

Different Tests of the “Sexual Markets” Hypothesis

As a reviewer correctly emphasized, a rational choice model should imply that individual women who are status-deprived are more likely to be affected by men’s status when deciding whether or not they are sexy than women who are not status deprived. This implies some sort of interaction between female ego’s status and male alter’s status. We may understand, and hence parameterize, the interaction in two conventional ways. The first is a simple difference. Thus the “farther above” a woman any man is, the more likely she is to see him as sexy. Model 1, Table C-1 demonstrates that this is in fact the case. This table presents coefficients from dyadic logistic regressions where ego nominating alter as sexy is the dependent variable. Thus Model 1 demonstrates that a linear difference in status between ego and alter increases ego’s odds of nominating alter, where ego is female and alter is male. But Model 2, which also enters a term for alter’s status, shows that this is simply because dyads where this difference is large are likely to be dyads with a high status male alter. (Because the difference is a linear combination of ego’s and alter’s statuses, we cannot take both into account at the same time.) Alter’s status is strongly positive, while the coefficient for the difference is now in the wrong direction. This suggests that there is no evidence of an interaction, at least given this parameterization.

But we may also use a more conventional multiplicative interaction. Because status can be either negative or positive, we can envision the results of this interaction by simplifying and considering only high (positive) status as opposed to low (negative) status. We would expect low status women to be more likely to choose high status men; since a negative times a positive is a negative, “more likely” would imply a negative sign to the interaction coefficient. This parameterization would also imply that high status women would be more likely to choose low status men (more likely to do so, that is, than low status women). This makes perfect sense, since high status women would not need to garner any status from a man, and so could expand their range of choices. But as Model 3 shows, the interaction coefficient is in the wrong direction for this hypothesis. Note that because this is an interaction, we need to take into account the “zero-order” relations of ego’s and alter’s statuses.

The previous results show no support for either individual-level parameterization of the “sexual markets” hypothesis. But, as stated in the text, another interpretation of this hypothesis would be that the rationality comes not in the desiring, but in the choosing. In this case, we would expect the same dynamics to occur when we examine which men women report sleeping with, controlling for perceived sexiness (though our results are unchanged when we do not make this control for perceived sexiness). Models 4-6 replicate the parameterizations of Models 1-3, but for this case. Once again, the crucial coefficients are in the wrong direction. Hence the group-level operationalization of this hypothesis, while not obviously the most logical, is the only one that is both defensible and has a potential for empirical support.

Table C-1: Equations for Women Choosing Men Only; Coefficients Only Reported

	Model 1 SEXY	Model 2 SEXY	Model 3 SEXY	Model 4 SLEEP	Model 5 SLEEP	Model 6 SLEEP
(1) EGO'S STATUS		. ^a	-.590		. ^a	.276
(2) ALTER'S STATUS		1.091	1.446		2.339	1.822
(3) = (2)-(1)	.632	-.014 ^b		.403	-.645 ^b	
(4) = (2)*(1)			3.785 ^b			1.901 ^b
(5) ALTER SEXY				2.254	.480	.474

^a=cannot be estimated due to linear combination; ^b=in wrong direction for theoretical implication