



Mate preferences in the US and Singapore: A cross-cultural test of the mate preference priority model

Norman P. Li^{a,*}, Katherine A. Valentine^a, Lily Patel^b

^a Singapore Management University, Singapore 178903, Singapore

^b Northern Illinois University, IL, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 July 2010

Received in revised form 5 October 2010

Accepted 7 October 2010

Keywords:

Mate preferences

Economics

Sex differences

Cross-cultural

ABSTRACT

Sex differences have been found in mate preferences across several decades. Especially for long-term partners, men tend to value physical attractiveness and women tend to value social status. However, the sexes both value various other traits even more highly. Such findings thus diminish the importance of the sex differences and challenge the theoretical importance that evolutionary psychologists place on physical attractiveness and social status. Using a budget allocation methodology to examine mate preferences in both the US and Singapore, we found not only the usual sex differences, but also evidence that men prioritize physical attractiveness and women prioritize social status as necessities in their long-term mates. We also found that both sexes tend to value physical attractiveness as a necessity in short-term mates. Results replicate previous budget allocation findings and provide cross-cultural validation for a mate preference priorities model.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Do men and women meaningfully differ in their criteria for potential mates? To answer this question, it is important to consider at least two key factors that may underlie male and female reproductive value in both long-term and short-term mating contexts (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). First, individuals' fertility tends to decrease with age. In particular, whereas men's fertility decreases at a relatively slow rate over the entire lifespan, women's fertility tends to decline quickly after 30 and reaches zero at menopause. Thus, because female fertility is especially tied to age and only fertile individuals can produce offspring, men may have evolved to seek cues to youth (and sexual maturity) in both long- and short-term matings (Symons, 1979). Specifically, men may have evolved to find such cues, including soft skin and hair and a low waist-to-hip ratio (e.g., Singh, 1993), to be especially physically attractive in long- and short-term mates.

Second, both men and women tend to vary in their ability to provide resources that enhance the viability of offspring. However, whereas both sexes can contribute significant resources, the sexes differ sharply in their obligatory parental investment (Trivers, 1972). Specifically, women incur a relatively heavy investment of pregnancy and lactation, which far outweighs the (relatively small) sex cells that men are physiologically required to contribute. Thus, it would have been adaptive for women to ensure that their

offspring become viable, by preferring mates who are able and willing to invest resources beyond the obligatory minimum (Buss, 1989; Symons, 1979). For short-term matings, a man's resources may still be a consideration (Greiling & Buss, 2000); however, it may be beneficial for women to focus more on obtaining heritable benefits or "good genes", which may be outwardly indicated by a man's physical condition (Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993). Specifically, women may have evolved to find cues such as symmetry and masculinity to be especially physically attractive and desirable in short-term mates (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

Given these important factors, when considering long-term mates, women, more so than men, have been hypothesized to place high importance on a mate's investment potential, which may be indicated by his social status (Symons, 1979). In contrast, men, more so than women, have been hypothesized to value physical attractiveness. For short-term mates, both sexes have been hypothesized to place high value on physical attractiveness (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), though for different reasons (Li & Kenrick, 2006). Indeed, researchers investigating long-term mate preferences have shown that women more highly value their partner's ability to acquire resources, whereas men place higher value on their partner's physical attractiveness (e.g., Buss, 1989; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Feingold, 1992; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004; Hill, 1945; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998). For short-term mates, both sexes tend to place higher value on physical attractiveness (e.g., Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004; Kenrick et al., 1993; Regan & Berscheid, 1997).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +65 6828 0864; fax: +65 6828 0423.

E-mail address: normli@mail.utexas.edu (N.P. Li).

1.1. The mate preference priority model

Traditional surveys, however, may be limited in their ability to paint a full picture of mate preferences. For instance, Buss and Barnes (1986) found that when considering potential marriage partners, men rank-ordered physical attractiveness higher than did women and women rank-ordered good earning capacity and good financial prospects higher than did men. Likewise, in a large-scale study of human mate preferences spanning 33 countries, 6 continents, and 5 islands, Buss (1989) found that cross-culturally, cues signaling resource acquisition were more important in a marriage partner for women than men, and cues signaling reproductive capacity were more important for males than females. However, such studies offer only limited support for evolutionary hypotheses of long-term mating because physical attractiveness was only moderately important to men and resource potential was near the bottom of the list for women. Indeed, both sexes most highly valued traits such as intelligence, kindness, and being lively.

Utilizing economic concepts, Li and colleagues suggested that the discrepancy between evolutionary theory and empirical results may be clarified by considering how individuals *prioritize* qualities they desire in mates (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). That is, a *necessity* is something that is initially extremely desirable (e.g., water, food, and shelter), but as more of it is acquired, diminishes in value. A *luxury*, in contrast, is not important when necessities are lacking, but becomes more desirable once basic needs are met (e.g., vacations and fine dining). For reproductively successful long-term mateships, a woman's fertility and a man's ability to provide minimal resources should be critical. That is, in the ancestral past, mating with a woman who is beyond reproductive age would not have led to any offspring, and mating with a destitute man may have compromised offspring viability.

Consistent with this mate preference priority model, a budget allocation methodology revealed that while kindness was highly valued by both sexes, women prioritized resources and social status and men prioritized physical attractiveness in long-term relationship partners (Li, 2007; Li et al., 2002). However, after acquiring average amounts of these traits in potential mates, the sexes became more alike in their choices and favored other traits more heavily. When women engage in extrapair mating, there is evidence that they may be looking to upgrade their long-term mate or to obtain immediate resources (Greiling & Buss, 2000). In general, though, resources are less relevant and genetic quality may be more crucial in short-term, sexual versus long-term, committed partners. Consistent with this reasoning, both sexes prioritized a minimum level of physical attractiveness in their short-term sexual partners (Li & Kenrick, 2006).

1.2. Across cultures

From an evolutionary perspective, psychological mechanisms are thought to be cross-culturally universal because they evolved to solve adaptive problems recurrently encountered by ancestral humans. However, to the extent that the ancestral environment varied on dimensions relevant to the functioning of a mechanism, the mechanism should have evolved to be sensitive to variations on those dimensions (Buunk, Angleitner, Obaid, & Buss, 1996; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Between local ecologies or cultures, variation may exist on such dimensions and thus, in the ways that psychological mechanisms are expressed.

In this regard, the reproductive constraints outlined earlier are hypothesized to have been recurrently encountered in the ancestral past; thus, the prioritization of physical attractiveness and social status in specific mating contexts should occur across cultures. However, such mate preference mechanisms may be sensitive to differences in cross-cultural norms – and the factors underlying

such norms – regarding the importance of physical attractiveness and social status. For instance, in places where pathogens are more common, physical attractiveness tends to be more highly valued (Gangestad & Buss, 1993).

In the current study, we utilized the budget allocation methodology (Li & Kenrick, 2006; Li et al., 2002) to examine mate preference priorities in both American and Singaporean contexts. First, we aimed to see whether previous findings that women prioritize status when selecting for long-term relationships but prioritize physical attractiveness when selecting for short-term relationships, and that men prioritize physical attractiveness in both contexts, can be replicated in the US and extended to an East Asian context. If the same patterns of prioritization are present in both countries, an evolutionary explanation for mating-duration dependent, sex-differentiated mate preferences would be further bolstered (though sex-differentiated mate preferences are also generally compatible with social structural accounts; e.g., Harris, 2003; Wood & Eagly, 2002). At the same time, we sought to explore potential differences between the two contexts. Although Singapore is similar in economic development and gender-equality as the United States, East Asian cultures tend to especially value face and hierarchical position (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Thus, we expected social status to be more highly valued in Singapore.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants ($n = 407$) were 207 undergraduates taking introductory psychology at a large Midwestern American university and 200 undergraduates taking psychology courses at a major university in Singapore. In the US, there were 124 women (age $M = 19.16$, $SD = 2.04$) and 83 men ($M = 19.72$, $SD = 2.91$). Ethnically, 77.8% were Caucasian, 13.5% Black, 4.3% Hispanic, 2.4% Asian, and 2% other. In Singapore, there were 126 women ($M = 20.90$, $SD = 1.22$) and 74 men ($M = 22.54$, $SD = 1.87$), of which 83% were ethnically Chinese, 7.5% Indian, 2.5% Vietnamese, 1.5% Malay, and 5% other. The Singapore participants identified their nationality as Singaporean (75.0%), Indonesian (12.0%), Chinese (8.0%), and other (5.0%).

2.2. Design and procedure

We used the low-budget condition and the exact traits from the “mate dollars” allocation task introduced by Li et al. (2002, Study 2; also see Li & Kenrick, 2006, Study 1). For both their ideal long-term (marriage) partner and short-term (casual sexual) partner, participants allocated 100 mate dollars to acquire percentile points across five characteristics: physical attractiveness and social level (social status), and three other traits that had been rated highly in previous research – creativity, kindness, and liveliness (e.g., Buss & Barnes, 1986). Thus, the low budget allows participants to select a mate who is, on average, at the 20th percentile (compared to same-sex others) on each characteristic.

3. Results

We analyzed budget allocations via GLM in SPSS with country and participant sex as between-subject variables and duration and characteristic as within-subject variables. The overall GLM revealed three 3-way interactions: sex \times duration \times characteristic, $F(4, 1604) = 9.201$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$, country \times sex \times characteristic, $F(4, 1604) = 3.90$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and country \times duration \times characteristic, $F(4, 1604) = 5.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Together, these

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات