

Gender differences on mate preferences



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Abstract This experiment was conducted to study gender differences in mate selection preference.

82 participants, aged 17-23 years and have never been married were randomly selected for the experiment in a convenience sample. Participants were given a survey- listing considerations important to people in choosing a life partner- to complete. Participants had to rate how willing they are to marry a person with a certain characteristic; each characteristic is rated individually on a 7-point scale (1= not willing, 7= willing). The mean ratings for each characteristic were calculated; mean ratings were determined individually for males and females, and as a whole. Results show that males ranked physical attraction to be more important in choosing a life partner, while females placed more importance on financial stability.

Both genders equally emphasized personality and similarity. The ratings for social approval are somewhat equal, though males reported a higher need for friend approval and females, family approval. Mate Selection Preference

2Introduction Gender Differences in Mate Selection Preference The New Times Los Angeles newspaper (January 29-February 4, 1998) had on page 66 what was titled as telepersonals. The sub header read: PRESENTS: “ THIS WEEK’S TOP ADS”. A “ woman seeking men” personal ad read “ I’m a single white woman. I’m 5’7” tall, 125 lbs with honey blonde hair and brown eyes.

I have a nice figure with feminine curves, a pretty face and pretty hair. I have a tall, slender, sexy look. I’m college educated, intelligent, confident and not a bad cook. ...) I’m looking for a single white man who’s 36-47 years old, professionally employed, educated, successful, charming, fit, honest and

relationship-ready. (...) If you meet these qualifications, please leave a message at Box 1788. Moving right across the page, a “ man seeking a woman” ad described, “ I’m 6’2” tall, 185 lbs, with light brown hair and green eyes.

I’m single, professionally employed as a writer, with a defiant, wild side. I’m looking for a practical, sexy, intelligent and fun lady to keep up with me on the weekends. I enjoy the finer things in life, such as travel, working out, fine dancing, dancing the night away, and I’m looking for possibly you. Box 6371.

” Given an ad under an anonymous identity and no specifications to gender, we would still be able to identify the gender of the personal ad writer with a relatively high accuracy. We are able to do this, because of some rather distinct characteristics that are emphasized by males and females. What do people look for in choosing a life partner? What differences are there in the choices of males and females? This experiment attempts to study gender differences in mate selection preference. Mate Selection Preference 3 The study of mate selection evoked interest in early biologists; Darwin (1871 as cited in Bailey J. M. , Gaulin S.

, Agyei Y. , Gladue B. A. 1994), noted that in most species, males fought for the females, and theorized that the competition played a key role in increasing reproductiveness rather than merely surviving. Darwin’s writings on sexual selection promoted a topic of interest among theorists.

The study on mate selection however, was not extensively researched until the 1980’s, sparked off by the development of evolutionary psychology on human behaviour. The evolutionary standpoint on human mate selection <https://assignbuster.com/gender-differences-on-mate-preferences/>

preference was developed from Darwin's original theory of sexual selection. Evolutionary theories (Buss & Barnes, 1996; Kenrick & Trost, 1993 as cited in Doosje B. , Rojahn K.

, Fischer A. 1992) emphasize that current human mating strategies are biologically inherited and shaped by the obstacles humankind faced in early human history. Evolutionary theories predict gender differences in age preference, importance of physical attractiveness, and financial status. Females, for instance, are biologically predisposed to raise and care for the family. Because they would have to involve themselves in time and effort to bring up a stable and secure home, they would want mates that could in turn supply the resources essential to make sure the child is well provided for.

This suggests that females would place a relatively high emphasis on financial capability, social status, and would prefer an older mate (an older mate meant better control of resources). Males back then focused on characteristics relevant to bringing reproductive success. Because there was no sure way for males to determine female fertility, they would look for certain signs, such as physical beauty and youth (female fertility stands only for a limited time in contrast to male Mate Selection Preference 4 fertility) that signified a larger percentage chance to fertility. Also, physical beauty reflected a woman's capability and concern in taking care of herself. This would predict a higher emphasis on physical attractiveness by males than for females. The other standpoint on gender differences in mate selection preference is the socio-cultural theory (Eagly, 1987; Spence, Deaux, & Helmreich, 1985 as cited in Doosje B.

et al. , 1992). The socio-cultural theory identifies societal pressure as the reason for gender differences in mate selection. Social differences in labor roles (males are involved publicly while females are private home-based) have been established traditionally for the whole of history; only in the last century have women moved into the workplace and taken professional jobs.

But even now, men are the dominant force of economy and the leaders in professional organizations (e. g. law, medicine, and education). This theory proposes that mate selection preferences differ in congruency to societal roles. For example, men want their wives to be able to cook well, and manage the house effectively. They want their wives to have a tender, nurturing character important to bringing up the children.

Women, on the other hand, look for financial stability, crucial to provide security and a comfortable life. The socio-cultural theory also emphasizes parental and peer group influence. Men, being dominant in nature, seek to enhance social status by having a physically attractive mate. Women, facing pressure from the family, take care to marry someone who would be able to support them well.

In this present time, we are being constantly bombarded with ‘ perfect’ images, what we should look like or dress like. The pressure to conform to societal standards is enormous, especially for females in following the current fashion trends, having a nice figure, and enhancing their body image. Of course, it doesn’t help that ‘ all’ the actresses, singers and models look amazingly polished. It almost seems as a rule that beauty is a prerequisite for social esteem. Several studies that have been

carried out on gender differences in mate selection preference have reported substantial support to popular belief that women placed less importance on physical attractiveness than do men (Feingold A.

, 1990, 1991 as cited by Feingold A. 1992), and value financial stability and ambitiousness more than men do (Buss D. M. 1989, Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost 1990 as cited in Feingold A. 1992). A study of a survey consisting of a wide sample comprising men and women aged 19-35, from different social backgrounds by Sprecher, Sullivan and Hatfield (1994) showed similar results.

In studies involving character values however, findings have been largely inconsistent. Certain studies (Nevid 1984; Roscoe, Diana, & Brooks 1987 as cited in Feingold A. 1992) reported that women valued character more than men did, but others (Kenrick et al. , 1990; Wakil, 1973 as cited in Feingold A. 1992) found no significant difference.

Researchers agree with reports of gender differences in preference for physical attractiveness and financial stability, but are widely diverse in opinion of character. Very little studies have been carried out to test parental and peer influence. The few studies however (Lewis 1973; Berger 1987; Parks & Adelman, 1983 as cited in Sprecher S. , Felmlee D. , 1992), have similarly reported a positive correlation between the perceived support from these social networks and the quality and stability of a relationship.

Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) did a longitudinal study on relationships of young adults at a large Mate Selection Preference 6 Midwestern university in the United States, with results supporting previous studies on social

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influence. “ The more others treat the two as a “ good match”, the more likely they are to label themselves as a couple or unit, and the more romantically involved they will become. ” (Spreecher et al. 1992, p. 889) This study attempts to test the differences in gender preferences when selecting a mate. The first hypothesis is that males would rank physical attractiveness to be more important than would females.

The second hypothesis expects females to place more bearing on financial stability than would males. It was also hypothesized that there would not be a significant gender difference in importance of character. Fourthly, that both males and females would value societal support in choosing a partner. Method Participants 82 participants (male and female) were selected for this study.

Participants ranged in age between 17 and 23 years ($M = 20.12$). All participants were single, and none had been previously married. Most of the participants were personal acquaintances of the freshmen at Help Institute Kuala Lumpur who conducted this study.

The subjects make up a convenience sample. Materials Participants were given a one-page survey titled “ Life-Partner Preference Survey” (Appendix A). Instructions were enclosed to “ please circle how willing you would be to Mate Selection Preference 7 MARRY someone who ” on a scale of 1-7.

On the extreme left is 1 (not willing) and on the extreme right, 7 (very willing). The 13 articles were randomly distributed across the page, but in actual were each linked correspondingly to one or more of the five different dimensions tested in this study: financial stability (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5),

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social approval (Q12, Q13), physical attraction (Q5, Q7), similarity (Q9, Q10, Q12), and personality (Q8, Q10, Q11). A consent statement was printed at the top of the survey, and participants only needed to give their gender and age along with their signature; the participant's identity will remain anonymous. The survey consisted of 4 positive attributes (e. . "...has a good sense of humor"), 5 negative attributes (e.

g. "...does not possess an attractive body"), and 4 ambiguous statements.

The 4 ambiguous statements are in turn composed of two different categories, referring to earnings and education, each comprising of two contradictory statements (e. g. "... had more education than you", "... had less education than you"). Procedure Participants were given the survey forms to complete on their own.

Generally, experimenters tried to recruit a 50-50 ratio of male and female participants. The survey description was printed " Listed below are considerations that are important to some people in thinking about whether to MARRY someone. " Participants were given a one sentence instruction in the survey to " please circle how willing you would be to marry someone who..." on 7 point scale (1= not willing ... 7= very willing). No specific instructions were given orally. Participants also had ample time to finish the surveys before handing them back. The place/setting where the experiment was administered was not controlled.

Mate Selection Preference 8 Results Table 1 Mean gender differences in mate selection Theoretical variable Male Female Total Financial stability Steady job 3. 29 (1. 85) 2. 18 (1.

47) 2.72 (1.75) * Earns more 4.32 (1.90) 5.90 (1.

62) 5.24 (1.87) * More education 4.35 (1.

57) 5.51 (1.52) 5.12 (1.

63) * Earns less 4.79 (1.70) 3.41 (1.

82) 4.02 (1.85) * Less education 4.00 (1.54) 3.

26 (1.71) 3.61 (1.68) Physical Attraction Face 3.32 (1.

65) 4.21 (1.28) 3.90 (1.50) * Body 3.29 (1.

53) 3.90 (1.35) 3.66 (1.

40) PersonalityHumor 5.76 (1.44) 5.97 (1.20) 5.94 (1.

25) Respect 6.18 (1.31) 6.41 (1.16) 6.

29 (1.23) Mate Selection Preference 9 Theoretical variable Male Female

Total Similarity No interest 3.53 (1.93) 3.51 (1.

64) 3.51 (1.77) No understanding 1.91 (1.42) 2.

10 (1.37) 2.02 (1.39) Social Approval Friends 5.74 (1.08) 5.

64 (1.18) 5.70 (1.11) Family 5.88 (1.20) 6.

15 (0.90) 5.91 (1.21) Note: Numbers in brackets are standard deviations *p

< .05; Participants-descriptive data Total = 82 Age (in years): M = 20.12;

SD = 2.

40 Details for Significant Comparisons Steady job: $t(71) = 2.868, p < .05$

Earn more: $t(71) = 3.819, p < .05$ More education: $t(71) = 3.199, p < .$

05 Earn less: $t(71) = 3.343, p < .05$ Not attractive face: $t(71) = 2.570, p$

< 0.5 Mate Selection Preference 10 Results show that females ranked

financial stability to be more important than did males, in all respects.

On positive attributes, females scored higher 5.90; 5.51 compared to males who scored 4.32 and 4.

5 for a mate's higher earnings and more education respectively. On negative attributes, females ranked lower: 2.18; 3.41; 3.46 on a partner not having a steady job, earning less and having less education than did males: 3.

29, 4.79, 4.00. Males reported higher emphasis on physical attraction than did females. The negative attributes under physical attraction generated a lower ranking value by males (3.

32 for face, and 3.29 for body) than for females (4.21 for face, and 3.90 for body).

The difference in rates for personality however, was not significant. Social approval took in almost similar ratings for both males and females, with relatively high mean ratings for both genders (females reported 5.64 for friends and 6.15 for family; males reported 5.74 for friends and 5.

88 for family). Differences in similarity rankings were also insignificant.

Discussion Results indicate that females ranked financial stability to be more

important than did males. Males on the other hand, emphasized physical attractiveness more than did females.

There were no significant differences in personality, similarity, and social approval categories. The results here supported the first three hypotheses: 1) Males would rank physical attractiveness to be more important than would females. 2) Females would place more bearing on financial stability than would males. 3) There would not be a significant gender difference in importance of character. The fourth hypothesis predicted that males would perceive peer support Mate Selection Preference 11 to be more important than would females, and females would report more pressure for family approval.

The results however, showed insignificant difference in ratings for both genders. The results were consistent with previous studies on gender differences in mate selection preference. The difference in ratings for physical attractiveness supported previous studies (Feingold A. , 1990, 1991 as cited in Feingold A.

1992) which found men to emphasize good looks more than women do. This creates substantial backing to why males take extensive pride in having an attractive partner. Generally, a man who has for himself a beautiful wife is widely regarded by other men to have been ‘ successful’. This supported predictions made by both the evolutionary biology theory and the socio-cultural theory.

The results obtained also backed up the second hypothesis which states that females would place more bearing on financial stability than would males,

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further establishing the reported outcome from previous studies (Buss D. M. 1989, Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost 1990 as cited in Feingold A. 1992) on gender differences in mate selection preference. This supports, as well, predictions from both the evolutionary biology theory and the socio-cognitive theory. Also, results in line with the third hypothesis supported previous findings from studies which found no significant differences in gender preference for mate selection (Kenrick et al.

1990; Wakil, 1973 as cited in Feingold A. 1992). This gives an edge to the view that personality is viewed similarly by both genders, and reflecting doubt on studies which found significant difference (Nevid 1984; Roscoe, Diana, & Brooks 1987 as cited in Feingold A. 1992). Studies on the influence of family and friend approval concluded that social support is important in mate selection, and this is supported by results essential to the fourth hypothesis; social approval is important.

We can speculate Mate Selection Preference 12 however, that findings related to the fourth hypothesis may vary across cultures, and that the high ratings were perhaps a result of strong cultural traditions in Malaysia (family's blessing is needed for marriage). This experiment however, was not fully controlled as it was done in a rush for time and in convenience. As participants were mostly personal acquaintances of the experimenters, most would belong to an urban, upper-class lifestyle. Race was also not controlled. This would perhaps have resulted in higher esteem for physical attraction and financial stability for both genders than would for a multiple-class, wide demographic study.

Design weaknesses in this experiment include lack of honesty by participants and the experimenters' difficulty in maintaining a standard ranking scale on which each level (1, 2, 3, ...7) could be defined objectively. Participants may feel pressured to give expected or idealistic answers which do not reflect their own level of willingness. Also, the scale used is dependent on the individual's perception of what the numbers mean in relation to real-life context. To minimize the error in experimental results, it was suggested that each point on the scale be defined individually; this would still result in an imperfect scale, but a more precise one. Also, to decrease the effects of extraneous variables, the experiment should be done more extensively, and participants recruited should present a general majority as opposed to college-going participants in the city.

Underlying personal factors could be maintained by presenting the experiment through the internet, therefore fully establishing the 'anonymous' concept. Read also: " Gender and optical illusions"