

Comparative Study

A Comparative Study of Mate Selection Preferences: An Evolutionary Perspective

Sai Joshi^{1*}, Pooja Prabhavalkar²

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to compare the mate selection preferences of men and women. In this study men and women were asked to give their preference for potential mate on 32 randomly ordered characteristics. The characteristics were put segregated under 6 major domains. Total of 93 participants participated out of which 48 were male and 43 were females. The hypothesis that women will be more selective in mate selection and will desire for higher standards on certain traits was supported. This study is based on the evolutionary psychology theory of Parental Investment.

Keywords: Mate Selection, An Evolutionary Perspective

Over the past decades, considerable amount of psychological research has been conducted regarding the human mate selection. In this study, human mating behavior is studied through an evolutionary perspective. An evolutionary Psychological perspective offers explanation for human mate selectivity and it also suggests that sexual differentiations exists between male and female mate selection behaviors because men and women have historically faced different environmental and social pressures (Eagly and Wood, 1999). Eagly and Wood (1999) argue that “a society’s division of labor between the sexes is the engine of sex-differentiated behavior, because it summarizes the social constraints under which men and women carry out their lives” (p. 409). For example, women maintain less status and economic power in many societies throughout the world. The social structuralists opine that genetically-related sex differences, such as men’s greater physical size and women’s childbearing capacity interact with cultural and economic beliefs to influence societal roles. The evolutionary perspective states that men and women have evolved sex-specific cognitive mechanisms that cause them to differ psychologically, thereby predisposing them to behave and make decisions in a sexually differential manner. The Kenrick et al. results (1990; 1993) suggest that women are more selective in potential mate criteria, particularly at the relationship investment levels that include a sexual relationship, because of increased potential for conceiving a child. Men, however, demonstrate less selectivity in criteria at lower investment levels because there is a lesser likelihood that they will be required to invest personal resources. The parental investment

¹Research Scholar, Shivaji University, Kolhapur

²Assistant Professor, Symbiosis college Arts & commerce

*Corresponding Author

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theory (Trivers 1972) also states that the sex that invests heavily in the offspring is more selective in the mate choice than the less investing sex. The higher investing sex usually (and among mammalian species always) is female. Women have much larger obligatory parental investment than the men do. They must carry the fetus in the womb for nine months and also nurse the infant for years afterwards. A mistake in mate choice, in the form of having a child with a wrong mate is often much costlier for a woman than it is for men because such a mistake represents a greater proportion of women's lifetime reproductive potential than men's. Thus, a woman is said to be more selective while selecting a potential mate.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The Sample consisted of 48 males and 43 females (Total 93) all of them were between the age group 20-30 yrs. All of them had "Single" current marital status.

Variables

There are two independent variables are Females and Males. And there are six dependent variables namely Interpersonal-skills, Intellect, Physical attractiveness, Social Status, Interpersonal Power, Family.

Hypothesis

- Women have higher standards while choosing their potential mates on the domain of Interpersonal skills as compared to men.
- Women have higher standards while choosing a potential mate on the domain of Intellect as compared to men.
Men have higher standards while choosing a potential mate on the domain of physical attractiveness
- Women have higher standards while choosing a potential mate on the domain of Social status as compared to men.
- Women have higher standards while choosing a potential mate on the domain of Interpersonal Power as compared to men.
- Women and men both will equally desire for the family orientation while choosing a potential mate.
- Women are more selective in choosing the potential mate as compared to males.

Tools

Each participant was given a set of randomly ordered set of 32 characteristics adapted from Research (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Kenrick et al., 1993; Regan & Berscheid, 1997)

Validity was also established. Participants were classified into two groups men (N=48) and Women (N=43). The test used in this study included 6 domains. T-test analysis was conducted on each of the domain.

Reliability of the test is given by Cornbach α for each of its domains. (Regan.P., 1998. What if you can't get what you want?)

RESULTS

Table1: Shows the mean, standard deviation and t-score of females and males on all six domains.

Factor	Sex	Mean	Std. dev	Std. error	t	Sig.
Interpersonal skills	F	77.78	10.89	1.62	4.846	.000
	M	66.11	12.23	1.76		
Intellect	F	80.38	11.60	1.72	4.355	.000
	M	69.67	12.08	1.74		
Physical attractiveness	F	73.25	14.64	2.18	2.298	0.024
	M	66.25	14.75	2.13		
Social status	F	65.51	17.89	2.66	3.653	.000
	M	53.29	14.26	2.06		
Interpersonal Power	F	53.22	15.59	2.32	2.516	0.014
	M	45.39	14.42	2.08		
Family	F	67.18	17.56	2.62	1.761	0.082
	M	61.14	15.51	2.24		

The analysis states that the means of females on each factor are greater than the means of males. Which shows that women prefer to have higher standards of the traits such as Interpersonal skills, Intellect, Physical attractiveness, social status and interpersonal power in their potential mate. Significant difference is seen in the significance on all factors except for that of Family orientation. That means both men and women give equal preference for factor of family.

DISCUSSION

How we choose romantic partners is a complex question. Selecting the perfect mate is an important task most adults have to go through. This process of mate selection is influenced by a number of factors. The scope of this study was to see if the characteristics that individuals seek in a potential partner are different based on one's own sex. A number of theories in evolutionary psychology point to the fact that women have to be more selective while choosing a potential mate as there are more costs involved for her than men.

This study was conducted to carry out the comparison of mate selection preferences between men and women. It was studied if the women are more selective in mate selection as compared to the males on certain traits. This study was backed by various evolutionary psychology theories mainly Parental Investment Theory (Trivers 1972). The parental investment theory states that the male and female of a species have different amounts of investments in their offspring. Hence the theory suggests that the sex which invests more in the offspring will be more discerning while making mate selection decisions. In human beings the greater burden of looking after the offspring is on the females of the species as she has the nine-month gestational period followed by months of breast feeding etc. Women are thus more selective while choosing a partner as they wish to find a mate who will provide resources not only for her but also their offspring. These choices are reflected in the characteristics that men and women use to select a mate. For instance in research done by Buss (1989) across 37 cultures shows that men seek younger women as youth indicates fertility whereas women look for men willing to make higher parental investments, higher status etc.

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The participants of this study consisted of 48 males and 43 females all of whom were single, they were given the Ideal Mate Preference Questionnaire by (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Kenrick et al., 1993; Regan & Berscheid, 1997). This questionnaire included 32 randomly ordered characteristics on which the participants had to assign a percentile score that they most desired in their expected potential mate. These 32 characteristics were put under 6 domains such as Interpersonal Skills, Intellect, Physical Attractiveness, Social Status, interpersonal Power and Family. The findings in this study were consistent with the earlier researches and evolutionary theories.

The first hypothesis stated that women compared to men will choose a partner who is higher on interpersonal skills was supported. Interpersonal skills refers to being relaxed in social settings, good sense of humor, easy going, friendly, and attentive to partner's needs (Regan, P., 1998).

The T-test analysis indicates that $t = 4.846$ p value of 0.000 which is ($p < 0.01$) showing significant difference in the way men and women rate partners on this trait. Women had a higher mean of 77.77 compared to mean value of 66.11 for men. As interpersonal skills includes interpersonal responsiveness and being attentive to partner needs the obtained findings are in keeping with the parental investment theory.

The second hypothesis stated that women compared to men will seek a partner who is higher in intellect. T-test results indicate that $t = 4.355$ and p value of 0.000 which ($p < 0.01$) and women had a mean score of 80.4 and men 69.1 indicating that women rate intelligence higher than men.

The results of the Buss and Barnes (1986) study revealed that the top three characteristics consensually desired by men and women were kindness and understanding, intelligence, and an exciting personality. While there were many other consensually desired characteristics on which, men and women significantly differed. Women preferred education and capacity of earning more important as compared to men. Selecting a man with higher intelligence gives the woman better access to resources as usually higher the years of formal education better is the earning capacity. Prokosch et al (2008) indicated that intelligence also provides indirect genetic benefits in the form of having offspring who are in a better physical condition.

The third hypothesis stated that men compared to women will place greater emphasis on physical attractiveness was not supported.

Empirical findings over the past two decades reveal clear gender differences in the qualities that men and women desire in their mates. For example, seemingly consistent are findings that men place a higher value on physical attractiveness and youth in a mate than do women, while women place a higher value on financial success, high status, and commitment in a mate than do men (Ben Hamida et al., 1998; Buss et al., 1986; Buss, 1989). Men place a greater value on physical attractiveness as it signals fertility.

The t-test analysis indicates that $t = 2.30$ and p value of 0.024 which is ($p < 0.05$). Women have a mean value of 73.25 and men of 66.25 showing that women compared to men are more discerning when it comes to physical attractiveness. These findings are contrary to some of the mate selection theories.

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However, research by Cunningham et al. (1990) proposed that women are attracted to an optimal combination of neotenous, mature and expressive facial features, such as large eyes, big smile, prominent cheekbones and large chin. Cunningham (1986) found that facial features judgments made by women were similar to that of men but cognition behind female judgments appears to be somewhat different. Cunningham (1990) study found that choices made by female can be linked to greater number of underlying mate characteristics such as power, status, maturity and sociability. These studies indicate that women too are concerned about physical attractiveness, but unlike men who choose attractive women as it signals fertility, women's choices are based on other indicators. The important reasons for women placing higher standards on physical attractiveness could be cultural differences, exposure to media.

The fourth hypothesis stated that women compared to men will place greater emphasis on social status was supported. T- test results indicates that $t = 3.653$ and p value of .000 which is ($p < 0.01$) and women had a mean score of 65.5 and men 53.2 indicating that women rate social status higher than men.

Kenrick et al. (1990) found that, like the Buss and Barnes (1986) study, women exhibited a much greater preference for elements related to status, power and resources. Kenrick et al (2001) employed a "zoom and focus" approach to examined how different degrees of wealth affected women's judgments of a man's desirability. Results showed that women judged men to be progressively more desirable as personal wealth increased; however, this effect was not significant once a certain degree of wealth was obtained. Kenrick et al. (2001) suggested that female choice is motivated to avoid poverty rather than to seek wealth.

The fifth hypothesis stated that women compared to men will place greater emphasis on interpersonal power was supported.

The t- test results indicates that $t = 2.516$ and p value of 0.014 which is ($p < 0.05$) and women had a mean score of 53.2 and men had mean score of 45.3 indicating women rate interpersonal power more than men.

The research study conducted by Sadalla, Kenrick, and Vershure (1987) that showed women were more attracted to men who exhibited dominant behavior. Sadalla et al. (1987) hypothesized that women's preference for men who exhibited dominant behaviors were indicative of evolutionary influences, because male dominant behaviors conveyed reproductive advantages and the ability to access resources. The reasoning behind this approach was that while women may prefer dominant men because of the resources they would be able to contribute to a relationship, women would exhibit a preference for men with both dominant and pro-social behaviors that indicated a man's willingness to share resources.

The sixth hypothesis stating that, women and men both will equally desire for family orientation was supported.

The t-test results indicate $t = 1.761$ and p value of 0.082 which indicates that there is no significant difference in the preferences shown by men and women. Women had a mean of 67.18 and men had a mean of 61.14

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Desire for a family is a trait that is equally preferred by both men and women while selecting a potential mate. According to evolutionary theories, all organisms, including humans are motivated to enhance their chances of passing on their genes to the subsequent generation (Archer, 1996; Buss, 1996). So, the desire for family and related traits is seen in both the sexes.

This indicate difference on the preferences shown by men and women on the domains such as Interpersonal skills, Intellect, Physical Attractiveness, Social Status and Interpersonal Power. But no significant difference ($\text{sig} > 0.05$) was seen in the preference shown by men and women on the domain of Family. While it was also seen that the women gave higher preferences on all of these domains as the means of females were seen to be higher than those of the men.

These findings are consistent with some earlier done researches which say that the women are delegated to roles that have less power and less access to resources. In order to gain power and access to resources, women seek out these characteristics in potential mates. Women, in turn, offer to exchange commodities that they do have access to, such as physical beauty, fertility, and sexual pleasure. As men are assigned to gender roles that place them in possession of greater power and financial independence, they are able to advertise those commodities on the mating market in exchange for those qualities that they desire in a potential mate (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Howard et al., 1987). This is called as Marketable Exchange perspective.

Thus, women desire for higher levels of traits such as interpersonal skills, Intellect, Social status and Power in a potential mate as they symbolize the resources that a man can provide while men desire for higher levels of physical attractiveness which symbolizes fertility. The family orientation is desired equally by both men and women.

Limitations

The sample used in the study was the convenience sample so any generalisation of the conclusions arrived must be done with caution. Sample was collected from urban area so conclusions may not be applicable to population of rural areas.

CONCLUSION

- The aim of the study was to look for differences in mate selection preferences between men and women. As expected differences were found on five of the six factors under study.
- It was found that women place higher standards on most of the characteristics while selecting a potential mate and are more selective in the process of mate selection. The hypothesis stating that women desire for higher levels of traits such as interpersonal skills, Intellect, Social status and Power in a potential mate was supported.
- The third hypothesis stated that men compared to women will place greater emphasis on physical attractiveness was not supported.
- The hypothesis stating that the family orientation is desired equally by both men and women was also supported.
- These results are in support of evolutionary psychology theory of Parental Investment. It was found that women may be using behavioural displays to judge the

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quality of mates and their likelihood to invest in the offspring. The hypothesis stating that women are more selective than men in mate selection was supported.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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