

Myth about 'dirty old men' supported by science

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Middle-aged men want younger women, often touting their intelligence and their high income. This is shown in research at Gothenburg University and Oxford University that studied 400 lonely hearts ads to see how men and women choose partners.

Research in the theory of evolution includes a number of accepted theories about how men and women choose their partners. Among the more established ones is that men place more emphasis on attractive appearance, whereas resources and social status are more important to women.

By examining lonely hearts advertisements, researchers at the University of Gothenburg and the University of Oxford have now tested how valid these presumed preferences are when modern individuals choose partners.

In the study, published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology*, the researchers looked at 400 lonely hearts ads in the Swedish newspapers Göteborgs-Posten and Aftonbladet and on the Websites Spraydate and match.com.

To some extent, the findings support established theories:

-- Women, more than men, look for solid resources and social status. As a result men also offer this in their ads, through formulations like 'large house' and 'economically independent.'

-- Men in all categories prefer younger partners. Of a total of 97 men who mentioned age in their ads, only three were looking for an older partner – among men aged 40 to 59, only one out of 67.

-- Younger women, on the other hand, prefer older men: fully 14 of 16 women aged 20-39 were looking for an older partner. Among women over 60, however, the majority were looking for a younger man.

Another point of departure for the study was that men are more fixated on appearance than women are. This turned out not to be the case.

"When it comes to physical characteristics, it turned out that men and women were the same. Both used words like, 'athletic,' 'beautiful,' 'pretty,' 'tall,' 'handsome,' and 'trim' to the same extent, and this goes both for their descriptions of themselves and for the characteristics they were looking for in a partner," says Jörgen Johnsson at the Department of Zoology, University of Gothenburg, one of the researchers behind the study.

"This might indicate that men have learned to respond to women's interest in looks, therefore stressing to the same extent their attractiveness in the ads. The fact that both sexes focus on looks may also be influenced by our times, with the great fixation on appearance in the media."

Source: Swedish Research Council

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