

# What Makes a Siren Sultry: Investigating the Attractiveness Stereotype in Vocal Performance



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## Introduction

The current study evaluates the impact of facial, physical attraction, gender, and feelings of rejection on the evaluation of vocal talent and vocal attractiveness.

Physical attractiveness has been linked to greater success across many situations, but to what extent does it influence vocal performance evaluation? Prior studies have evaluated attractiveness of the spoken voice, but research into the impact of physical attraction within a vocal music context is limited. To date, it is known that vocal tone is the key factor in perceived auditory attractiveness. The current work builds from this finding to examine the influence of the halo effect of attraction and risk regulation on ratings of vocal evaluation.

In this study, we tested the hypothesis that an attractive female target would be rated as more vocally skilled and vocally attractive than an unattractive target, because of the physical attraction halo effect. This effect was hypothesized to be more prominent in heterosexual male participants for partner selection purposes. Further, it was proposed that when rejection concerns were salient, participants would balance their competing desires for connection and protection by showing a preference for “safer” choices.

## Procedure

Participants completed background questionnaires about relationship preferences and completed an autobiographical recall task to manipulate rejection salience. Then, participants viewed pictures of 11 different females and rated the vocal skill and vocal attractiveness of each pictured target. Participants were asked to make ratings based upon vocal tone. Each picture was paired with a separate female, soprano vocal recording of a fragment of *The Star Spangled Banner*. Unknown to participants, one voice was presented twice with different pictures, one high in attractiveness and one low in attractiveness. The two recordings had varying diction, note emphases, and ornamentation, but maintained the same tone quality.

To further examine this effect, we created a difference score, indexing the disparity in ratings for high vs. low attractiveness targets. We then conducted a hierarchical linear regression analysis. As depicted in the graph, male participants in the acceptance condition rated highly attractive targets as more vocally skilled and vocally attractive as compared to male participants in the rejection condition.

## Conclusions

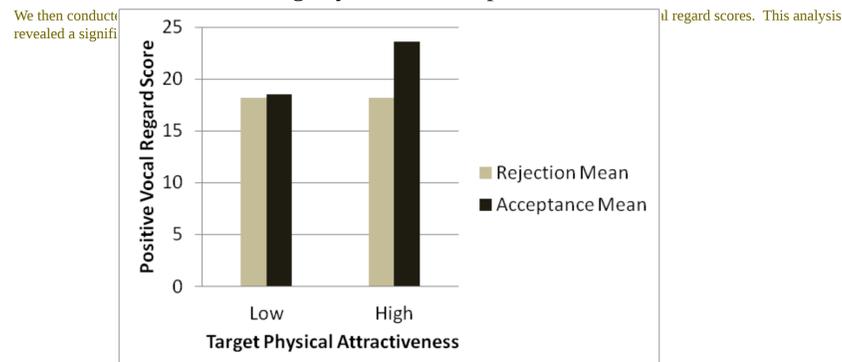
As predicted, male participants demonstrated the halo effect, evaluating the highly attractive target as more vocally skilled. However, this preference was only seen in the acceptance condition. When primed with rejection, male participants reported a similar level of vocal regard for the high and low attractiveness targets.

In line with risk regulation, we believe that the obtained findings demonstrate a strategy aimed at balancing connection and protection. Male participants may have felt particularly threatened by the combination of rejection priming and the increased level of risk associated with a highly attractive female target. Taken together, this likely accounted for the absence of the halo effect in evaluations of vocal performance observed by males rating desirable targets in the rejection condition, as compared to their counterparts in the acceptance condition.

## Results

To evaluate vocal skill and vocal attractiveness, we created a composite measure, termed positive vocal regard. This measure consisted of 4 items assessing vocal preference for both the low and high attractiveness targets ( $\alpha > .95$ ).

Ratings by Male Participants



## Methods

### Participants

88 (38 male) undergraduate students at High Point University. Only 12 self-identified as singers and 15 as musically talented.

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