

Genders differ dramatically in evolved mate preferences

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Men's and women's ideas of the perfect mate differ significantly due to evolutionary pressures, according to a cross-cultural study on multiple mate preferences by psychologists at The University of Texas at Austin.

The study of 4,764 men and 5,389 women in 33 countries and 37 cultures showed that sex differences in mate preferences are much larger

than previously appreciated and stable across cultures.

"Many want to believe that women and men are identical in their underlying psychology, but the genders differ strikingly in their evolved mate preferences in some domains," said co-author of the study and psychology professor David Buss. "The same holds true in highly sexually egalitarian cultures such as Sweden and Norway as in less egalitarian cultures such as Iran."

Mating is multidimensional and requires matching a pattern of mate preferences to a pattern of potential mate features. The researchers suggest that these patterns of mate preferences are far more linked to gender than any individual mate preference examined separately would suggest.

Researchers found that they could predict a person's sex with 92.2 percent accuracy if they knew his or her mate preferences.

"The large overall difference between men's and women's mate preferences tells us that the sexes must have experienced dramatically different challenges in the mating domain throughout human evolution," said lead author and graduate researcher Daniel Conroy-Beam.

According to the study, men favor mates who are younger and physically attractive. Women seek older mates with good financial prospects, higher status and ambition.

"Because women bear the cost of pregnancy and lactation, they often faced the adaptive problem of acquiring resources to produce and support offspring, while men faced adaptive problems of identifying fertile partners and sought cues to fertility and future reproductive value," Conroy-Beam said.

Of the 19 mate preferences that researchers considered, five varied significantly based on gender: good financial prospects, physical attractiveness, chastity, ambition and age. Four other preferences—pleasing disposition, sociability and shared religious and political views—were not sex-differentiated.

"Few decisions impact reproduction more than [mate choice](#)," Conroy-Beam said. "Mate preferences will therefore be a central target and driver of biological evolution. We have found some promising initial results, and we think this holistic approach will help answer a lot of questions in mating research in the future."

The study "How sexually dimorphic are human mate preferences?" was published in the August 2015 issue of the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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