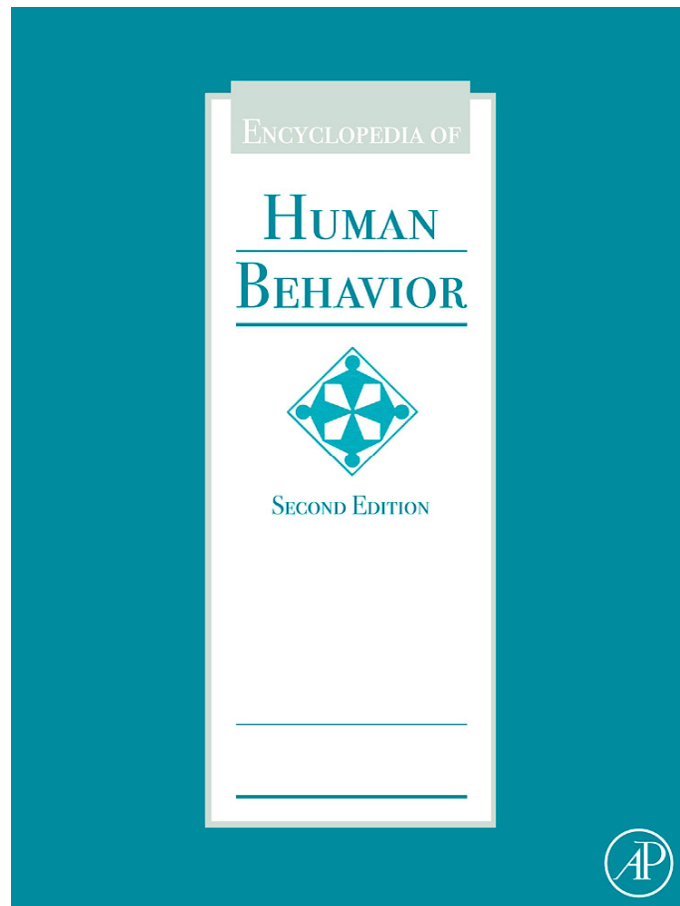


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## Mate Selection

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### Glossary

**Long-term mating** Long-term romantic relationships (e.g., cohabitation, marriage).

**Mate value** One's value in the mating market, based on one's reproductive value as perceived by potential mates.

**Minimum parental investment** The amount of expenditure toward offspring that an organism or individual is physiologically required to make.

**Ovulation** In the human menstrual cycle, ovulation is when a mature ovum (egg) is released from an ovary and is therefore available to be fertilized.

**Sexual dimorphism** Differences in phenotype (physical appearance, behavior) between males and females within a species.

**Short-term mating** Engaging in sexual intercourse without commitment (e.g., one-night stands, casual sex).

**Sociosexuality** The extent to which an individual is open to and interested in short-term mating and the extent to which an individual is open to and interested in long-term mating.

**Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)** The ratio of the circumference of the waist to that of the hips; an indicator of health and fertility in women, with a ratio of 0.7 (or lower) being ideal.

### Introduction

The topic of mate selection is one that is intrinsically fascinating. Why do we choose who we choose? What makes them attractive to us? Certain features (e.g., breasts, hips, long hair, lips) are found alluring in women, while others (e.g., strong jaws, chiseled cheekbones, biceps) are found attractive in men. Men and women also seem to approach mating from different perspectives – generally, men are more interested than women in having short-term relations, while women are more interested than men in having long-term relations. A man seems to prioritize attractiveness in his partner, while a woman seems to prefer a partner who has a job that supports at least himself if not her as well (this is less of a concern to men). In what other ways do men and women differ in their mate preferences? In what ways are they similar? Why do these preferences exist? How did they come about? This article addresses these important questions. It (1) introduces social and evolutionary perspectives on mate selection (2) examines how individuals select mates for long- and short-term relationships, (3) presents empirical research on the effects of the ovulatory cycle on mate selection, (4) explores same-sex preferences, and (5) reviews studies on actual mate choices.

### Perspectives

There are two prominent perspectives on why humans choose the mates they do. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but do have different foci. Some social psychologists focus on social role theory to explain mate preferences, while evolutionary psychologists focus on evolutionary adaptations. This article focuses on the evolutionary perspective, as most of the developments in mate selection have stemmed from predictions generated by this perspective. However, it briefly introduces both viewpoints here.

Social role theory argues that mate preferences are based on cultural expectations. That is, in each culture, there are generally held expectations for ideal male and female mates. Such

expectations, or social roles, are shaped by the values of a society, which in turn are shaped by various constraints. For instance, from a sociocultural perspective, women in most societies have less power socially and economically than men do. To gain better access to economic resources and upward mobility, women need to select marriage partners who have social status and income potential. Thus, these traits are an important part of the male social role. In contrast, men are not excluded from economic participation. Rather, they are free to pursue what society deems pleasurable, such as a person's physical attributes. As such, physical appearance is a large part of the female social role.

Why do those traditional sex roles exist in the first place? Evolutionary psychologists argue that it is because they were adaptive in our ancestral environment. From this perspective, human brains consist of problem-solving devices (i.e., adaptive mechanisms) that have been shaped over millions of years of natural and sexual selection. That is, psychologies that somehow aided ancestral humans in reproducing more successfully are likely to have been passed down over evolutionary history to the present day. Because men and women have different reproductive capacities and constraints, the sexes may have evolved different psychologies relating to mating and reproduction. In the following paragraphs, this theory is explored in greater detail.

### Relationship Selection

What type of relationship to pursue may depend on an individual's sociosexual orientation, or willingness to have sex without commitment. Although both sexes seem to value long-term, committed relationships, men are significantly more inclined than women to engage in short-term (casual sexual) mating. Evolutionary theorists attribute this key sex difference to differential parental investment.

Evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers drew upon Darwin's writings on sexual selection as well as more recent research to formulate parental investment theory, from which many

hypotheses and fruitful studies have been designed. Trivers defines parental investment as “any investment by the parent in an individual offspring that increases the offspring’s chance of surviving (and hence reproductive success) at the cost of the parent’s ability to invest in other offspring.” In a species, the sex that makes the larger minimum parental investment typically evolves to be the choosier sex, whereas members of the less-investing sex compete among themselves for access to the more valuable sex. For humans and other mammals, females are physiologically required to make a much larger parental investment. In fact, because female sex cells (eggs) require more energy to produce and maintain than male sex cells (spermatozoa), when an egg is fertilized, females have already made more of an investment than males have. Mammalian females also incur the costs of a long period of internal gestation, birth, and subsequent lactation and nursing. In contrast, a male’s minimum parental investment may potentially end with the release of seminal fluid. This differential minimum required parental investment makes females more selective than males because females have more to lose from mating with a low-quality partner.

Another way to view this dynamic is to consider that men and women differ in terms of how partner number affects reproductive success. For men, each new sexual partner represents a potential increase in offspring. Women, however, are physiologically constrained by pregnancy and lactation and thus do not reproductively benefit from having numerous sexual partners. From the perspective of genes, upon which evolutionary processes operate, a gene or set of genes that promoted sexual promiscuity may have successfully propagated through males but not through females. It is important to note that genes, in order to propagate, do not require organisms, including humans, to be consciously aware of their operation. Just as a person does not need to be aware that eating contributes to the reproductive success of genes involved with hunger mechanisms, the individual does not need to be aware that he or she is propagating genes when choosing mates.

Several studies have shown that women are more cautious about engaging in short-term sexual relations. For instance, evolutionary social psychologists Norman Li and Douglas Kenrick recently performed an experiment to investigate the kinds of mates people would design if given varying ‘budgets’ of characteristics. When participants were asked whether they would enter into a long-term relationship if they encountered the ideal long-term mate they had designed, men and women were found to be similarly selective; however, women were significantly more selective when it came to short-term relationships. Women were more reticent than men to say they would engage in a short-term relationship even when they had a high budget to design an ideal partner.

In a classic field experiment, social psychologists Russell Clark and Elaine Hatfield found that when a female stranger asked a male university student whether he wanted to go to bed with her that night, 75% said yes. However, when a male stranger asked a female the same question, 100% said no. Evolutionary psychologists David Buss and David Schmitt asked people how many partners they would ideally like to have in a lifetime. For men, the mean was 18, whereas for women, it was 4.5. Men are also more likely than women to desire sex sooner after meeting a potential partner. In the same study, women and men were equally likely to have sex with

a potential partner after knowing them for 5 years; however, at every shorter interval of acquaintance (2 years, 1 year, 6 months, 3 months, etc.), men were significantly more likely to say that they would consent to sexual intercourse. This sex difference was replicated by Schmitt in a study of 52 cultures. Men also significantly lower their standards when it comes to short-term mating, while women do not. Additionally, men prefer women with sexual experience when engaging in short-term mating, but not long-term mating. The lowering of standards and the preferences for sexually experienced short-term partners make sense in terms of promoting sexual activity with a larger number of women and support an evolved preference for short-term mating in men. However, these findings could all represent how women prefer to be *seen* rather than their actual desires.

A recent meta-analytic review by Peterson and Hyde examined reports of 30 sexual behaviors and attitudes in 834 papers and 7 large national data sets between 1993 and 2007. Overall, men reported slightly more sexual experience and sexual permissiveness, but these effect sizes were small for everything other than pornography use and masturbation (for which there were medium effect sizes). However, even this difference might be explained by the fact that women underreport masturbation and pornography consumption, while men do not. While men were more supportive of casual sex and women were more supportive of sex with commitment, this latter point was the reverse of what Oliver and Hyde found in their meta-analysis of a similar nature that was conducted 20 years ago. This may reflect changes in social standards: it is now acceptable for a woman to engage in sex within a committed relationship, whereas 20 years ago, premarital sex was impermissible for a woman. The differences between males and females in sexual behavior and attitudes may not be as large as is often portrayed.

Which type of relationship is more prominent depends on the sex ratio. The more men versus women, the more a society leans toward long-term mating – less promiscuity and early marriage. The more women versus men, the more a society leans toward short-term mating – more promiscuity and late marriage. Thus, men’s preferred mating strategy is more likely when women are in greater supply, whereas women’s preferred strategy is more likely when men are in greater supply.

### Long-Term Mate Preferences

When selecting for a long-term mate, men and women both make significant investments of time and resources, so there should be some similarities in their long-term mate preferences. Indeed, several studies have shown that long-term mate selection seems to be somewhat assortative. For example, Watson and colleagues recently investigated assortative mating in newlywed couples. They found that both sexes select for a mate with the same political inclinations, the same religion, and someone of a similar age. Moderate similarities have been found with respect to intelligence: people seem to prefer someone with a similar vocabulary, education level, and general IQ. It makes sense that people prefer mates who are similar to themselves, as similarity minimizes conflict in relationships while maximizing cohesion.

Although men and women are both selective and share similarities in what they seek in long-term relationship partners, there are also some key differences. Women care more than men about their partner's social status and ability to acquire resources, while men care more than women about their partner's physical attractiveness. Buss has shown that these differences tend to be found not only in the United States and other Western countries, but also across 37 different cultures worldwide. Buss and Kenrick have also shown that while couples tend to be similar in age, women are attracted to men who are their own age or older and men are attracted to women at peak fertility – that is, women in their 20s.

Physical attractiveness and resources are not only sex-differentiated, but they are regarded as necessities by men and women, respectively. That is, Li and colleagues found that when mating budgets are low, men tend to prioritize physical attractiveness above other traits in their long-term partners. In contrast, women tend to prioritize resource-related traits in their long-term partners. Once these traits are obtained in roughly average levels, both sexes tend to value other traits. In other words, both sexes ideally want a well-rounded mate who has it all. However, men seem geared toward ensuring that their long-term mates are not physically unattractive and women seem geared toward ensuring that their long-term mates are not destitute.

Multiple studies have suggested that aspects of females that are found to be physically attractive – breasts, buttocks, skin, hair, teeth, movement patterns, etc. – are related to youth, sexual maturity, and health, which impact a woman's ability to bear children. Less intuitive features that are found widely attractive, such as body and facial symmetry, are also cues to genotypic and phenotypic quality. In both men and women, low fluctuating asymmetry indicates better mental, cognitive, and physical health. Buss hypothesizes that the most compelling reason for men to pursue a long-term mating strategy is to monopolize a female's lifetime reproductive resources. If this is the case, then it makes sense to be particularly attracted to signals of fecundity and health, and also explains the common finding that men prefer younger women.

One particularly important measure of fecundity has been investigated by psychologist Devendra Singh: the waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). While preferences for body mass levels and weight vary across cultures depending on factors such as food scarcity, in most cultures, women with a lower WHR (generally in the 0.6–0.8 range) are found to be the most attractive. This has been found to be true in White-American, African-American, Hispanic, Indonesian, and British males, as well as in art and statues from around the world over the centuries, and more traditional hunter-gatherer societies such as the Aché. Investigating populations who live in conditions more similar to the ancestral environment showed that it is not necessarily the absolute WHR that matters, but rather that a lower WHR in comparison to the normal female range to which a man is exposed is found to be especially attractive. Direct relationships between WHR and fertility have been found, and it has been hypothesized that low WHR helps distinguish which females are of a fertile age and are not pregnant (pregnancy increases WHR). Furthermore, Hughes and Gallup recently found that females with low WHR had intercourse for the first time at an earlier age, reported having had more sexual partners, more

extra-pair copulations, and more instances of sexual relations with men already in a relationship. This provides further evidence of the attractiveness of a low WHR, but it also indicates a related issue: sexual infidelity.

As men tend to invest significant amounts of time and resources into long-term relationships, they may have evolved to ensure that their investment is not misdirected, by being sexually jealous and more interested in women who will be faithful to them. That is, men who invest in long-term relationships without regard to a partner's sexual fidelity likely do not leave any descendants. Buss and colleagues found that 60% of men would be more upset by sexual infidelity as opposed to emotional infidelity. Additionally, men find promiscuity acceptable in a short-term mate, but unacceptable in a long-term mate and, as mentioned earlier, find sexual inexperience to be an attractive quality in a potential long-term partner. These preferences support the idea that when a man selects a long-term mate, he may have an underlying need to ensure future paternity.

Women, on the other hand, have different concerns when it comes to selecting a long-term mate. A woman is always certain of her maternity because she is incubating and giving birth to the child herself. Instead, her concerns focus on a partner's investment, resources, and status. Through a long-term relationship with a man of high status who has a stable income, a woman can acquire direct resources for her children, as well as the indirect reproductive advantages that social and economic benefits can confer. Several studies have found that measures such as socioeconomic status (SES), social dominance, ambitiousness, or social status are valued and prioritized when women are selecting long-term mates.

### Short-Term Mate Preferences

Men have similar criteria for selecting a short-term mate as for selecting a long-term mate. That is, for all of the reasons mentioned previously, physical attractiveness is especially valued in a short-term partner. Although women generally prefer long-term mating, some women do engage in short-term mating. Why would women engage in short-term mating when considering the potential costs? Beyond the sexual pleasure involved, the adaptive benefits for women have been hypothesized to include instantaneous resource acquisition (e.g., prostitution or 'gold digging'), better genetic quality, or being able to evaluate a mate for a long-term mating context. Li and Kenrick found that when women are selecting a short-term mate, they (like men) prioritize physical attractiveness. However, as opposed to looking for a fertile mate, women may be selecting good genes in a short-term mateship. That is, although a casual sexual partner may not contribute much in the way of income or resources, his genetic quality – which can be directly passed on to offspring – is relevant if pregnancy occurs. According to psychologist Steven Gangestad and biologist Randy Thornhill, a healthy set of genes and immune system provide resistance to pathogens that can adversely affect developmental stability. In addition to having negative health consequences, individuals who are not able to fend off pathogens during development tend to possess a greater degree of bilateral asymmetry (i.e., left-side development deviates from being

symmetrical to right-side development). Because testosterone suppresses the immune system, only men who have strong immunity are able to maintain high levels of testosterone and remain healthy. Thus, testosterone-related physical features, when present with symmetry, are honest indicators that a man's genes are resistant to pathogens. Consistent with this theory, women seem to prefer short-term mates who are symmetrical, muscular, tall, broad-shouldered, and have masculine facial features. Thus, whereas men seem to be seeking women who are capable of reproducing, women seem to be seeking good genes for their potential children.

Women, according to psychologists Steven Gangestad and Jeffrey Simpson, may have evolved to utilize short-term mating as part of a mixed mating strategy. That is, women want men who are strong and healthy, but they also want men who will invest and help raise children. However, this cannot always be found in the same individual, and such men, being high in demand, tend not to be loyal mates. So, although a committed relationship with a resourceful man who is also physically attractive is ideally preferred, most women have to choose between resourceful men for long-term relationships and physically attractive men for short-term relationships. As such, most women opt for the former. If the opportunity presents itself, some of these women may have sexual affairs with physically attractive men, thereby obtaining resources and investment from one man but genetic quality from another. Indeed, women's sexual affair partners tend to be more physically attractive and symmetrical than their regular partners.

### Ovulatory Effects

Individuals vary in whether they utilize a short-term or long-term mating strategy. However, there is also important intra-individual variation. This section focuses on the way the ovulatory cycle affects women's own choices as well as men's attraction to women at different points in their cycle. It is one thing to say that men and women have unique preferences in the opposite sex in certain contexts, but quite another to think that a woman could be attracted to a certain type of man one day and a different type of man two weeks later. However, this has been found to be the case. Similarly, one generally thinks of a woman's physical attractiveness as being relatively stable; however, evidence shows that a woman actually varies in how attractive she is perceived to be based on the phase of her menstrual cycle. These processes are not conscious, but are rather driven by hormones and reactions to the hormones of others.

### Women's Preferences When Ovulating

Ovulation is the most fertile phase of a woman's menstrual cycle. At this time, indicators of genetic quality become more important to women selecting mates. For example, Ian Penton-Voak and colleagues found that during phases of high conception risk, women preferred more masculine faces for short-term relationships. Consistent with the good genes theory mentioned previously, more masculine features might indicate genes that can resist disease, which would be beneficial for offspring. In contrast, when assessing attractiveness for long-term relationships, women choose men with more

feminine faces irrespective of the menstrual cycle, presumably because such men would be more likely to invest and less likely to have extramarital affairs. Additionally, when women are ovulating, they prefer the scent of men who are more symmetrical. Furthermore, they prefer the scent of men who scored high on a dominance scale when fertile or when currently in a relationship. Recently, Gangestad and colleagues found that women are more attracted to traits such as physical attractiveness, muscularity, and being confrontational when most fertile and when evaluating men as short-term mates. Anthony Little and colleagues found that women prefer facial symmetry in men during the most fertile phase of their menstrual cycle and also when they are in the midst of a long-term relationship. They also found an increase in preference for both symmetry and sexually dimorphic facial characteristics in women who consider themselves to be physically attractive. David Puts similarly found that lower frequency male voices were preferred by women for a short-term relationship over a long-term relationship, and were most preferred when women were ovulating. Additionally, preference for a deeper male voice was correlated with high self-reported mating success. Whereas women of low attractiveness or mating success might have a hard time keeping a high-quality mate, a woman of high attractiveness or mating success might be able to keep one or, even if he deserts her, find another man to help her raise her children.

### Men's Preferences for Ovulating Women

Women are more receptive to short-term pairings during ovulation; they also judge themselves as more attractive and are judged as being more attractive by men during this time. Why might this be? In many mammalian species, females experience estrus. In these species, females only engage in sexual relations and can only be fertilized during this time. Females often display obvious signs of estrus, such as genital swellings or spontaneously elevating the hindquarters. Human females, like the other great apes, experience menstrual cycles rather than estrus cycles. This means that if no eggs are fertilized, the endometrial tissue is shed through menstruation rather than being reabsorbed. For many years it was thought that ovulation was entirely concealed in humans. As human females are sexually receptive throughout the menstrual cycle and do not show that they are ovulating (and might not even be aware of their own ovulatory patterns), it was thought that men would not be able to detect female fertility. It was also hypothesized that this might have evolved to extend investment from males and sexual interest throughout the entire cycle, encouraging monogamy. However, this mechanism would also enable females to cuckold males more easily because it would be more difficult for males to keep track of their partner's fertile window. In this way, it would have allowed women to mate with, and become impregnated by extra-pair men. However, more recently it has been shown that ovulation might not be as concealed as previously thought.

Recent laboratory studies have demonstrated that during the fertile phase of their cycles, women are more attractive to men. Women experience a decreased WHR, increased body symmetry, greater facial attractiveness, greater likelihood of wearing revealing clothing, more attractive scent, and even higher levels of creativity and fluency on high-fertility days.



Additionally, Kristina Durante and Norman Li found that higher estradiol levels (which fluctuate throughout the menstrual cycle and are higher during ovulation) were associated with higher ratings of self- and other-perceived attractiveness and the likelihood of mating. Furthermore, during ovulation women dress more provocatively, are perceived as trying to look more attractive, are guarded more closely by mates, and receive more attention and expressions of love from mates.

Recently, an innovative study by psychologists Geoffrey Miller and colleagues assessed the effects of the ovulatory cycle on tip earnings in lap dancers. Eighteen dancers recorded their menstrual cycles and reported on 296 cumulative work shifts over a period of 60 days. Participants who were not using any hormonal contraceptives earned US\$335 for each 5-h shift during ovulation, US\$260 during the luteal phase, and US\$185 during menstruation. Conversely, those using hormonal contraceptives earned only US\$193 per shift and experienced no ovulatory peak. This means that on average, normally cycling lap dancers make US\$80 more than those who use hormonal contraceptives each shift. This suggests that men, though almost certainly not consciously, are able to detect female ovulation in some way. However, the fact that women still make money during nonfertile phases suggests that this detection is imperfect. If infertile women were entirely unattractive, then they would make no money. This could be the result of an evolutionary arms race between men and women – women developing mechanisms to conceal ovulation in order to cuckold men and men developing mechanisms to detect ovulation in order to mate with fertile women.

### Same-Sex Mate Preferences

Evolutionary psychologists rarely address same-sex attraction, mate selection, and relationships because the evolutionary function of homosexuality and bisexuality is still unclear. However, Alfred Kinsey found that ~10% of the male population have engaged in exclusively homosexual interactions for a period of 3 or more years. Estimates of female homosexuality are usually much lower; however, this may be because female sexuality is more fluid. Michael Bailey studied arousal patterns in men and women by measuring physiological arousal while watching different kinds of pornography. He found that men tended to be aroused either by watching lesbian and heterosexual sex or by watching homosexual male sex, but not both. Females, on the other hand, were equally aroused by homosexual male and female sex as well as heterosexual sex. Sell, Wells, and Wypij used a survey to measure the prevalence of homosexual attraction and behavior in the United States, United Kingdom, and France. They found that for men, the percentages of attraction and behavior tended to be similar, while for women, the percentage of females attracted to other females was higher than the percentage of those who had engaged in sexual behavior with other females. The important differentiation between attraction and behavior is discussed in a heterosexual context in the following paragraphs.

Several studies have suggested that there might be an innate component to homosexuality. This could be due to a gene that makes an individual more likely to become homosexual, and it could also be due to prenatal androgen signaling. If

homosexuality is heritable, why would that be? What benefits could it bestow for an individual's genes? One possibility is kin selection, whereby an individual is more likely to help his or her kin because they share a large proportion of genes. This means that benefits shared with kin indirectly benefit one's own genes and costs to kin are indirectly costly to one's own genes. The higher the proportion of genes shared, the more likely it is that an individual will help. Stated differently, genes can spread by inducing organisms to help their relatives, because relatives are likely to have copies of those helping genes. This has been demonstrated in species from ground squirrels to humans. So, if a homosexual individual helps to ensure the survival of his or her brothers' and sisters' children, that individual is also ensuring the survival of his or her own genes. This theory is consistent with the finding that having older brothers increases the likelihood of a male being homosexual. Anthony Bogaert found that each additional older brother increased the likelihood that the subsequent son would be homosexual by an average of 38%. However, evidence supporting this hypothesis is still inconclusive, and several alternative theories have been postulated.

Regardless of why homosexuals and bisexuals exist, it is clear that they do exist and they do show certain attraction patterns. While conclusions drawn from these studies are more tentative because they lack the replication of heterosexual studies, certain trends are still present. Bailey and colleagues performed a study comparing homosexual and heterosexual male and female participants, and found that sex had a considerably larger impact on their results than did sexual orientation. Men – both heterosexual and homosexual – were more interested in uncommitted sex and prioritized physical attractiveness more than women. However, there were some proclivities that were a bit more complicated. Men were much more interested in visual sexual stimuli than women generally, but lesbians were more interested than heterosexual women in pornography (though not as much as heterosexual men). Men were more likely to express that partner's status is unimportant, but lesbians were just as likely as heterosexual men to say the same. Men were more likely to be sexually jealous, while women were more likely to be emotionally jealous, but homosexual men were more similar to women than men in this case. Men were more likely than women to prefer a younger partner, but heterosexual males displayed a stronger preference than homosexual males (however, homosexual males were still more likely than females to prefer a younger partner). Finally, men had higher sociosexuality scores than women, but homosexual men had even higher sociosexuality scores than heterosexual men. However, this difference reflects differences in opportunity rather than motivation to engage in casual sex (the difference depended on the behavioral items on the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory). These collective findings suggest that generally, males and females vary more intersexually than intrasexually on these items and also that sexual orientation adds complex dispositions that should be further explored.

### Actual Mate Choices

In a meta-analysis of gender differences in mate selection preferences, Alan Feingold rightly highlights that in mate selection research, experimenters rarely distinguish between attraction,

self-professed mate preferences, and actual dating/mating choices. What people say they want could be entirely different from what they are actually attracted to, which could still be different from who they actually end up with. There are three main paradigms which have sought to explore mate selection in the real world because of this problem: (1) Personal advertisements, (2) Marriage data, and (3) Speed-dating studies. Personal ads reveal, in a naturalistic manner, what potential partners want. Speed-dating studies tell us what aspects are important in a brief encounter that could lead to a date. Marriage data tell us who really ends up with whom.

### Personal Ads

Personal ads are mate preferences revealed in competitive mating markets. Various studies have shown that advertisements are consistent with surveyed mate preferences. Women who promote themselves as being physically attractive make more demands for affluent mates. Additionally, women become less demanding as they get older, while men become more demanding. Younger women get more responses than older women and older men get more responses than younger men. This supports the idea that both men and women are able to pursue their preferred mating strategy when they perceive their own mate value as being high. More recently, a study of internet personal ads across the life span found that predictions from evolutionary psychology still hold true in this modern context: from 20 to over 75, men sought physical attractiveness and offered more status-related information; women sought more status than men did and were more selective. As men age, they look for progressively younger women; women look for men older than themselves until 75 and older, at which point they start to look for younger men. These measures seem to confirm past findings of sex differences in what men and women are looking for in a mate and the age of the preferred partner.

### Actual Marriages

Collecting data using married individuals gives researchers a different perspective on mate selection – what kind of mates are actually selected for long-term relationships? Do higher-status men attain more attractive females? Is the male usually older than the female in a marriage? Several marriage studies have found that men with successful careers do indeed have more attractive wives. Indeed, a woman's physical attractiveness, as indicated by her high school yearbook photo, is a significant predictor (more so than her intelligence) of the social status of the man she marries.

Marital satisfaction studies have also supported evolutionary predictions. Glenn Weisfield and colleagues found that a woman is more satisfied with her marriage if her husband made most of the decisions (i.e., dominance is attractive), but excessive dominance reduced satisfaction (potentially getting to the point of making a wife scared of her husband). A man is more satisfied if his wife is more attractive than him. The notion that dominant men gain more attractive wives was also supported. Overall, marriage data support evolutionary hypotheses of mate selection and validate hypothesized sex differences.

### Speed Dating

One of the ever-present difficulties of psychological research is attempting to maintain ecological validity while retaining experimental control, and this balance can be particularly hard to achieve in attraction and mate selection paradigms. Preferences that people state on questionnaires about what traits they are looking for in a partner can differ from who they actually choose. Speed dating helps bridge the gap between stated preferences and choices on who one actually wants to see again. Social psychologists Paul Eastwick and Eli Finkel performed an experiment to test whether stated preferences would prove true in an actual face-to-face dating situation by using a speed-dating paradigm. On a pre-speed-date questionnaire, men (more than women) reported that physical attractiveness would be an important characteristic when selecting for an ideal partner and for a speed date. Women (more than men) thought they would find earning potential to be an important characteristic when selecting for an ideal partner and for a speed date.

However, post-speed-date questionnaires that asked participants why they selected the specific people they did showed that, while physical attractiveness, good earning potential, and personable characteristics were all related to romantic interest, there was no evidence for sex differences in selecting for these characteristics. There was also no evidence suggesting that the lack of sex differences had anything to do with participants' long versus short-term mating preferences. Additionally, what participants thought they wanted and what they actually chose were largely independent (e.g., a participant might have said they thought physical attractiveness was very important, but then said in the postdating questionnaire that they selected their partner based on personality).

The lack of congruence between stated mate preferences and actual mating choices raises issues that deserve further study. For instance, are there really no sex differences in the importance of earning potential in mate choice, or can this be attributed to where the speed-dating study was conducted – a university campus, where most of the students are of a certain economic level as well as having a certain level of intelligence. Additionally, since most of the female participants were around 20 years old, a certain level of fertility could also be assumed. Thus, male and female participants may have less need to discriminate on the basis of earning potential and physical attractiveness, respectively. Instead, both can focus more on how well they get along with their potential mates.

### Conclusion

Mate selection is a complex process that is influenced by biology as well as culture and the environment. Individuals look for long- or short-term mates, or both, depending on hormones, phase of life, and self-perception. In general, women seem to prefer long-term relationships, but still engage in short-term mating. Although most men end up in long-term relationships, most men seem to prefer short-term mating. These types of decisions are also influenced by sex ratios of available mates versus intrasexual competitors. A strategy becomes more desirable as a function of the number of

available mates responding to that strategy and the lack of many intrasexual competitors employing that tactic. Recent speed-dating studies have shown fewer differences between men and women than previous studies found with other methods (e.g. self-report). Whether this finding can be replicated in populations with more diversity in levels of attractiveness and SES, however, has yet to be seen.

Men and women seem to be more similar when it comes to what they are looking for in a short-term partner, but differ in what they desire in a long-term partner. Good looks are a requirement for short-term mating, and other factors are less important. However, when looking for a long-term mate, women prioritize status and resources, while men continue to prioritize physical attractiveness. However, only a certain level of these is necessary. Whereas a man with an average, stable job is much more highly valued than a destitute man, a man who earns a lot more is only slightly higher in desirability to most women. Conversely, women who are moderately physically attractive are strongly preferred over women who are clearly unattractive. However, further gains in attractiveness are associated with smaller increases in overall desirability. Beyond differences in what they initially prioritize, men and women tend to ideally prefer the same kind of long-term partner – a well-rounded individual who is attractive, smart, industrious, funny, creative, and kind.

Embracing an evolutionary viewpoint does not mean ignoring cultural and social factors. Evolutionary explanations tend to focus more on the ultimate origins of preferences and behaviors, and evolved adaptations are complex processes that can have different implications depending on environmental and cultural factors. Studying mate selection across cultures and across other contexts would allow a more intricate understanding of how adaptive mate selection processes shape and are shaped by environmental factors. Indeed, scientific research across cultures is becoming more common as the world grows smaller; this is an encouraging trend.

**See also:** Evolutionary Psychology; Evolutionary Social Psychology; Human Mating; Personal Relationships in Everyday Life; Sex Differences.

## Further Reading

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## Relevant Websites

- <http://www.davidbuss.com> – Site for Dr. David Buss.
- <http://www.bradley.edu/academics/las/psy/facstaff/schmitt.shtml> – Site for Dr. David Schmitt.
- [http://www.unm.edu/psych/faculty/lg\\_gmiller.html](http://www.unm.edu/psych/faculty/lg_gmiller.html) – Site for Dr. Geoffrey Miller.
- <http://www.normli.com> – Site for Dr. Norman Li.
- <http://info.sciencedirect.com/> – Support site for ScienceDirect.