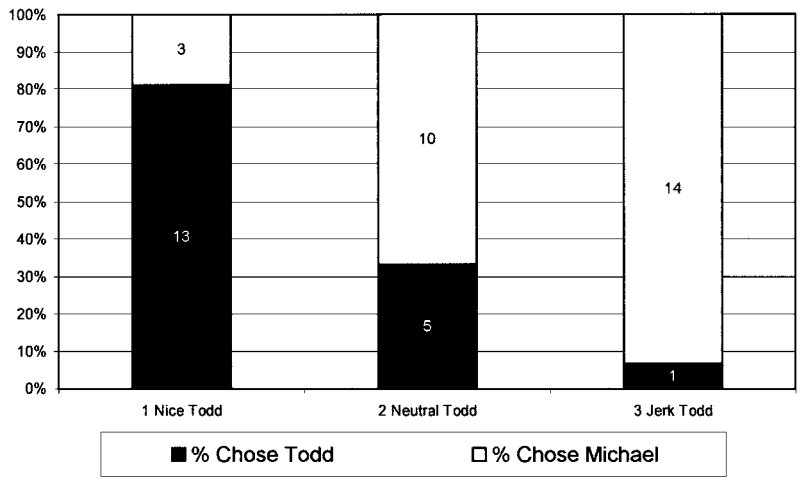

Fig. 1. Study 1 participants' dating choices for Susan by condition, "Whom do you think Susan should chose to date?"

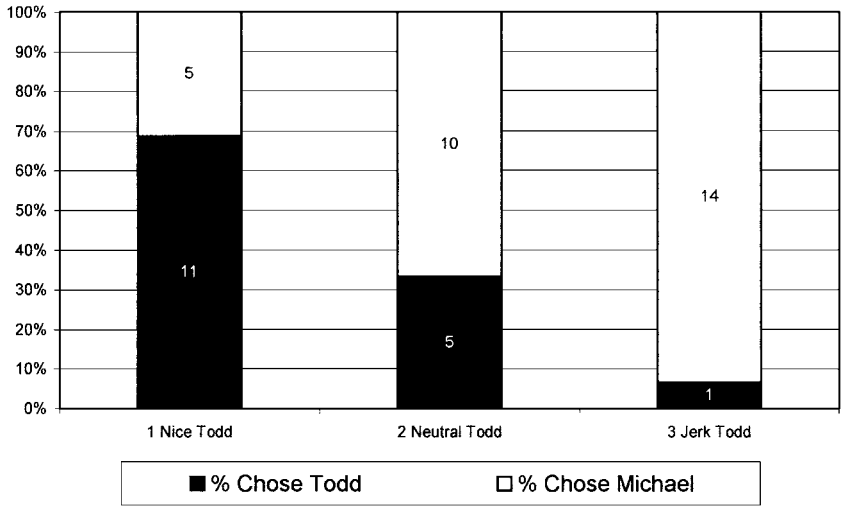

Fig. 2. Study 1 participants' dating choices for themselves by condition, "Whom do you personally find more appealing—that is, whom would you choose for yourself?"

Analyses of variance (ANOVA) revealed variations among conditions in terms of the participants' ratings of Todd's desirability. The nicer Todd was, the more desirable he was seen as a marriage partner, $F(2, 45) = 24.83$, $p < .001$; a steady boyfriend, $F(2, 45) = 15.00$, $p < .001$; a platonic friend, $F(2, 45) = 19.27$, $p < .001$; and a sexual partner, $F(2, 45) = 12.74$, $p < .001$. Also, the nicer Todd was, the more intelligent, $F(2, 45) = 8.66$, $p < .001$; and the more kind/considerate, $F(2, 45) = 33.38$, $p < .001$, he was rated. The latter variable served as an additional manipulation check, which subsequently confirmed the construct validity of Todd's responses across conditions. Furthermore, Todd was not rated as significantly less (or more) exciting, easygoing, sincere, or funny/humorous across conditions. This outcome suggests that nice guys are not automatically considered less interesting/exciting than jerks. Finally, Nice Todd was seen as significantly less assertive than in the other two conditions, $F(2, 45) = 19.43$, $p < .001$, yet he was still the overall favorite (see Figs. 3 and 4).

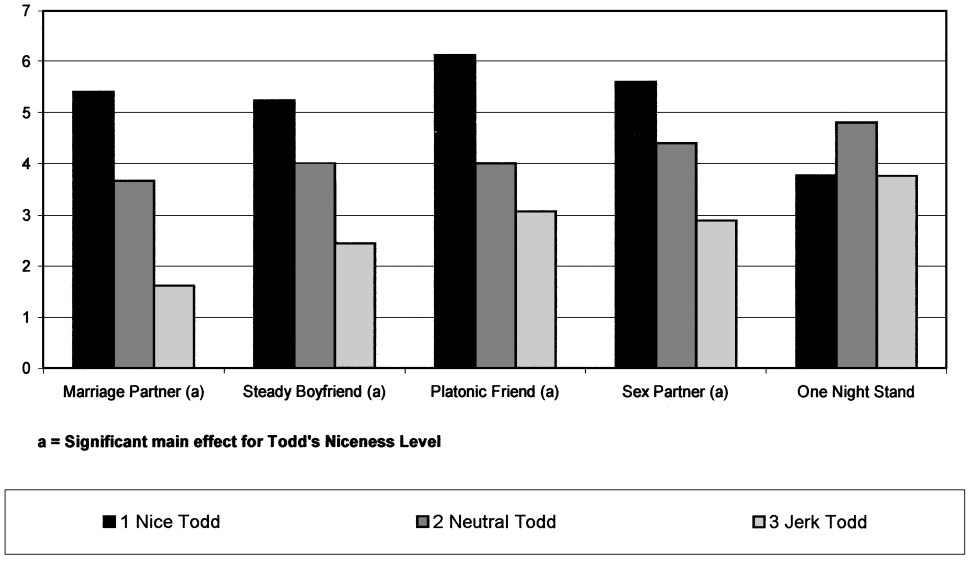

Fig. 3. Study 1 mean desirability ratings of Todd by condition, "How desirable is Todd as a . . ."

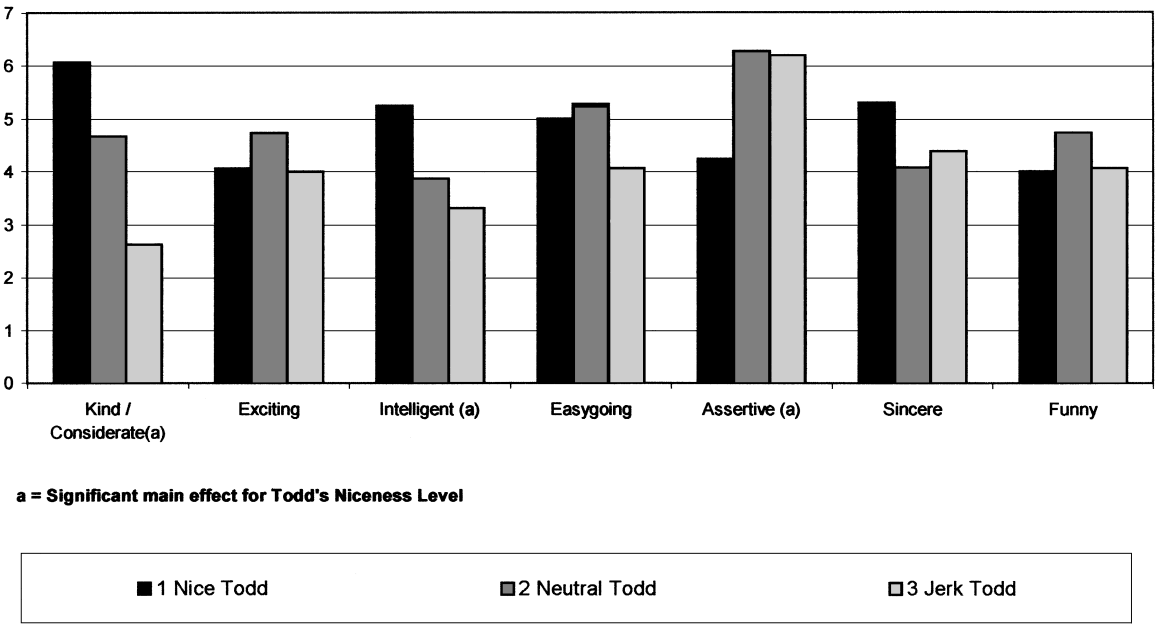

Fig. 4. Study 1 mean personal quality ratings of Todd by condition, "How ___ is Todd?"

An informal qualitative analysis of participants' free responses about why they made their choice suggested that, across conditions, the most salient issue was how nice/sensitive the targets were perceived to be in comparison to each other. The most typical responses emphasized that one target was more sensitive than the other. Some examples:

(1) "Todd is definitely the man—his focus seems to be much more on other people than himself—he seems to have a more mature attitude towards both relationships and people in general" (Condition 1).
(2) "Because [Todd] seems to be the perfect "sensitive new age guy"—the type who really worries about how people are feeling" (Condition 1).
(3) "Michael seems to be more interested in a mutually supportive and equal relationship. Todd is more absorbed w/ himself" (Condition 3).

The results provide support for the notion that women's preferences do match their behaviors and that nice guys are preferred. Thus, our data support the mate preference literature more than the nice guy stereotype. Specifically, the nicer Todd was portrayed, the more often he was chosen and the more desirable he was rated across different relationship contexts. However, Study 1 included only a small number of participants from a rather small, politically liberal, and relatively expensive private university. As such, the results might not be representative of women in general. Furthermore, in Study 1 we did not examine the role of the physical attractiveness of the target man on women's ratings. According to the nice guy stereotype, a particularly attractive man might be chosen more often despite being less nice.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate Study 1 with a larger sample and also to include the added effects of a physical-attractiveness-of-target manipulation. Again, the study allowed for testing competing hypotheses. Based upon the results of Study 1 and the research reviewed earlier, we predicted that

1. When physical attractiveness of the target men is matched, Nice Todd would be chosen more often and rated more desirable than Jerk Todd.

As for the effects of the physical attractiveness manipulation, it makes intuitive sense that if physical attractiveness were more important than niceness, a highly attractive, insensitive man should be chosen more often and rated more favorably than the less attractive nice man. If niceness were the more important factor, a less attractive nice guy should be

chosen more often and rated more favorably than a highly attractive yet insensitive man. In this regard, our second hypothesis was the following:

2. There will be an interaction between niceness and physical attractiveness. The more physically attractive and nice Todd is portrayed, the more favorably he would be rated.

Method

Participants

The participants were 194 female undergraduates at a large public university in the Southeast; they were recruited to participate in psychological research in return for partial fulfillment of psychology course requirements. The mean age of the participants was 19.66 years (SD = 1.56); their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years old. Thirty-four percent classified themselves as politically liberal, 41% as moderates, 16% as conservatives, and 9% did not know or did not answer the question. Sixty-four percent classified themselves Caucasian, 28% as African American, 6% as Asian, 1% as other, and <1% as Hispanic. Ninety-seven percent rated their sexual orientation as predominantly heterosexual. To qualify for the study, all students had to be unmarried and not involved in an exclusive romantic relationship.

Procedure

The initial procedure was to conduct a pilot test for the physical attractiveness manipulation. Twenty-eight male undergraduates were recruited to have photographs taken of their faces to provide stimuli for the physical attractiveness manipulation. Twenty female undergraduates (who did not participate in the formal experiment) rated the men's photographs for physical attractiveness. The women ranged in age from 18 to 25 (mean = 20.62, SD = 1.69); 67% identified themselves as Caucasian, 24% as African American, and 9% as Asian. All participants were given course credit for their participation.

The photographs were scanned into a digital format and added to a Web page questionnaire. Each woman was shown all of the men's photographs and asked to rate each man for physical attractiveness from 1 *very unattractive/ugly* to 10 *very attractive/handsome*. The order of photo presentation was counterbalanced across three conditions to control for serial position effects. Based upon these ratings, three photographs were chosen for the formal experiment. One photo was chosen as relatively highly attractive with a relatively low variance in ratings (mean rating = 5.67, SD = 1.68), and two other photos judged less attractive than the first photograph but matched relatively closely to each other; mean ratings 2.90 (SD = 1.51) and 2.81 (SD = 1.01), respectively, were also chosen. All three of the photographs chosen depicted White men. We chose to use only White men's photos in order to reduce variability in the stimuli associated with race and to match the race of the men in the photographs with that of the expected majority of female participants. The men in the photographs also fell within the same age range as that of the female participants.

Study 2 followed the framework of Study 1 with a few procedural modifications. In addition to the manipulation of Todd's "niceness," participants also viewed photographs of both Todd and Michael in which Todd's level of physical attractiveness was manipulated across conditions. The two photos of matched medium–low attractiveness were used for attractiveness level 1 (Matched PA); one was assigned to "Todd," and the other was assigned to "Michael." The third photo, which was rated high in attractiveness, represented Todd in attractiveness level 2 (Mismatched PA). (Michael's photograph remained the same in these conditions.) This arrangement yielded six conditions in which Todd's attributes varied while Michael's remained the same: (1) "Nice Todd—Matched Attractiveness"; (2) "Neutral Todd—Matched Attractiveness"; (3) "Jerk Todd—Matched Attractiveness"; (4) "Nice Todd—Mismatched High Attractiveness"; (5) "Neutral Todd—Mismatched High Attractiveness"; (6) "Jerk Todd—Mismatched High Attractiveness." Each participant was randomly assigned to one of these conditions.

The participants read each script on a computer screen using a Web browser so that they could see the photographs of Todd and Michael as they read the script. Participants then completed the questionnaire, also on-line, and their responses were fed directly into a database. The experiment was conducted in groups in a large classroom with an array of computers. The lead experimenter was present during all administrations to assist participants who had questions about how to use the computer program and to verify that all procedures were followed correctly.

Results and Discussion

To examine the effects of the experimental manipulations, a logistic regression analysis was performed on participants' choices for Susan as outcome with three predictors: Todd's niceness level (Nice Todd, Neutral Todd, or Jerk Todd), attractiveness level (matched vs. mismatched), and the interaction of niceness and attractiveness. A test of the full model with all three predictors versus a constant-only model was statistically reliable, $\chi^2(5, N = 194) = 58.18$, $p < .001$, Negelkerke $R^2 = 0.348$, which indicates that the predictors, as a set, reliably predicted whom the participants thought Susan should choose as a dating partner. Using the Wald criterion, niceness was a significant predictor but neither attractiveness nor the interaction effects were significant predictors. When the interaction effect was removed from the equation, however, the model was still reliably different from the constant-only model, $\chi^2(3, N = 194) = 58.03$, $p < .001$, Negelkerke $R^2 = 0.348$, but not reliably different from the full model, $\chi^2(2, N = 194) = 0.15$, *ns*, which indicates that the two factor model was significant and that the interaction effect was of negligible importance. Furthermore, once the interaction was removed, both niceness, $z = 34.76$, $p < .001$, and attractiveness, $z = 7.69$, $p < .05$, were significant predictors. When attractiveness was removed, the model that included only niceness remained reliably different from the constant-only model, $\chi^2(2, N = 194) = 51.19$, $p < .001$, Negelkerke $R^2 = 0.314$, but this niceness-only model was also reliably different from the two predictor model, $\chi^2(1, N = 194) = 6.84$, $p < .05$; thus, attractiveness was an important factor in the model. Overall results indicated that both the niceness and attractiveness manipulations (but not the interaction between them) affected the participants' choices; niceness apparently was the stronger factor.

A similar pattern was shown for the participants' choices for themselves. The most parsimonious model indicated that both niceness and attractiveness, but not their interaction, reliably affected participants' choices. The two-factor model was reliably different from the constant-only model, $\chi^2(3, N = 194) = 58.76$, $p < .001$, Negelkerke $R^2 = 0.353$, and, using the Wald criterion, both niceness, $z = 37.96$, $p < .001$, and attractiveness, $z = 7.24$, $p < .05$, were significant predictors. Examination of the frequencies of choices across conditions (see Figs. 5 and 6) appears to indicate that the nicer Todd was portrayed, the more often he was chosen as a date both for Susan and for the participants themselves. Physical attractiveness appeared to have an additive effect. That is, the target man was chosen even more frequently when he was generally nice and more attractive, but the overall pattern favored niceness. It is especially important to note that, in Condition 6, being more physically attractive than his counterpart did not seem to help Todd when he was portrayed as a jerk. Michael, whose responses were neutral but still relatively nicer than Todd's in

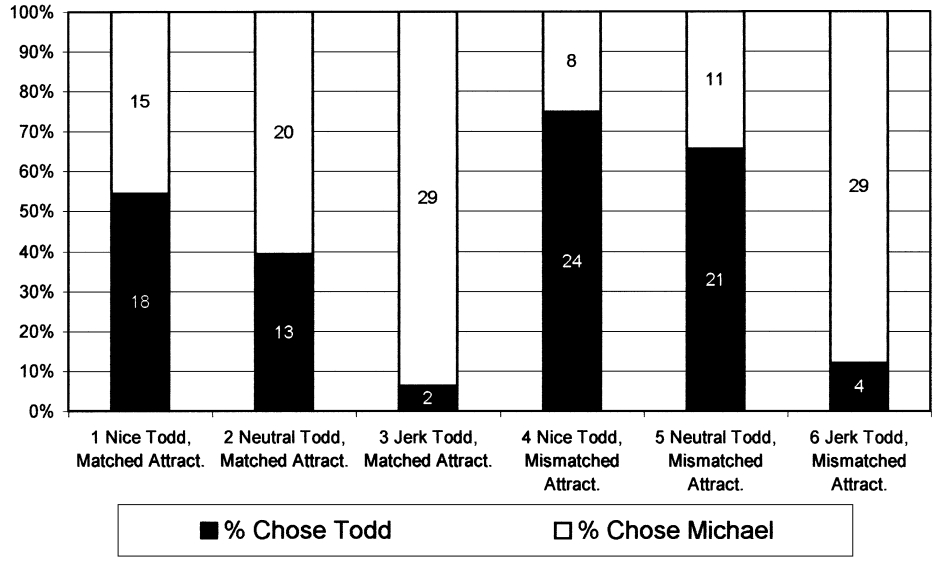

Fig. 5. Study 2 participants' dating choices for Susan by condition, "Whom do you think Susan should chose to date?"

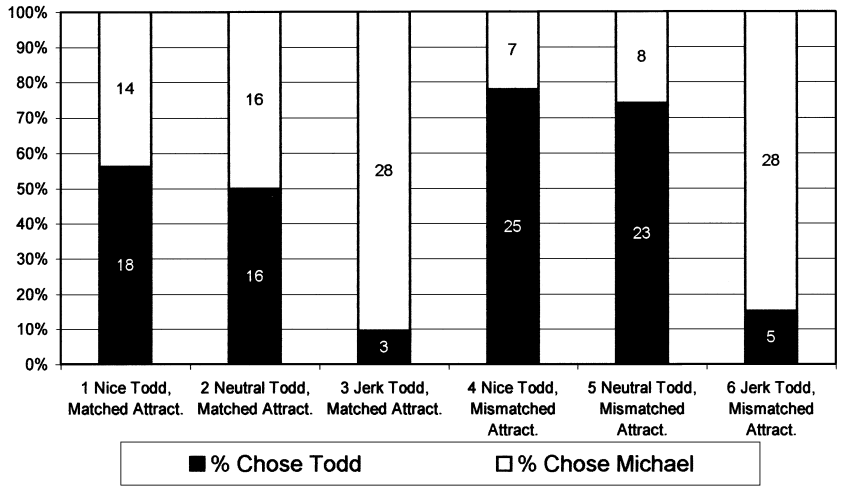

Fig. 6. Study 2 participants' dating choices for themselves by condition, "Whom do you personally find more appealing—that is, whom would you choose for yourself?"

this condition, nevertheless was overwhelmingly chosen despite his being less attractive than Todd.

To assess how the participants rated Todd on desirability, a 3×2 between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the five desirability dependent measures: Todd's rated desirability as a marriage partner, a steady boyfriend, a platonic friend, a sex partner, and a "one-night-stand." Independent variables were niceness (Nice Todd, Neutral Todd, and Jerk Todd), and attractiveness (matched or mismatched). Using the Wilks's criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by both Todd's niceness level, $F(10, 354) = 12.77$, $p < .001$, and Todd's attractiveness level, $F(5, 177) = 6.55$, $p < .001$. The interaction effect between niceness and attractiveness approached significance, $F(10, 354) = 1.82$, $p = .056$. Because of the somewhat exploratory nature of this study it was decided to interpret this "marginally significant" interaction effect further (see Fig. 7).

At the univariate level, a significant main effect was found for Todd's niceness level on his ratings of

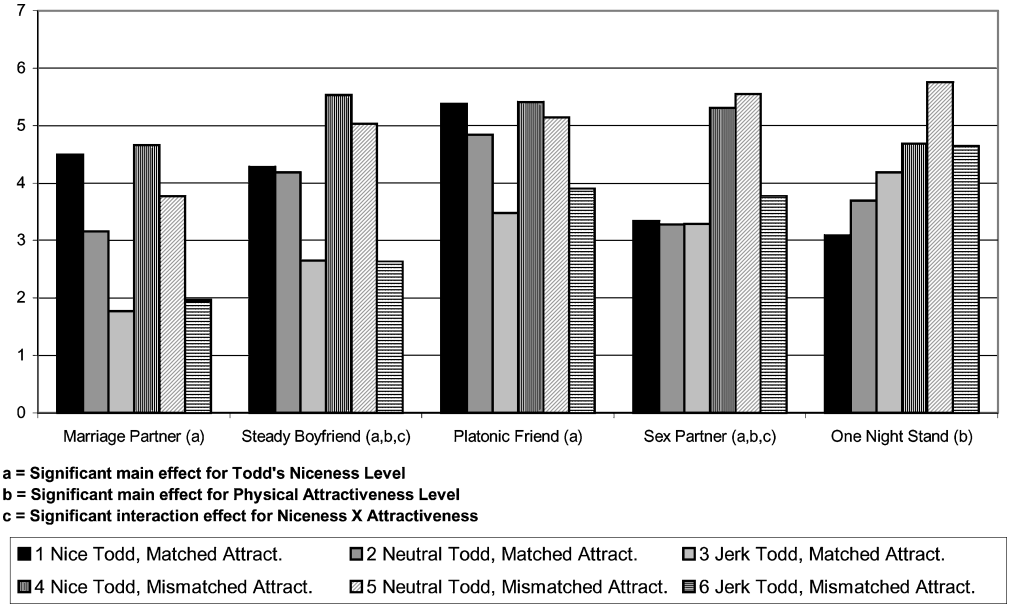

Fig. 7. Study 2 mean desirability ratings of Todd by condition, "How desirable is Todd as a . . ."

desirability as a marriage partner, $F(2, 181) = 50.96$, $p < .001$; a steady boyfriend, $F(2, 181) = 48.10$, $p < .001$; a platonic friend, $F(2, 181) = 21.25$, $p < .001$; and a sex partner, $F(2, 181) = 3.67$, $p < .05$. The between-subjects correlation matrix revealed high correlations among all the significant variables, which suggests one overall effect. The means indicated that, generally, the nicer Todd was portrayed, the more desirable he was perceived. The majority of the effect stemmed from a rejection of the particularly insensitive man in the Jerk Todd condition. In the Jerk Todd condition, Todd was clearly disliked, whereas there was not much difference between the really nice condition and the more neutral responses. Still, the direction of the effect tends to indicate that nicer is better, especially in the more serious relationship contexts, and this was generally consistent with the results of Study 1.

A significant main effect for Todd's attractiveness level was found on his desirability ratings as a steady boyfriend, $F(1, 181) = 11.65$, $p < .001$; a sex partner, $F(1, 181) = 28.87$, $p < .001$; and a "one-night-stand," $F(1, 181) = 20.51$, $p < .001$. On these variables, Todd was generally rated as more desirable when he was more physically attractive than his counterpart. Physical attractiveness did not appear to influence Todd's ratings as a marriage partner or as a platonic friend, as effects for both of these variables were not significant.

Significant univariate results indicated an interaction effect on the steady boyfriend, $F(2, 181) = 3.26$, $p < .05$, and sex partner, $F(2, 181) = 3.53$, $p < .05$, variables. Analysis of the between-subjects correlation matrix shows a high correlation between these two variables ($r = .89$), which indicates the same effect for both. The means indicated that physical attractiveness had an additive effect on Todd's ratings in the nice and neutral conditions, whereas the additive effect was cancelled-out in the jerk condition. That is, when Todd was portrayed as insensitive, his higher physical attractiveness no longer added to his desirability ratings (see Fig. 7).

An additional 3×2 (niceness $\times$ attractiveness level) MANOVA was conducted to explore Todd's ratings on the eight trait factors: kind/considerate, physically attractive, exciting, intelligent, easygoing, assertive, sincere, and funny. Using the Wilks's criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by Todd's niceness level, $F(16, 338) = 10.81$, $p < .001$, Todd's attractiveness level, $F(8, 169) = 33.43$, $p < .001$, and by the interaction effect between niceness and attractiveness, $F(16, 338) = 2.41$, $p < .01$.

At the univariate level, there was a significant main effect for Todd's niceness level in terms of how highly he was rated on the variables kindness/considerateness, $F(2, 176) = 74.69$, $p < .001$; exciting, $F(2, 176) = 3.26$, $p < .05$; intelligent, $F(2, 176) = 18.01$, $p < .001$; easygoing, $F(2, 176) = 19.26$, $p < .001$; assertive, $F(2, 176) = 6.17$, $p < .01$; sincere, $F(2, 176) = 13.46$, $p < .001$; and funny, $F(2, 176) = 11.95$, $p < .001$. The only variable not affected by Todd's niceness level was his rating on physical attractiveness. Examination of the between-subjects correlation matrix revealed various correlations between the different significant variables, which suggests multiple effects. The more nicely Todd was portrayed, the more highly he was rated as kind/considerate, intelligent, and sincere. The fact that Todd was rated more kind/considerate the nicer he was portrayed served to confirm that the niceness manipulation was successful. The ratings for the other factors were somewhat more varied, but most notable was that Todd was rated less assertive the nicer he was portrayed. As assertiveness is often considered a highly admirable trait, it is noteworthy that Todd was chosen more often when nice, even though he was rated as less assertive, and this, again, generally is consistent with the results of Study 1.

A significant main effect for Todd's attractiveness level was found on his ratings on the variables physically attractive, $F(1, 176) = 261.39$, $p < .001$; exciting, $F(1, 176) = 7.52$, $p < .01$; and assertive, $F(1, 176) = 4.62$, $p < .05$. When Todd was portrayed as more physically attractive, he was rated higher on these traits. Again, the fact that Todd was rated significantly more physically attractive in the mismatched attractiveness conditions confirmed the effects of the attractiveness manipulation.

There also was a small interaction effect between niceness and attractiveness on how exciting, $F(2, 176) = 5.94$, $p < .01$; easygoing, $F(2, 176) = 4.54$, $p < .05$; and funny, $F(2, 176) = 4.89$, $p < .01$, Todd was rated. Examination of the between-subjects correlation matrix revealed high correlations among all three significant variables, which suggests that there is one overall effect. Although the effects were not dramatic, it appears that being portrayed as more neutral was beneficial to Todd on these measures, and being attractive also tended to have an additive effect for this condition (see Fig. 8.)

An informal analysis of the qualitative results confirmed that niceness was the most important factor in the participants' decisions. The vast majority of the rationales for the women's choices emphasized

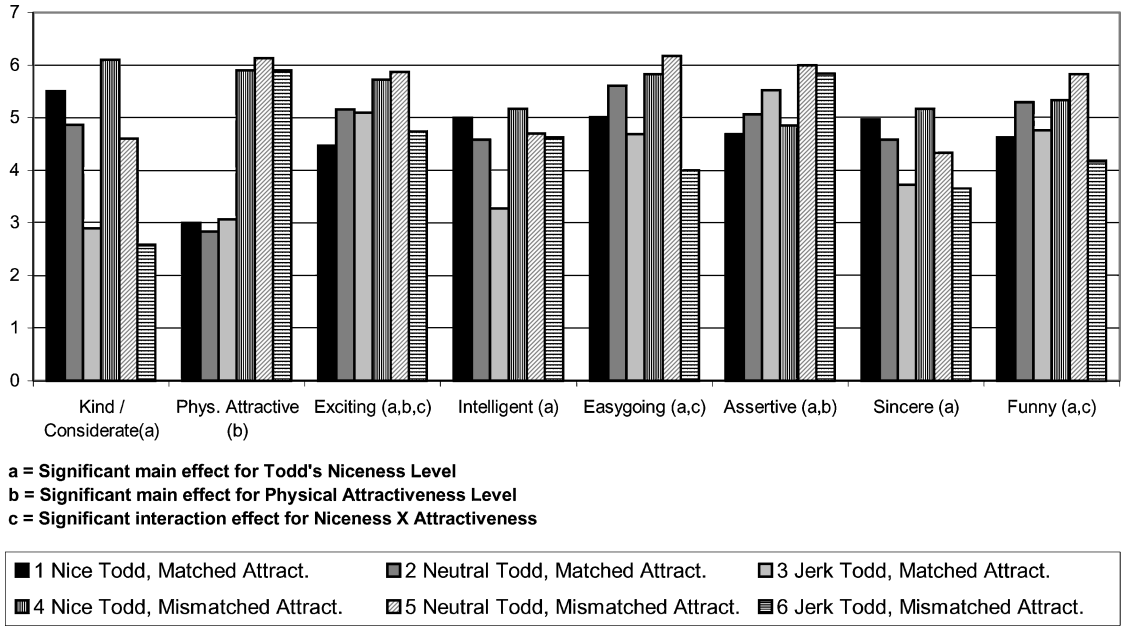

Fig. 8. Study 2 mean personal quality ratings of Todd by condition, "How ___ is Todd?"

the fact that the particular bachelor they chose was seen as nicer, even if, as in the neutral conditions, he was intended to be seen as equally nice. Some typical examples included

(1) "Susan should choose [Nice] Todd because he treats everybody equal and he seems to care about other people's feelings. He also knows how to treat a woman." (Condition 1)
(2) "He [Nice Todd] expresses his feelings more. It sounded more meaningful than Bachelor number 2." (Condition 1)
(3) "I don't think Michael is as good looking as [Neutral, Attractive] Todd, but he's nicer and more reserved. Looks aren't everything." (Condition 5)

Some of the participants, however, did express attitudes more consistent with the nice guy stereotype. In some cases, they thought that Susan should choose the nice guy, but they would choose the less nice guy for themselves. In other cases, participants actively chose the less nice guy for both Susan and themselves:

(1) "[Susan should choose Michael because. . .] He seems like a nice guy who would be there if she needed him. [But I would choose Neutral Todd for myself] because I always go for the wilder type of guy." (Condition 2)
(2) "The only reason why I choose [Jerk] Todd is because I am always attracted to the men that are leaders, secure, and I hate the mushy stuff. I felt that Michael was more the nice guy, which is great . . . but, I am just not attracted to that personality to the extreme." (Condition 3)

Although these latter responses are more consistent with attitudes one would expect of women who endorse the nice guy stereotype, they were clearly in the minority.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The experimental nature of both of these studies represents a methodological strength over some of the existing literature on these issues. As opposed to studies in which participants were simply asked to rank-order their preferences for different mate attributes, we employed an experimental manipulation to assess how the effects of varying levels of niceness and/or physical attractiveness would affect participants' choices and ratings of the target men. In addition, rather than simply describing the men as nice or as jerks or as physically more or less attractive, participants were able to form their own judgments of these qualities through evaluations of the target men's responses to dating-related questions and by

looking at their photographs. As such, this method was perhaps more naturalistic than that used in some previous studies, and the dating-game scenario was one with which participants were likely familiar, even if this situation does not represent the norm in terms of actual dating scenarios. Analysis of the participants' ratings of Todd's kindness/considerateness and his physical attractiveness across conditions confirmed that our manipulations were successful.

Our studies also have methodological limitations, some of which are intrinsic to the study of attraction and partner choice. To begin with, none of the college women who participated in Study 2 were currently involved in a dating relationship. These women might differ from their peers who are currently involved in romantic relationships and who, perhaps, may form such relationships more readily. Further, the "niceness" and "jerk" manipulations may have appeared positive and negative, respectively, when expressed verbally in a script, but if expressed in real behavior they may be confounded with masculinity and/or dominance. For instance, a man who might be described as a "jerk" in terms of his behaviors toward his female partner may not express his more macho attitudes to her as directly as did the hypothetical man in our vignette (i.e., Jerk Todd). In addition, the notion of "attractive" as used in Study 2 was somewhat restricted because previous research has shown that women's judgments about the sexual attractiveness of a man are influenced by his dominance (e.g., Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987). In the real world, an individual's dominance may be signaled by body language, the behavior of peers, status symbols, and so forth. These cues are missing in a static photo and brief verbal statements by the target. As such, although our study may have been more naturalistic than other script-based research, it is still a script with static photos, and thus it may not generalize into real-world interactions. Furthermore, the participants were asked to indicate, hypothetically, whom they *would* choose rather than being asked to make a real choice with all of its subsequent consequences. Therefore, these studies may still be subject to some (if not all) of the demand characteristics of the partner preference studies cited earlier.

Keeping these limitations in mind, our overall results did not favor the nice guy stereotype; instead, our results suggested that women's attitudes (as expressed in previous studies) do, in fact, generally match their behaviors. Niceness was a robust, positive factor in women's choices of a dating partner and in how desirable they rated Todd, especially in terms of more serious, emotionally involved relationships. The nicer Todd was portrayed, the more frequently he was chosen and the more desirably he was rated as a potential marriage partner, a steady boyfriend, and a platonic friend. He was also seen as generally more intelligent and sincere in these conditions. It is interesting that Todd was rated as generally less assertive than Michael, yet still was chosen more often. When Todd was portrayed as more physically attractive than Michael, the frequency with which he was chosen and his ratings as a more desirable partner increased; however, the factor of physical attractiveness did not tend to overwhelm the niceness factor. Most notably, in Condition 6 of Study 2, where Todd was rated more physically attractive yet less nice than Michael, it was Michael's relative niceness that triumphed over Todd's physical attractiveness. The majority of women rejected the insensitive man even when he was more physically attractive than his counterpart. This finding is also fairly consistent with that of Sadalla et al.'s findings of the effects of dominance on attraction (Sadalla et al. 1987). Although dominant behaviors generally increased a target male's attractiveness, aggressive or domineering behaviors did not; nor did simple descriptions of a man as being dominant, perhaps because aggressive and domineering features were then assumed to be present. Some of Jerk Todd's responses might have been interpreted as domineering, and he was subsequently rejected.

With reference to Todd's desirability ratings for purely sexual relationships, however (i.e., as a sex partner or as a "one-night-stand"), a somewhat different pattern emerged. In these cases, niceness appeared generally less influential than physical attractiveness. It may be that the nice guy stereotype is more accurate in relation to relatively casual, physical relationships than to more serious relationships. This finding is generally consistent with results of previous studies which suggest that women place more emphasis on physical attractiveness when considering more short-term relationships (e.g., Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Regan, 1998a; 1998b; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Still, the overall results of our studies suggest that, although niceness may be less essential in these relationships, it still should not be a major hindrance, as would be suggested by the nice guy stereotype.

If the overall results of these and previous studies demonstrate that women highly value niceness in choosing a dating partner, why is the nice guy stereotype so pervasive? It is expressed readily in the media, including magazines, television commercials, situation comedies, etc., and the notion seems to

promote considerable anxiety among a large number of self-proclaimed nice guys. As stated earlier, although our studies represent an improvement over prior self-report studies because of their more behavioral, experimental design, women's responses to reading a script may not generalize to the real dating world. The preferences of college students may also not be representative of the majority of women in our culture, or perhaps, as Herold and Milhausen's results (1999) suggest, less nice men may be more willing/able in the real world to manipulate or coerce women into sexual activity or dating relationships. If these men pursue women more aggressively than do nice guys, they may end up with more overall dating success (especially sexual success) through sheer determination. They may be more able to "talk women into" dating them, even if those women would ideally prefer to date nicer men.

Another plausible explanation is that the nice guy stereotype is simply an illusory correlation based upon a minority of cases where nice guys do not succeed. The vivid examples of times when we might like to see the nice guy "get the girl," only to see him lose out to a "bad boy," may disproportionately influence our availability heuristics of whom women chose to date. Alternatively, the finding that women place less emphasis on niceness when considering a short-term sexual relationship may suggest that people who believe in this stereotype tend to focus only on nice guys' prospects for short-term sexual "conquests" rather than considering their prospects for longer-term, more involved relationships. Yet another explanation is that there may be a disproportionate number of not-so-nice guys out there for women to choose. Nice guys could lose out overall just by being in the minority. Finally, it may be that women who reject men on the pretext that they are "too nice" may be using this as a euphemism, either consciously or unconsciously, for "too dull." Although being nice may actually be a highly valued factor in women's decisions, it is certainly not the only factor. Women are likely to reject even men who are nice if they do not meet other expectations, such as sharing similar interests or having other exciting/interesting personal qualities. Niceness by itself may not be enough in a real dating context, and the overall "package" presented by these men may be lacking in some way for which their niceness cannot fully compensate. Hence, the notion that "nice guys finish last" may actually be a misnomer for "dull guys finish last—no matter how nice they are."

These studies represent an important step in the examination of an understudied stereotype. Given the prevalence of messages in the media that perpetuate the notion that many women do not *really* want sensitive men, our results may be encouraging to "sensitive, new-age guys," at least in terms of their prospects for finding longer-term, meaningful relationships. Future researchers should explore how the stereotype influences romantic choices, actual dating behavior, and interpersonal outcomes. It is also important to use more naturalistic research designs to examine the various *types* of real-world dating "success" of men of differing levels of sensitivity. A more operational definition of a "nice guy" could help identify the percentage of men who are considered nice guys. Evaluations of men's real-world dating success should also differentiate between such factors as number of sexual partners; frequency of sexual contact; number or length of more committed, steady relationships; and levels of intimacy and/or satisfaction within these relationships. Future researchers should strive to employ more realistic scenarios such as actually setting up women on real dates (or what they expect to be real dates) with men who have different attributes. Future researchers also should explore further the characteristics of women who do choose to date less sensitive men. Although women *on average* may prefer niceness, there may be a sizable minority who do not.

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