

Chapter 19

Advertised Waist-to-Hip Ratios of Online Female Escorts: An Evolutionary Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Web's global reach provides evolutionary behavioral scientists unique opportunities to investigate human universals steeped in a common and evolved human nature. In the current article, it is argued that many forms of online sexual communication are indicative of our evolved mating minds, including the manner by which female escorts are "advertised" online. It is demonstrated that online advertisers provide a restricted set of morphological cues whilst advertising female escorts, these being congruent with men's evolved aesthetic preferences. Specifically, it is shown that irrespective of cultural setting, online escorts advertise waist-to-hip ratios (WHR) that are in line with the near-universal male preference for women that possess WHRs of 0.70.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet's ubiquitous and global reach provides scholars with countless new opportunities to study evolutionary-based human universals. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the study of human sexuality in the online setting. The importance of sex within the Web manifests itself in a myriad of ways. Cooper (2004) reported that the most searched subject matter on the Internet was sex, and added that online dating constituted

the most profitable instantiation of paid content on the Internet. Cronin and Davenport (2001) discussed the importance of pornography within the greater phenomenon of e-commerce. They stated (p. 41), "Certainly, it is universally acknowledged by information technology experts that the adult entertainment industry has been at the leading edge in terms of building high-performance Web sites with state-of-the-art features and functionality." Stern and Handel (2001) raised the same point in their historical analysis of sexual content

in various forms of mass media. Spink, Jansen, Wolfram, and Saracevic (2002) used *Excite* query data from 1997, 1999, and 2001 to determine the general topics that were most often searched on the Internet. "Sex and pornography" was ranked in the top five categories in each of the latter three data sets. Using an *Excite* query data set from 1999, Spink, Ozmutlu, and Lorence (2004) found that 15.9% of all queries were sex-related. Li (2000) divulged that online revenues originating from adult websites for the years 1998 to 2001 represented more than two-thirds of the aggregate online revenues. In light of all of these disparate facts, it is not surprising that Peter and Valkenburg (2006, p. 178) concluded, "More than any other medium, the Internet is a sexual medium."

Of relevance to the current article are forms of online sexual communication that are demonstrative of the Darwinian forces that shape human sexuality. Loosely speaking, online sexual communication can take place either between groups of Internet users (e.g., via online personal ads, in chat rooms, or at www.myspace.com) or between companies and prospective online customers (e.g., spam, Internet pornographic sites, or online escort services). In the current article, I explore a ubiquitous instantiation of online business-to-consumer communication, namely, the manner by which online advertisers and related professional communicators (e.g., pornographers) advertise female escorts. Not surprisingly from an evolutionary perspective, men constitute the majority of consumers that are targeted by such ads. More generally, there exists a strong male effect across a wide range of online sexual activities. Using longitudinal data from the General Social Survey, Buzzell (2005) found that irrespective of the technology (movie theaters in 1973, movie theaters or VCRs in 1994, and Internet in 2000), men outnumbered women by significant amounts as the consumers of pornography. In the online setting, men were more than six times as likely

to have visited a pornographic Web site. Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2000) found that men constituted the overwhelming proportion of sexually compulsive (88%) and cybersex individuals (79%). Additionally, they propose that men are more likely to use visual images in their online sexual pursuits while women make greater use of chat rooms in their attempt to form and develop relationships. Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, and Mathy (2004) replicated the general pattern of findings, albeit they proposed that differential socialization of the two sexes is the explanatory mechanism (i.e., innate biological forces that shape sex-specific sexual phenomena were not recognized). Using a college sample, Goodson, McCormick, and Evans (2001) concluded that men are more likely to search for sexual images on the Internet while Philaretou, Mahfouz, and Allen (2005) recognized that men constitute the substantial majority of Internet sex users. Finally, Vartti (2001) investigated various types of German matchmaking Web sites and concluded that women constituted well over 99% of the "advertised" individuals. In other words, it is seldom the case that women are seeking men via these online mediums. This universal and robust male effect is demonstrative of evolutionary-based sex differences in human sexuality.

In the remainder of the article, I report the results of a content analytic study that was conducted to explore the manner by which female escorts are "advertised" online. I demonstrate that male customers seek universal cues of beauty whilst foraging online for prospective escorts (see DiClemente & Hantula, 2003; Rajala & Hantula, 2000; and Smith & Hantula, 2003, for evolutionary approaches to online foraging albeit in non-pornographic contexts). Prior to doing so, I provide a brief discussion of three theoretical ideas relevant to the content analysis namely media richness/media naturalness, ecological rationality, and the Savanna Principle.

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