Despite the Dumb Jokes, Stereotypes May Reflect Some Smart Cho...  http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/07/business/07scene.html?_r=1&o...
In short, the hypothesis that beauty and brains go together does not appear far-fetched. (No one ever claimed life is fair.) By similar reasoning, if gentlemen prefer blondes, fair-haired women should pair more often with intelligent, more successful men, and since hair color is at least weakly inheritable, a positive correlation should also emerge between blondness and intelligence.

What, then, accounts for the pervasiveness of dumb blonde jokes? The logic that governs decisions about investment in education and training suggests a possible answer. How intelligent you appear to others depends not only on your native mental abilities, but also on the extent to which you cultivate them through investment in education and training. In turn, the extent to which a person pursues such investments in “human capital” depends on how their returns compare with those for alternative investments.

If blondes are perceived as more attractive, then being blond may create valuable opportunities that do not require onerous investments in education and training. The dumb blonde stereotype may thus stem from the fact that blondes rationally choose to invest less than others in education and other forms of human capital.

This interpretation is consistent with research documenting a positive link between earnings and physical attractiveness. In a 1993 paper, for example, two economists, Daniel Hamermesh of the University of Texas and Jeff E. Biddle of Michigan State University, reported that people described as good-looking earned more than 10 percent more than those described as plain. The authors also found that plain women were more likely to marry men with limited education.

The human capital story suggests a similar rationale for the dumb athlete stereotype. Contrary to popular impressions, intelligence and athletic ability may be slightly positively correlated in the population as a whole. (The link shouldn’t be surprising. It is the brain, after all, that controls the body.) But because gifted athletes enjoy many attractive social and employment opportunities that others do not, they may rationally choose to invest less, on average, in human capital.

The dumb athlete stereotype is further reinforced by the fact that varsity athletes at any given university are actually less intelligent than their classmates, since many were admitted primarily on the strength of their athletic skills, not because of their academic achievements. If each university admitted people whose last name begins with the letter “M” with SAT scores 400 points lower that those of other applicants, the false impression would quickly form that people with names like Martin and McDermott were mentally deficient. It is the same with athletes.

The bottom line is that popular perceptions about the intelligence of blondes and athletes may stem more from the academic choices made by members of these groups and from choices that others make about them than from any innate differences in mental ability.

Or perhaps jealous brunettes and nonathletes with time on their hands simply sit around making up jokes about their rivals.

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