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Introduction

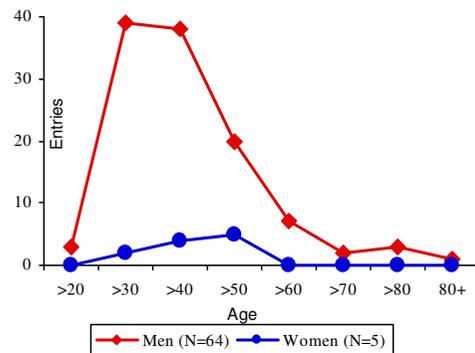
The display hypothesis (Miller, 1999, 2000) assumes, among others, a correlation between literary and markers of reproduction relevant success. Lyric poetry, following the handicap principle, is more difficult to fake than non-lyric literature and thus a better indicator of human reproductive quality. These two hypotheses were tested with respect to German literature of the 18th to 20th century.

Methods

- Literary success was operationalized by the number of entries of a writer in the literary canon of the highly respected German literary critic Reich-Ranicki who lists the literary works of 69 writers which he considers to be of high literary quality
- Data about each writer's reproduction relevant successes was collected by researching available biographies

Results

- 92.8 % of all writers (N=69) were male
- 93.2 % of all entries (N=161) were achieved by men
- Mean age of male writers (N=64) for the first work in the canon: 31.0 (Median: 28.5)
- Mean age of male writers (N=64) for all works in the canon: 35.7 (Median: 32.0)
- Later female age peak (cf. Miller, 1999, p. 85):
- Mean age of female writers (N=5) for the first work in the canon: 35.4 (Median: 33.0)
- Mean age of female writers (N=5) for all works in the canon: 37.3 (Median: 33.0)



Number of entries in the most prestigious German literary canon, by age and sex of writer

Correlations between # canon entries and mating success, and means

Mating Success	Male writers: 18 th -20 th century (N=64)	
Marriages	-.24	1.5
Engagements (w/o marriages)	.31	1.3
Affairs, girlfriends...	.57***	2.9
Female admirers	.44	1.8
Children	.42**	3.2
Total score ¹	.42**	5.5
Total score ¹ (w/o marriages)	.46***	5.0

1 : mean score of all mating successes

66 % of all mating successes were achieved after the first canon entry

Life age in years

	Lyric poets	Non-lyric writers
Means:	58.4	61.8
	$d = 0.20$ (ns)	

Differences between lyric poets and writers of other genres (only male) after controlling for life age

Mating Success	Means		Differences	
	Lyric poetry (N=26)	Non-lyric literature (N=38)	F	η^2
Marriages	1.5	1.5	-	-
Engagements (w/o marriages)	1.4	1.3	0.40	-
Affairs, girlfriends...	4.1	2.1	5.87*	0.14
Female admirers	2.0	1.7	0.09	-
Children	2.5	3.6	2.84	-
Total score	5.7	5.3	0.17	-

Trivers-Willard hypothesis (Trivers & Willard, 1973)

- typical sex ratio at birth: 106 sons : 100 daughters (Trivers, 1985)
- for all writers in the canon: 138 sons : 100 daughters

$$\chi^2(1) = 9.66^{**}$$

- Difference between lyric poets and writers of other genres: 84 : 100 vs 168 : 100

Discussion

- The current study shows substantial correlations between literary and markers of reproduction relevant success. To our knowledge, this is the first study examining this relation.
- Furthermore, the presented data seem to show that lyric poets had more mating success than non-lyric writers. This could be interpreted as a support of lyric poetry being a larger handicap than other forms of literature. Further studies with larger sample sizes are required, though.
- The Trivers-Willard principle seems to apply to non-lyric writers but not to lyric poets. If this means that lyric poets are of lower socio-economic status, must be left to further studies.

References

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