



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Continuity and change in emerging adults' mate preferences and mating orientations



April Bleske-Rechek*, Danielle E. Ryan

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 June 2014

Received in revised form 21 August 2014

Accepted 22 August 2014

Available online 18 September 2014

Keywords:

Mate preferences

Mating orientation

Continuity and change

Emerging adulthood

Stability

ABSTRACT

The various milestones and transitions of emerging adulthood have led previous researchers to investigate continuity and change in personality traits during this life period. In the current study, we build on that research by investigating continuity and change during emerging adulthood in mate preferences and mating orientations. Following past research, we hypothesized that mate preferences and mating orientations would demonstrate weak-to-moderate rank-order stability over 3 years of emerging adulthood. We also hypothesized that emerging adults would display mean-level changes that reflect increasing maturity, such as an increased emphasis on long-term committed relationships and partners' internal attributes and a decreased emphasis on short-term sexual relationships and partners' physical attractiveness. We followed 200 young adults from their first year to their fourth year in college. Analyses revealed weak-to-moderate rank-order stability but very little mean-level change in mate preferences and mating orientations. We discuss limitations of this study and directions for future research.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In industrialized societies, the ages of 18–24 have been labeled “emerging adulthood” – a period of changes and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). Many individuals leave home for the first time, begin college, and start working full-time. They also explore different relationship partners and types of relationships, which are thought to help form their relationship identities (Fincham & Cui, 2011) and prepare them for serious commitments of adulthood (Meier & Allen, 2009). Because the various challenges of emerging adulthood implicate it as an important period for personality development, previous researchers have investigated the ways in which personality traits display continuity and change during emerging adulthood (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Vaidya, Gray, Haig, & Watson, 2002). Similarly, varied relationship partners and experiences have the potential to influence individuals' preferences and attitudes toward romantic relationships. Thus, in the current study we investigate the ways in which romantic partner preferences and relationship attitudes display continuity and change during emerging adulthood.

1.1. Previous research on continuity and change in emerging adulthood

During emerging adulthood, men and women move from being largely dependent on their parents to becoming increasingly independent and committed to their future adult roles in terms of career and family. How stable is personality during this transition period? Previous researchers have operationalized stability in several ways, the two most common being *rank-order* stability and *mean-level* stability. Rank-order stability reflects the degree to which the relative ordering of individuals on a trait is maintained over time. Previous research suggests that the rank-order stability of personality during emerging adulthood, particularly among college students, is moderate-to-strong, with cross-time coefficients over 2–4 years averaging .5–.7 (Robins et al., 2001; Vaidya et al., 2002). This degree of stability supports the proposition that personality traits function as organizational constructs, influencing the situations individuals enter into and how they behave in response to new challenges. The magnitude of stability in personality during emerging adulthood, however, is slightly lower than in subsequent years of adulthood (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), perhaps because of identity and relationship exploration during this time (Hopwood et al., 2011).

Mean-level stability refers to the degree to which the average score of a population changes over time. Previous research suggests that emerging adults display small but systematic changes

* Corresponding author. Address: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Psychology Department, 105 Garfield Avenue, Eau Claire, WI 54702, USA. Tel.: +1 715 836 4641; fax: +1 715 836 2214.

E-mail address: bleskeal@uwec.edu (A. Bleske-Rechek).

over time: On average, they tend to become more agreeable, controlled, and conscientious, and less neurotic and alienated (Ludtke, Trautwein, & Husemann, 2009; Roberts et al., 2001; Robins et al., 2001; Vaidya et al., 2002). These changes have been described as evidence of increasing maturity in young men and women as they move toward adulthood (Roberts et al., 2001).

1.2. Continuity and change in mate preferences and mating attitudes

In the current study, we extend previous research on continuity and change in *personality*, to research on continuity and change during emerging adulthood in *mate preferences* and *mating orientations*. Mating is one of the primary challenges of emerging adulthood, and mate preferences and mating orientations are central to nearly any discussion of human mating. Mate preferences, broadly defined as the characteristics that people prioritize in romantic relationship partners (Buss, 1985), predict individuals' partner choices (Li et al., 2013) and the characteristics their romantic partners possess (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997). Mating orientations, broadly defined as individuals' stated interest in committed, long-term relationships and in brief or uncommitted sexual relationships (Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007), are also tied to a variety of behaviors, such as the tactics people use to attract mates (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 1996), how long people engage in courtship before engaging in sex (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), and their likelihood of straying (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004).

Individual differences in mate preferences and orientations, then, appear to reflect differences in individuals' mating behavior and the ways that they approach sexual and romantic relationships. We propose that mate preferences and orientations, like personality traits, function as organizational constructs during emerging adulthood, influencing with whom people choose to become involved and how they respond to relationship opportunities and challenges. Like personality traits, mate preferences and orientations may also be influenced by the challenges of different relationships and partners. We propose that mate preferences and orientations will show patterns of continuity and change during emerging adulthood that are analogous to those observed for broad personality traits.

1.2.1. Rank-order stability

People's mate preferences and orientations are tied to their standing on other attributes that show stability over time, such as mate value (as indexed by physical attractiveness; Buss & Shackelford, 2008) and personality traits such as agreeableness and extraversion (Jonason, Teicher, & Schmitt, 2011). Indeed, researchers have suggested that mating strategies and preferences reflect stable personality dimensions (Nettle & Clegg, 2008). Shackelford, Schmitt, and Buss (2005) offered tangential support for this idea. They assessed adults' mate preferences in their first year of marriage and again in their fourth year of marriage and found moderate rank-order stability (average correlation coefficient of .48). Those same adults also showed moderate consistency over 3 years in the tactics they used to retain their partner (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Buss, 2010).

In the current study, we extend previous research on rank-order stability of mate preferences (Shackelford et al., 2005) by surveying emerging adults who have just begun college and who are not married but instead likely to be in the midst of relationship exploration. In the same way that personality stability is less stable during emerging adulthood than in subsequent years (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), we expect that emerging adults' mate preferences and orientations will display somewhat less rank-order stability over 3 years of college than will those of married couples in their late twenties (as in Shackelford et al., 2005). We hypothesize that emerging adults will show weak-to-moderate rank-order

stability, which would be consistent with the idea that mate preferences and mating orientations guide relationship experiences but also are influenced by them.

1.2.2. Mean-level stability

The research on mean-level continuity and change in personality suggests that as a whole, emerging adults display personality changes that are conducive to keeping a full-time job and developing and maintaining close relationships. We expect that emerging adults' mate preferences and mating attitudes will show similar movement toward increased maturity. Specifically, we hypothesize that they will report decreased interest in short-term mating and increased interest in long-term mating; and that they will place less emphasis on a mate's physical attractiveness and more emphasis on a mate's internal qualities (such as faithfulness, emotional stability, and intelligence). These predictions mirror what college students say about each other: Bleske-Rechek, VandenHeuvel, and Vander Wyst (2009) found that in a sample of U.S. college students, many thought their peers become more long-term oriented and less short-term oriented, and place more emphasis on a partner's personality and less emphasis on a partner's attractiveness, as they head toward their senior year in college.

We are not aware of any research to investigate mean-level change in mating orientations. Shackelford et al.'s (2005) study of married couples is the only one of which we are aware to investigate mean-level change over time in mate preferences. They found little change besides an increased emphasis for both sexes on a mate's pleasing disposition and an increased emphasis for men on a mate's good looks. However, Shackelford et al.'s (2005) participants were already married and beyond emerging adulthood at study onset. If mating attitudes and preferences fluctuate over time, perhaps that fluctuation occurs earlier, during emerging adulthood.

1.3. The current study

In the current study, we tested two primary hypotheses about continuity and change in emerging adults' mate preferences and orientations: First, we hypothesized weak-to-moderate rank-order stability over time; and second, we hypothesized that emerging adults would display mean-level increases in long-term mating orientation and emphasis on mates' internal attributes, and mean-level decreases in short-term mating orientation and emphasis on mates' attractiveness. To test these expectations, we assessed emerging adults' mate preferences and their long-term and short-term mating attitudes at the beginning of college and again 3 years later.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Original participants were undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a large public university in the Midwestern United States (263 women, 110 men; mean age = 18.78, *SD* = 1.50). The sample was broadly representative of younger students enrolled in the university, which is 65% female. Students represented 40 different programs and departments across the university. Upon informed consent, students completed the paper-and-pencil questionnaire voluntarily as part of a class activity. All but five provided their name, contact information, and consent to be contacted 3 years in the future.

Three years later, we obtained university funding to acquire follow-up responses from 200 of the original participants (\$25

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