

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

Edmond, Oklahoma

Jackson College of Graduate Studies & Research

Characteristic Preferences in Mate Selection among College Students: A Comparison
Study Spanning the Late Twentieth Century into the Early Twenty-First Century

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN FAMILY AND CHILD STUDIES

By

TAMRA TOWNSLEY BLANKINSHIP

Edmond, Oklahoma

November 2008

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Characteristic Preferences in Mate Selection among College Students: A Comparison
Study Spanning the Late Twentieth Century into the Early Twenty-First Century

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

November 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The adage “to whom much is given, much is owed” is the overwhelming theme of this body of work. I owe immeasurable thanks and gratitude to Dr. Kaye Sears, who not only sat on my committee but also graciously allowed me the use of data she collected over a span of decades as the foundation for my research and analysis. Thank you for sharing your passion for greater understanding with me. It is my wish that your data, viewed through my lens, is everything you’d hoped it to be.

Additionally, I am indebted to Dr. Glee Bertram, my committee chairperson, whose guidance was unmatched and unmistakable, and whose cheerful and optimistic enthusiasm motivated me; to Dr. Malinda Hendricks Green, committee member and statistical wonderworker, without whom my data would have remained a mystery; and to Dr. Lori Beasley, who not only convinced me to sign on for this challenge many moons ago, but originally chaired my committee. Each of these women spent precious time encouraging, praising, reviewing, prodding, and doing all they humanly could to spur me on toward success in this endeavor. Without your patience and persistence, I would have been lost. Thank you for not giving up on me.

I wish to express my utmost appreciation to my parents, Chuck and Linda Townsley, who instilled in me a tremendous thirst for knowledge. You empowered me to set goals in my life, knowing that hard work and dedication would pay big dividends, and you encouraged me to persevere through all manner of adversity – a lesson that has served me well. I would be remiss without acknowledging my large and ever-growing family of constant cheerleaders, too many to name in such a small

space. I am thankful to be a daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, cousin, aunt, and in-law in this family that is replete with unending love!

My dear friends both near and far, have served as my personal pep squad. Thank you for walking beside me with laughter and tears on this journey. I am the luckiest girl in the world to be surrounded by such incredible people.

And finally, I am ever-grateful to my dear husband, Mark. The irony of experiencing my own mate selection process in the midst of this body of research is not lost on me. Words simply cannot express the joy you have brought to my life. Thank you for your steadfastness and strength when I felt my own were lacking. Your unyielding belief in my ability to succeed gave me the confidence to carry on when I felt like giving up altogether. You are my pot of gold at the end of this rainbow, and for that, I am truly blessed.

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

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Title of Study: CHARACTERISTIC PREFERENCES IN MATE SELECTION

AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: A COMPARISON STUDY SPANNING THE

LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY INTO THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Candidate for the degree of Master of Science in Family and Child Studies

Abstract

This study was designed to explore the preferred characteristics of mate selection. Additionally, this study sought to determine preferences by sex, age, and over time. As a matter of geographical convenience and also in recognition of a population ripe for mate selection, students enrolled in a semester-long, family-related, cross-listed undergraduate and graduate course at a Midwestern regional university comprised the subject base. After a verbal solicitation from their professor, with neither positive nor negative consequence for participation, amenable students completed a voluntary survey regarding their preferred characteristics when seeking a mate. Overall and without regard to sex, age, or time, the leading two characteristics were *Warm and Affectionate* and *Good Sense of Humor*. A series of independent samples one-way t-tests were performed, which showed several statistically significant differences between the sexes, among the age groups, and across time. This study is quite helpful in understanding which characteristics are most important for those choosing a mate.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

There is no greater wonder than the way the face of a young woman fits in a man's mind, and stays there, and he could never tell you why; it just seems it was the thing he wanted.

-- Robert Louis Stevenson...Catriona

A family is a common experience to every human being in his or her lifetime. A man and woman who come together and create a child automatically become a father and mother. Whether they choose to accept those roles is a different matter, but at least for some fraction of time, they have created a family. A child may be placed for adoption or may be raised by someone other than his or her biological parents, but regardless of circumstance, "family" will forever be part of the individual's life. As that child matures and grows into an adolescent and then an adult, it is likely that at some point, this person will begin looking for a mate of his or her own, thus perpetuating the cycle ad infinitum.

Dating has become almost a rite of passage for American adolescents in today's society. While possibly nerve-racking and anxiety-filled, dating is typically fun and exciting, exhilarating some might even claim. Individuals across the nation can recall moments of sweaty palms, stolen glances, racing hearts, and nervous laughter as they embarked upon a first date with another person. In the early stages of dating, individuals tend to focus on the enjoyment and pleasure available through the

process of dating their partners. Often, adolescents date casually and for short periods of time before moving on to the next dating partner. As time progresses and those adolescents mature into adults, though, the focus and intent of dating customarily evolves into the search for a life partner, a mate.

There are a myriad of reasons for desiring a mate. Societal norms, companionship, financial security, or any other explanation imaginable might qualify as a motive for finding a partner, and ultimately, getting married. Understanding why one would want a cohort through life is not very difficult. In addition to the ease of simply having someone there to split the bills and help with chores, research has shown measurable benefits of marriage on happiness, life satisfaction, and even physical and mental health (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). And as Chapman (1995) simply and eloquently puts it: “At the heart of mankind’s existence is the desire to be intimate and to be loved by another. Marriage is designed to meet that need for intimacy and love” (p. 21).

Such recent movies as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *The Wedding Planner*, *When Harry Met Sally*, and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* – just to name a few – grace the shelves at video rental and sales facilities in the vast majority of towns across the country. They are best-sellers and pop culture favorites. Why? Americans love a good story about finding a life partner. The love story reinforces an ideal that it is better to spend life with someone – anyone – rather than no one at all. “[The] seven-hundred-year-old fairy tale of Prince Charming and his swept-off-her-feet bride who live happily ever after, at its core, still resonates today” (Hoffman & Weiner, 2003, p. 221).

Helping others find a mate has become a highly lucrative endeavor. Books that promise how to find the perfect mate can be bought by the armload. Talk shows are watched by millions of viewers daily. Counselors, therapists, and self-help gurus are in great demand. With many Americans living in a high-tech world, it is unsurprising that multimedia services have quickly come into play as viable options for meeting others. A proliferation of match-making services has sprung up utilizing videos, telephones, and, most notably, the internet.

Whether approaching mate selection the “old fashioned” way or by tapping into the modern, technologically-advanced way, it seems the sky is the limit and the options are nearly endless for those looking for a mate. The point, however, is that they are looking; mate selection has not become a stagnant, antiquated notion. In fact, it thrives as technology increases. Marriage is still a highly prized institution for many in the United States, and judging by the throng of singles taking advantage of such services, it is clear that there are people who will stop at seemingly nothing in order to find a mate.

It is an observable fact that many Americans choose to enter into a marriage relationship with a mate by repeating five little words in vows: “till death do us part.” The question at hand, though, is not why one would want to be married. Instead, it is why an individual chooses one particular person over another as his or her cohort in life. What it is that connects or draws one person to another is a fascinating subject for study, and is the precise focus of this body of research.

Statement of the Problem

The romantic comedy blockbuster movie *Jerry Maguire* chronicled the love life of a young professional man who, at just the right time, dramatically uttered the words “you complete me” to his beloved in an attempt to win her back. The idea he presented was a take on an old mindset of two people being halves who comprise a whole by entering a relationship with one another.

In an obvious backlash against this idyllic sentimentalism come books peddling self-help as the panacea for one’s dating woes, the idea being that if one fixes oneself, he or she will be a more desirable mate and therefore more likely to marry. The focus is on the seeker changing and developing into a whole so that he or she can find another whole person to join with in relationship. In Molloy’s Why Men Marry Some Women and Not Others (2003), the author polled thousands of singles and couples to determine important factors in mate selection, encouraging single female readers to buy the book, take the advice, and happily work their way down the matrimonial aisle; the back cover copy even states “the information proved so powerful that half the single women working on this book got married within three years!”

Media frenzy surrounded the best-selling book He’s Just Not That into You (Behrendt & Tuccillo, 2004), in which the authors allegedly help women spot an uninterested man in an effort to save time and embarrassment. Just two short years later, a quasi-companion book, Be Honest, You’re Not That Into Him Either (Kerner, 2006), emerged as a salve to the wounds inflicted by an apathetic would-be lover by

empowering women to raise their standards and compromise less when finding a mate.

Countless books can be bought from a number of respected and notable authors, chock full of helpful hints to make existing marriages work and repair damaged relationships (Parrott & Parrott, 1998; Gottman, 1994; Stanton, 1997). Local retail bookstores display such an overabundance of books in the Self Help and Relationships sections that it is plain to see those figurative bases are covered. In comparison, research is meager in the area of mate selection; the process that bridges the gap between self-help and relationship quick fixes. In finding a spouse, an individual acquires a lifelong helpmate.

Historically, people have migrated toward one another for various reasons. This research focuses upon what exactly it is that draws two individuals together. What factors, characteristics, or ideals does one contemplate when searching for a mate? In this fundamental process of couple formation, what matters most? Honing in on a population ready for the mate selection process – college students – this research compares anonymous survey responses from the spring semesters of 1997 and 2005. In this span of eight years, America saw much change. The new millennium brought with it increasingly improved technology and communication standards, with home computers and internet access being found as commonplace items in many American households (Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). Further, Americans witnessed a shocking display of terrorism on American soil, which greatly impacted this nation (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Gordon, Berenson, Brook, & White, 2006). In light of the vast

array of experiences Americans have undergone in recent years, have the preferred characteristics of mate selection changed as well?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to consider the characteristics that are crucial in the process of mate selection. Additionally, this study will determine the preferred characteristics in mate selection by gender, age, and over time to determine where, if at all, the differences lie. This study aims to provide a nonpartisan account of what men and women are contemplating when seeking out a life partner. More specifically, this research focuses on a population of men and women who are ripe to make such a decision: college students. Out of geographical convenience, this body of work focuses on college students at a Midwestern regional university who were enrolled in a semester-long, family-related course that was open to both undergraduate and graduate students in the Human Environmental Sciences department. This university is a melting pot that mingles students from not only its region, but also a wide variety of international students. Because of this, the results of this study may lend themselves to generalization to a greater population at large.

Theoretical Orientation

A familiar adage in American culture is this notion that “opposites attract.” However, a substantial amount of research has been devoted to the idea that in all actuality, it is commonality that we as humans find most attractive. Assortative mating and homogamy are synonymous terms that describe a theory of mate selection

in which individuals mate with others who are similar to themselves. Assortative characteristics can include a number of traits: age, height, weight, health, culture, religion, socioeconomic class, education, and occupation are quite common characteristics. In assortative mating, individuals select mates based upon shared commonalities. Assortative mating is a common practice in mate selection. “A certain degree of homogamy – men and women marrying someone who is similar to themselves – seems to be prevalent in all periods and all places,” summarized van Leeuwen and Maas (2002, p. 101). For example, Jaffe and Chacon-Puignau (1995) determined that “females prefer to marry and reproduce with males of similar educational and occupational level, nationality, and age, indicating the existence of assortative mating” (p. 113).

Social exchange theory has been useful in the study of small-group interaction. “The basic premise of social exchange,” stated McDonald (1981), is “that individuals in social interaction attempt to maximize rewards and minimize costs to obtain the most profitable outcomes” (p. 825). Specifically in the area of mate selection, Rosenfeld (2005) countered that “empirical support for status-caste exchange is not as strong as it appears to be [and that] simple educational homogamy...is the dominant educational marriage pattern, regardless of the race of either spouse” (p. 1285).

But it isn't unreasonable to think that exchange and homogamy theories cannot complement one another. As South (1991) explained:

Women are thought to be more concerned with the socioeconomic status of potential spouses, and men more concerned with physical

attractiveness. However...it seems likely that individuals with greater socioeconomic resources are less willing to marry individuals with comparatively undesirable or non-normative characteristics, since their resources provide them with greater bargaining power and enhance their own attractiveness in possible exchanges. Individuals with similar socioeconomic backgrounds tend to marry each other partly because they reject those with fewer resources. Conversely, individuals who bring to the marriage market less desired or non-normative traits are likely to expand their field of eligibles and to express a greater willingness to marry persons with dissimilar characteristics (p. 929).

This peaceful coexistence of social exchange theory and homogamy, then, comprise the theoretical framework for this body of research.

Hypothesis

Regardless of methodology, from antiquated practices of arranged marriages to cutting-edge uses of technology-based match-making, American singles today still seek the fulfillment offered by a mate. In light of this study's orientation to a combination of social exchange and homogamy theories, it is hypothesized that the two most preferred characteristics overall, irrespective of age or sex or time, are *Warm and Affectionate* and *Well-Off Financially*. Secondly and non-speculatively, this study will also seek to learn whether there are differences by age, gender, and

across time. This knowledge might add a level of awareness for some seekers and it might spur others on to simplify and/or streamline the selection process.

Significance of the Study

Consider the amount of time one will spend with his or her family in a lifetime. A child will grow and develop within the context of a family and might later create a new family in adulthood through mating. Clearly, with whom an individual chooses to mate is a decision with long-lasting implications.

Hill (2007) states that "...although the overall rate of marriage in the United States has remained high, sociologists point out that marriage and divorce rates fluctuate with major economic transitions.... The most recent surge in the divorce rate [in the United States] occurred between 1960 and 1980..." (p. 293). With the unstable divorce rate in the United States, mate selection becomes an important area for research and study. Understanding what draws two individuals to enter the bond of marriage together may compel researchers to develop more improved methods of premarital counseling and screening approaches, or possibly promote a more holistic approach to counseling married couples having trouble.

Mate selection is indeed a process that evolves and changes with time. Ingoldsby (2003) explains that American mate selection began with the Colonial Puritans as a means of fulfilling economic needs, but the Industrial Revolution of the mid-1800's was an impetus to privatizing family life. As the mate selection process morphed from arranged or suggested pairings intended for economic gain to pairings based more on a foundation of love, the courtship process emerged which lent itself

as a base for the current pattern of relationship development: “casual dating, steady dating, informal commitment..., cohabitation and/or engagement, and marriage” (Ingoldsby, 2003, pp. 8-9).

Today, many Americans place a premium on love and freedom of choice. From a traditional social role approach to mate selection in the 1950’s to the “free love” mentality at the foundation of the hedonistic sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s, American societal mores and norms have changed and continue to do so. As this study spans two decades and bridges two centuries, it is important to note what, if any, changes are found in determining which characteristics are preferred when one is selecting a mate. The results may indicate another change in mate selection to come.

Definition of Terms

“Courtship today is a lengthy process in which men and women select a mate through unmediated interpersonal interaction” (Hetsroni, 2000, p. 84). Current methods might seem extreme when looking through an historical lens at the arranged marriages of the medieval era. However, as mating is the only way to propagate the species, it has undoubtedly been around since the earliest time. Genesis 2:7-24 (Zondervan, 1984) explains the belief of Judeo-Christians that God created Adam and determined he needed a helpmate; enter Eve, the woman God created from Adam’s very body. From that time forward, men and women have come together for scores of reasons – one of which is the desire or need for a mate.

The term “mate” carries a different connotation for different individuals. Throughout this study, specific terms will be used consistently to avoid any ambiguity of meaning. For the purpose of this study, **mate** refers to a person sought after specifically with the intent of creating a long-term, committed, and meaningful relationship within the confines of marriage.

Mate selection, therefore, refers to the process in which one person seeks out a mate with who to engage in this previously described relationship. Despite the controversial climate in America today where the validity of homosexual unions is called into question, this study will presuppose that mate selection is limited to heterosexual couples whose end goal in selecting a mate is lawful marriage. Some might argue that a cohabiting couple is similar to a married couple in every way but legal documentation of their bond (Rindfuss & Van den Heuvel, 1990). However, this research does not recognize cohabiting as an equal to marriage. While studies may have shown differences in attitudes and behaviors between cohabiting and married couples, “these findings suggest that the attributes or traits that may attract two people to each other and eventually into cohabitation are different from those drawing couples into marriage” (Blackwell & Lichter, 2000, p. 276).

Because this study discusses a number of characteristics, it is important to note that a specific trait will be in an italicized typeface in order to distinguish itself as such. The characteristics included on the data collection tool and written about in the analysis portion of this work are largely self-descriptive and are as follows:

- *Good Health*
- *Sexually Responsive*
- *Good Housekeeper*

- *Imaginative Cook*
- *Virginity*
- *Desire for Children*
- *Warm and Affectionate*
- *Good Looks*
- *Same Religion*
- *Good Education*
- *Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks*
- *Ambitious*
- *Socially Adroit (skillful)*
- *Same Race*
- *Same Nationality Background*
- *Popular With own Sex*
- *Popular With Opposite Sex*
- *Liked by my Parents*
- *Liked by my Friends*
- *Well-Off Financially*
- *Sports-Minded*
- *Fond of Reading*
- *Artistic Talent*
- *Good Sense of Humor*
- *Good Speech*
- *Other*

One should note that these traits are listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey and with the same amount of detail or description. Thus, the respondent who might have questioned the meaning of a particular trait was left to interpret it for himself or herself at the time of response. The only exception to this is that *Other* was offered as a write-in option for survey participants who desired a choice that was not among the 25 named traits. There was no dominant or recurring theme among the *Other* write-in responses; as such, it has been left simply as *Other* for the purpose of this research and the reader may assume a broad range of additional traits to be embodied by it.

Content Overview

In the following chapters, the reader will be guided through the present study. Chapter Two, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, will familiarize the reader with several theoretical constructs pertaining to the process mate selection in order to better understand the background of the research problem. Chapter Three, METHODOLOGY, outlines how the research study was conducted and verbally illustrates the participant base. In Chapter Four, FINDINGS, results from statistical analyses are provided, complete with tables and figures for easier understanding. The reader will learn whether this study's hypothesis was substantiated as well as discover additional interesting conclusions. Finally, Chapter Five, CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, will sum up the study and provide suggestions for future research in the fascinating area of mate selection.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Family is a building block for society; therefore, choosing a mate carries tremendous importance. Looking to the past in an historical and developmental context, the keen observer might better understand and better predict the response when contemplating such a significant question as why one chooses a particular life mate.

Superiority

The evolutionary theory of mate selection posits that mates are selected because they have overcome certain obstacles and are therefore stronger, more viable partners. This perspective on mating stems from Darwin's general theory on the evolution of species. Darwin "introduced the concept of 'sexual selection,' by which he meant that (a) members of the same sex will compete for access to members of the opposite sex, and (b) members of one sex will have a preference for members of the opposite sex with certain characteristics" (Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999, p.46). It is from this premise that psychologists ultimately developed the evolutionary framework for mate selection among humans. "The concept of sexual selection is a way of describing how differences in reproductive success lead to evolutionary change: any traits that help in competing for sexual mates will tend to spread through the species" (Wong, 2003, p. 2). Mate selection, from this evolutionary standpoint, belongs to those who are stronger in health, mind, body, and spirit.

In a similar vein, researchers have concluded that a number of characteristics of perceived superiority are to be credited in the mating process, varying by gender. Hetsroni (2000) states, "...women look for a stuffed wallet and ... men hunt for good looks" (p. 85). Simply put, women look for signs of fiscal responsibility and upward mobility in a mate as these signal future prosperity and provision while men look for physical attributes of beauty that hint toward good health and fertility.

Attraction

Attraction can come in countless forms. For many, it represents the perception of beauty. However, it seems that beauty perception and attraction would be difficult to categorize and generalize as they are so diverse among individuals. Nevertheless, some themes have been extracted from the quagmire of individual notions. Filtering for specific characteristics allows for a stronger case for mate selection as a step-by-step process. Interestingly but not terribly surprisingly when taking into account the previous section on Superiority, "researchers have thought that this preference for attractive mates is particularly strong for men" (Fisher, Tran, & Voracek, 2008, p. 494).

Baumeister (2000) posits his female erotic plasticity theory in which he states that "female sexuality...is depicted as fairly malleable and mutable; it is responsive to culture, learning, and social circumstances...[offering] greater capacity to adapt to changing external circumstances as well as an opportunity for culture to exert a controlling influence" (p. 347). Essentially, women's sexual desire changes according

to circumstances and situations. Thus, the ability to narrow preferred characteristics in mate selection is nearly impossible as women's preferences fluctuate.

Conventionality

Social role theory “[takes] into account the different societal roles traditionally played by men and women: women's roles are more related to the private domain and men's roles to the public domain” (Doosje, et al., 1999, p. 47). This perspective on mate selection dictates that men and women prefer partners who fit into their conventional gender roles. The underlying premise to this theory is that boys and girls are socialized to fit their stereotypically assigned roles. Without that, this theory would be moot. Attractive, nurturing women are desirable to bread-winning, assertive men, and vice versa.

Familial Influence

The Freudian model of mate selection embodies the “notion that our parents provide us with templates for choosing mates in adulthood: In other words, that people tend to seek romantic partners who resemble their parents in meaningful ways” (Geher, 2000, p. 194). Whether the characteristics are physical or emotional, the Freudian model supposes that individuals are automatically drawn to those who remind them of their parent of the opposite sex due to imprinting earlier in life.

Background of the Problem

Reflect on the following vignette:

Suzy, a twenty-year-old female, and Billy, a twenty-two-year-old male, have become acquainted during a college course in which they are both enrolled. They steal glances at one another and make small talk before and after class. One day, Billy musters up every ounce of confidence inside him as he asks Suzy to go on a date. She is thrilled and they eagerly make plans for the weekend.

One date is followed by another and another. Suzy and Billy decide they do not want to date anyone else and they evolve into an exclusive, committed relationship. Over time, Suzy and Billy both contemplate the good and bad qualities in one another and begin to think about the future. Can Suzy see Billy in her future? Can Billy see Suzy in his? Liking each other grows into loving each other. As Suzy and Billy learn more about one another and become involved more and more in each other's lives, the answers seem clear.

On a starry night overlooking the lake, Billy gets down on one knee and asks Suzy to marry him. Suzy, through her tears, exclaims with gladness that yes, she would love to marry Billy. After months of preparation, Suzy and Billy are married in front of family and friends, pledging their eternal love and commitment to one another...till death do they part.

While this may not be a typical example of the mate selection process, one must recognize that America is known for its diversity and that narrowing down a

single norm with which to measure all mate selection processes would be next to impossible. This does, however, provide a general idea of the process: shown mutual interest, dating, exclusivity in the relationship, growing emotions, and marriage.

“In today’s world, one of the primary means of socialization and sources of knowledge is that of popular culture, including the mass media” (Hestroni, 2000, p. 83). For some, a likely vignette would include getting on the World Wide Web. Websites that match individuals are the latest craze in finding the love of one’s life. With a few clicks of a mouse button, one can arrive at a number of online matchmaking sites.

Dr. Phil, a popular contemporary psychologist, author, and television show host, backs www.match.com with his MindFindBind program available online-only in which he provides insight to “help [one] win at the competitive sport of dating” (<http://www.match.com/mfb/sizzle.aspx?lid=2>). Match allows for searching that can be narrowed by self-selected criterion such as age, location, religious affiliation, and educational achievement. So sure is Match of its ability to successfully facilitate pairings, the company advertises that if a subscriber fails to meet a special person within six months, Match will extend their subscription for an additional six months at no cost.

Another widely popular site is Dr. Neil Clark Warren’s www.eHarmony.com. On eHarmony, one takes an extensive, comprehensive relationship questionnaire that is used when screening potential matches. Dr. Warren boasts that eHarmony is “the only relationship site that uses a scientifically proven method to match based on [the] 29 crucial dimensions [of compatibility]” – claiming relationship science as his basis

for matching couples (<http://www.eharmony.com/singles/servlet/about/difference>).

Going beyond Match's commitment that users will meet someone special, coming off more as a dating website and with less of a marriage connotation, eHarmony boasts of the marriages it facilitates through its commercial advertisements. In fact, Dr. Warren has such a commitment to marriage that eHarmony now has a secondary website focused on marriage – whether preparing for a new marriage, maintaining one's current level of marital satisfaction, resolving relationship issues of any size, or working to avoid a potential divorce – whether those marriages originated on his eHarmony website or not.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Mate selection is a uniquely individual and highly subjective field for research. While it is up to one person to differentiate and identify the key characteristics he or she desires in a mate, it seems there are also some generalities available. Ideas and theories have focused on specific preferences in mating, but one question remains widely disregarded: What factor or factors are most important, across the board, when an individual is seeking a mate? Utilizing a quantitative research approach, this body of research will identify which, if any, characteristics are most prevalent. Further, it might aid in determining if there has been a shift in value over a particular span of years or according to age or sex. The research hypothesis for this body of work, taken from a theoretical orientation that combines social exchange theory and assortative mating, is that the most preferred characteristics overall will be *Warm and Affectionate* and *Well-Off Financially*.

Participants

The Midwestern regional university that provided the backdrop for this study has a long-standing history of attracting students from a variety of backgrounds and socioeconomic footings, both from the United States and abroad. Its population is richly diverse in ethnicity and race. Further, with undergraduate and graduate students alike, there is a wide variance in age among the populace at this university. Students

in the Human Environmental Sciences department are no exception to this melting pot framework. Therefore, it stands to reason that the results yielded from the sample population can potentially be generalized to the public at large.

For more than two decades, a professor has collected data from among students enrolled in a particular semester-long, family-related course. While this course is an undergraduate offering, both undergraduate and graduate students alike take it because it is a required course for all students in the Human Environmental Sciences department of the university; as such, it is often taken as a leveling course for graduate students.

The first data set was comprised of 87 anonymous, voluntary survey responses from students enrolled in the course during the spring semester of 1997. In looking at the demographics for this group, 82 respondents were female and five were male. Also, 45 participants fell between the age span of 18-22 years, 28 were ages 23-33 years, and 14 were ages 34-59 years.

The second data set consisted of 119 anonymous, voluntary survey responses from students enrolled in the course offered in the spring semester of 2005. The breakdown of demographics is as follows: 115 females and four males. Additionally, of these respondents, 88 students were ages 18-22 years, 21 were ages 23-33 years, and 10 were ages 34-59 years.

Combining the two data sets, a total of 206 surveys were analyzed, allowing for 197 female respondents and just nine male respondents. The vast majority of participants, 132 of them, fell within the age range of 18-22 years while 49 fell between 23-33 years, and 24 were 34-59 years of age.

All surveys were completed voluntarily, with neither reward for completion nor penalty for lack of completion. Participants only submitted age and gender information; no other personal or identifying information was collected. Since there were multiple classes surveyed in the same year and semester, and all completed surveys were gathered together by semester and year, there is virtually no way to trace back a survey to any particular individual. Therefore, this data is determined to be anonymous in nature. In accordance with university guidelines for the protection of human subjects participating in a research study, a proposal was submitted and approved (#07206) by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensuring that the rights and welfare of said human subjects was properly protected. This renewal expired on October 15, 2008, and was determined to be sufficient as no further work with human subjects was required after that date.

Design of the Study

At a convenient time in the professor's teaching schedule, she determined to administer the data survey to her students in each section of the designated course. Of all the courses she taught, this professor determined to utilize this specific course as it allowed access to both undergraduate and graduate students throughout the Human Environmental Sciences department. As she distributed the survey in her classes through an oral solicitation, she advised her students that she was collecting data for research, to be analyzed later on, and that she would pass out a survey to each student. Students were directed that their participation was voluntary, and that no reward or penalty would be associated with participation. The professor explained to

students that they were to rank order, with one being the highest rank and 10 being the lowest, their top 10 preferred characteristics when considering a potential mate. Students were given as much time as was needed to complete the survey and deposit their survey, whether completed or not, in a manila envelope. Each survey from that semester and year were gathered together. Incomplete surveys, as well as surveys that were completed incorrectly, were removed from the stack. Surveys were secured in the professor's office on campus until such time as this research began; at that point, they were secured in an off-campus location. Following data input, the surveys were returned the professor's office.

The professor collected data from countless semesters and years. The determination to use data sets for the spring semester of 1997 and the spring semester of 2005 was at random. This research merely wanted to ensure that data was available pre- and post-millennially, in order to allow for an interesting comparison of major eras in American society.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the administration of an anonymous survey that provided 26 characteristics that one might value when considering a mate. Of the 26 total options, 25 were given characteristics while the final option was called *Other* and allowed participants to write in a characteristic of their own choosing that was not represented in the survey. It is worthwhile to note that there was no overarching or consistent trait garnered when reviewing the write-in responses to *Other*; thus it has been left simply as *Other* and should be taken to represent a host of characteristics not

outlined in the other 25 characteristic options. From these traits, students were asked to identify and rank their top 10 traits in order of importance, with one being the most important trait. Students were given as much time as was needed to complete the survey. As this was a self-reporting tool, some students opted against completing the survey and some students did not follow instructions when completing the assessment. Blank and incorrectly completed inventories were discarded for the purpose of running statistical analyses.

Data Analysis

Data was entered into and analyzed in the SPSS for Windows (Version 13.0) computer program, using both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis approaches. Microsoft Excel was also utilized in order to perform some of the descriptive statistics.

Planning for Quality

Common sense dictates that with any self-reporting mechanism, the researcher must expect user error on the part of the participants. In this study, it was assumed that some students would fail to adhere to the instructions for completing the survey. For the purpose of this research, surveys that were incorrectly completed, meaning surveys that had either fewer or greater than 10 items ranked, were discarded. Surveys that were submitted without responses were also discarded as an indication that a student elected to not participate in the research. It is fairly reasonable to assume that, in light of the voluntary and anonymous nature of this study, the

remaining student responses – used as the data sets for this research – are an unbiased, accurate collection of the thoughts and ideals of the students pooled. Therefore, a reasonable confidence in this study's reliability has been determined.

The internal validity of this study was not subject to threats of maturation, pretest sensitization, instrumentation, or selection. Additionally, attrition, or subject withdrawal, was not a factor as students were allowed the option for participation and those who did not participate or did not participate fully according to instructions were eliminated from the data pool. While there could be no control for specific individual histories, the history of a new millennium and also for 9/11 – a traumatic event affecting our nation – were accounted for and specifically planned as points for reflection following statistical analysis. While it's possible that pretest interaction occurred among respondents, it is highly unlikely that it posed a threat to the external validity of the study since respondents completed surveys anonymously and according to personal preference. Neither selection treatment nor multiple treatments were part of this study, and therefore were not problematic to its external validity.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

Introduction

As mate selection tends to be a rather individualistic process, it stands to reason that individual preferences would prevail in this body of research; however, in this research, it was imagined that some traits would have universal appeal. Thus, it was hypothesized that the overall most preferred characteristics would be *Warm and Affectionate* and *Well-Off Financially*. Additionally, this research sought to determine differences by gender, age, or across time.

Microsoft Excel and SPSS for Windows 13.0, a statistical software analysis program for the computer, were utilized in order to execute the following analyses.

Results

This study utilized a variety of analytical approaches in order to determine statistical significance among the data. First, a nonparametric analysis was performed to determine the frequency of each characteristic. The frequencies were then rank-ordered to find the overall standing of the 26 traits. Table 1 shows the mean frequency of each characteristic, ranked from highest to lowest standing.

Table 1
Ranked Means of Frequency

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>N</u>		<u>Mean</u>
	Valid	Missing	
<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	198	8	8.1162
<i>Same Religion</i>	106	100	7.6604
<i>Other</i>	39	167	6.6410
<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	184	22	6.5163
<i>Virginity</i>	34	172	6.0588
<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	1	205	6.0000
<i>Desire for Children</i>	168	38	5.9940
<i>Good Education</i>	147	59	5.5374
<i>Same Race</i>	58	148	5.5172
<i>Ambitious</i>	157	49	5.3185
<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	153	53	5.1307
<i>Good Health</i>	139	67	4.9568
<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	124	82	4.9435
<i>Good Looks</i>	122	84	4.6721
<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	10	196	4.4000
<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	107	99	4.1215
<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	51	155	4.0588
<i>Good Speech</i>	36	170	4.0556
<i>Same Nationality / Background</i>	10	196	3.8000
<i>Artistic Talents</i>	12	194	3.5833
<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	65	141	3.4000
<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	58	148	3.2931
<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	20	186	3.2500
<i>Sports-Minded</i>	30	176	2.9333
<i>Fond of Reading</i>	15	191	2.6000
<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	6	200	2.3333

Essentially, the means of frequency shows how valued each trait is among the population that selected it as a top characteristic. This study noted several points of interest. The university is geographically located in what is commonly referred to as “the Bible Belt” of the United States and thus, religion may be considered by some to be an important trait to local students; as Table 1 shows, roughly half the students polled selected *Same Religion* as a preferred characteristic, and did so with a very high level of importance. Also of interest was that *Virginity* was ranked by a very small percentage of participants, yet its mean frequency shows it was highly valued among them.

In looking at the “Valid” column of Table 1, a quick visual spot-check shows that there were a number of characteristics that were selected by more than half the participants, including: *Warm and Affectionate*, *Same Religion*, *Good Sense of Humor*, *Desire for Children*, *Good Education*, *Ambitious*, *Liked by my Parents*, *Good Health*, *Fair*, *Good Looks*, and *Sexually Responsive*. To find out in detail how these characteristics and others ranked with respondents, it necessary to continue analyzing.

Table 2 shows the overall rank order of characteristics based on their mean scores among all participants. Not surprisingly, *Warm and Affectionate* ranked as the top characteristic overall, without regard to age, sex, or year of survey. Following it up to round out the top 10 preferred traits, in order, are *Good Sense of Humor*, *Desire for Children*, *Ambitious*, *Good Education*, *Same Religion*, *Liked by my Parents*, *Good Health*, *Fair*, and *Good Looks*.

The research hypothesis stated that the top two preferred traits would be *Warm and Affectionate* and *Well-Off Financially*. As is evident by reviewing Table 2, only half

of that hypothesis was supported. *Warm and Affectionate* was the top-ranked trait but *Well-Off Financially* ranked a paltry fifteenth, tied with *Virginity*.

Table 2
Overall Ranked Mean Scores

<u>Rank Order</u>	<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Mean</u>
1	<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.80
2	<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.82
3	<i>Desire for Children</i>	4.89
4	<i>Ambitious</i>	4.05
5	<i>Good Education</i>	3.95
6	<i>Same Religion</i>	3.94
7	<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	3.81
8	<i>Good Health</i>	3.34
9	<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	2.98
10	<i>Good Looks</i>	2.77
11	<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	2.14
12	<i>Same Race</i>	1.55
13	<i>Other</i>	1.26
14	<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	1.07
15	<i>Virginity</i>	1.00
15	<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	1.00
16	<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	0.93
17	<i>Good Speech</i>	0.71
18	<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.43
19	<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.32
20	<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.21
20	<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.21
21	<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.19
22	<i>Same Nationality / Background</i>	0.18
23	<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.07
24	<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.03

The overall data is important, but this study also seeks to understand what differences might exist in regard to sex or age of participant and also the year of survey.

To start, the following tables break down the means of the data.

Table 3
Ranked Means by Sex

Male Respondents, N =9		Female Respondents, N = 197	
<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.67	<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.81
<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	6.67	<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.78
<i>Good Looks</i>	5.33	<i>Desire for Children</i>	4.94
<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	4.22	<i>Ambitious</i>	4.07
<i>Good Health</i>	3.78	<i>Good Education</i>	4.04
<i>Desire for Children</i>	3.78	<i>Same Religion</i>	4.03
<i>Ambitious</i>	3.67	<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	3.79
<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	3.22	<i>Good Health</i>	3.32
<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	2.33	<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	3.01
<i>Other</i>	2.22	<i>Good Looks</i>	2.65
<i>Virginity</i>	2.00	<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	2.09
<i>Same Religion</i>	2.00	<i>Same Race</i>	1.61
<i>Good Education</i>	2.00	<i>Other</i>	1.21
<i>Good Speech</i>	1.67	<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	1.10
<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	1.11	<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	1.05
<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.78	<i>Virginity</i>	0.95
<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.67	<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	0.92
<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	0.56	<i>Good Speech</i>	0.66
<i>Same Race</i>	0.33	<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.41
<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.22	<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.32
<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.11	<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.22
<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.11	<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.21
<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.00	<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.19
<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.00	<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.19
<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.00	<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.04
<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	0.00	<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.03

Table 3 shows an interesting and not altogether expected similarity in preferred characteristics between the sexes. It is obvious that the top two characteristics in each column are identical: *Warm and Affectionate* and *Good Sense of Humor*. When looking at the remaining characteristics, the top 10 preferred characteristics for men and women share six additional traits: *Good Looks*, *Liked by my Parents*, *Good Health*, *Desire for Children*, *Ambitious*, and *Fair / Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks*. The two characteristics in the men's top list that are not shared by women are *Sexually Responsive* (ranked 12th by women) and *Other* (ranked 14th by women). The two characteristics in the women's top list not shared by the men are *Same Religion* (ranked 12th by men) and *Good Education* (ranked 13th by men). On the basis of raw data, it seems there are some very distinct similarities between men and women when looking for a mate. In order to determine statistical significance, additional analysis was conducted.

The next raw data comparison was performed by rank-ordering the means for each characteristic by the year of survey. The first survey was given in the spring of 1997. The second survey was given in the spring of 2005. Table 4 shows more interesting points, including that for both years and in the same order, the top three traits were *Warm and Affectionate*, *Good Sense of Humor*, and *Desire for Children*. Among the top 10 characteristics for each year, additional characteristics were shared though ranked differently within the top 10 range: *Good Education*, *Fair*, *Good Health*, and *Good Looks*. Other top traits not shared between the years include Year 1's selections of *Liked by my Parents* and *Sexually Responsive* and Year 2's selections of *Same Religion* and *Ambitious*.

Table 4
Ranked Means by Year of Survey

1997 Respondents, N = 87		2005 Respondents, N = 119	
Characteristic	Mean	Characteristic	Mean
<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	8.40	<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.36
<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.86	<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.79
<i>Desire for Children</i>	4.71	<i>Desire for Children</i>	5.02
<i>Good Education</i>	3.95	<i>Same Religion</i>	4.96
<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	3.62	<i>Ambitious</i>	4.38
<i>Ambitious</i>	3.61	<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	4.03
<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	3.52	<i>Good Education</i>	3.95
<i>Good Health</i>	3.48	<i>Good Health</i>	3.24
<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	2.97	<i>Good Looks</i>	2.91
<i>Good Looks</i>	2.57	<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	2.50
<i>Same Religion</i>	2.55	<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	1.54
<i>Same Race</i>	1.87	<i>Other</i>	1.46
<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	1.25	<i>Same Race</i>	1.32
<i>Good Speech</i>	0.99	<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	1.26
<i>Other</i>	0.98	<i>Virginity</i>	1.04
<i>Virginity</i>	0.94	<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	1.03
<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	0.82	<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	0.82
<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	0.79	<i>Good Speech</i>	0.50
<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.47	<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.39
<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.40	<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.35
<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.28	<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.25
<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.28	<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.24
<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.16	<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.13
<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.07	<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.12
<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.07	<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.07
<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.02	<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.00

Table 5
Ranked Means by Age Group

<i>Group 1, N = 133</i>		<i>Group 2, N = 49</i>		<i>Group 3, N = 24</i>	
Characteristic	Mean	Characteristic	Mean	Characteristic	Mean
<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.82	<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	7.59	<i>Warm and Affectionate</i>	8.13
<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.76	<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	6.39	<i>Good Sense of Humor</i>	5.00
<i>Desire for Children</i>	5.32	<i>Good Education</i>	4.61	<i>Ambitious</i>	4.46
<i>Same Religion</i>	4.29	<i>Desire for Children</i>	4.14	<i>Good Health</i>	4.42
<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	4.24	<i>Good Health</i>	3.90	<i>Desire for Children</i>	4.00
<i>Ambitious</i>	4.11	<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	3.78	<i>Good Education</i>	3.58
<i>Good Education</i>	3.77	<i>Ambitious</i>	3.69	<i>Same Religion</i>	3.42
<i>Good Looks</i>	2.96	<i>Same Religion</i>	3.24	<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	3.42
<i>Good Health</i>	2.95	<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	3.04	<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	2.79
<i>Fair, Willing to Share Unpleasant Tasks</i>	2.87	<i>Good Looks</i>	2.76	<i>Other</i>	2.13
<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	1.85	<i>Sexually Responsive</i>	2.61	<i>Same Race</i>	2.04
<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	1.74	<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	1.49	<i>Good Looks</i>	1.71
<i>Same Race</i>	1.60	<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	1.43	<i>Liked by my Parents</i>	1.50
<i>Virginity</i>	1.36	<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	1.41	<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	1.33
<i>Other</i>	1.14	<i>Same Race</i>	1.18	<i>Good Speech</i>	1.33
<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	1.06	<i>Other</i>	1.14	<i>Socially Adroit (Skillful)</i>	1.00
<i>Well-Off Financially</i>	0.77	<i>Good Speech</i>	0.63	<i>Virginity</i>	0.71
<i>Good Speech</i>	0.62	<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.43	<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.71
<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.53	<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.31	<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.63
<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.35	<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.29	<i>Liked by my Friends</i>	0.42
<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.32	<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.27	<i>Sports-Minded</i>	0.21
<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.11	<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.18	<i>Good Housekeeper</i>	0.13
<i>Artistic Talents</i>	0.11	<i>Virginity</i>	0.16	<i>Same Nationality Background</i>	0.13
<i>Fond of Reading</i>	0.10	<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.12	<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.00
<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.08	<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.08	<i>Popular With Own Sex</i>	0.00
<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.00	<i>Imaginative Cook</i>	0.02	<i>Popular With Opposite Sex</i>	0.00

In the previous showing, Table 5, one can easily see that the consummate favorite picks of *Warm and Affectionate* and *Sense of Humor* again surface. Group 1 shows those respondents in the 18-22 year span; Group 2 consists of those 23-33 years; Group 3 is comprised of 34-59 year-old respondents. Table 5, then, provides an easy visual representation of the rankings by age group.

While ranked differently between Group 1 and Group 2, the top 10 characteristics are the same. In looking at Group 3, the oldest respondents of the groups, eight of the top 10 characteristics are shared (again, ranked differently). The two characteristics shared between Group 1 and Group 2 that were not also shared by Group 3 are *Liked by my Parents* and *Good Looks*. Perhaps at this older age, parental approval has less pull as these adults likely have been out on their own for quite some time and possibly have already been married and divorced or widowed. The parent-offspring conflict in mate preferences, as discussed by Buunk, Park, and Dubbs (2008) might then diminish as both parties age. That *Good Looks* is not present in Group 3's top 10 preferred characteristics is interesting in light of new research by Sanchez, Good, Kwang, & Saltzman (2008) in which they state, "relationship status is both tied to, and perceived to be related to, physical appearance" (p. 91). However, it is possible that the decreased level of importance has to do with aging and changes in maturity and priorities. Rounding out the top 10 within Group 3, then, are these two traits: *Sexually Responsive* and *Other*.

To determine if any of these results is statistically significant, additional testing was necessary. A one-tailed t-test, or independent samples test, was used because this research was comparing a sample to a population (Markowski & Markowski, 1990). For the following series of parametric tests, $\alpha = 0.05$. Assuming homogeneity of variance,

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed. If $p > 0.50$, then the assumption is met, meaning one must fail to reject the null hypothesis. If the $p < 0.50$, though, then the assumption is not met, one must reject the null, and statistical significance is established (Pyrzack, 2002).

Independent samples tests were run for each of the 26 traits by year of survey and by sex. Several proved statistically significant, and are shown in the following figures.

Figure 1

Group Statistics

	Year of Survey	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Same Race	1.00	29	5.6207	3.15565	.58599
	2.00	29	5.4138	3.75611	.69749
Good Speech	1.00	20	4.3000	2.10513	.47072
	2.00	16	3.7500	3.29646	.82412
Imaginative Cook	1.00	2	1.0000	.00000	.00000
	2.00	8	5.2500	3.49489	1.23563
Virginity	1.00	11	7.4545	1.63485	.49293
	2.00	23	5.3913	3.70183	.77189
Other	1.00	10	8.5000	2.12132	.67082
	2.00	29	6.0000	3.76070	.69834

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Same Race	Equal variances assumed	4.363	.041	.227	56	.821	.20690	.91098	-1.61801	2.03180
	Equal variances not assumed			.227	54.383	.821	.20690	.91098	-1.61921	2.03300
Good Speech	Equal variances assumed	4.963	.033	.608	34	.547	.55000	.90440	-1.28796	2.38796
	Equal variances not assumed			.580	24.339	.568	.55000	.94908	-1.40735	2.50735
Imaginative Cook	Equal variances assumed	135.200	.000	-1.644	8	.139	-4.25000	2.58451	-10.20989	1.70989
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.440	7.000	.011	-4.25000	1.23563	-7.17180	-1.32820
Virginity	Equal variances assumed	20.456	.000	1.757	32	.088	2.06324	1.17402	-.32817	4.45465
	Equal variances not assumed			2.253	31.923	.031	2.06324	.91585	.19754	3.92894
Other	Equal variances assumed	12.573	.001	1.985	37	.055	2.50000	1.25958	-.05214	5.05214
	Equal variances not assumed			2.582	28.368	.015	2.50000	.96834	.51760	4.48240

Figure 1 depicts statistically significant changes in the means based on Year of Survey. Table 4 is useful for understanding rank position between the two survey years, 1997 and 2005. *Race* ranked twelfth in 1997 and moved only one position lower in 2005, but that change was statistically significant in nature. Additionally *Good Speech* moved from fourteenth position to eighteenth over time. *Imaginative*

Cook increased in rank from twenty-sixth to twentieth. *Virginity* increased from sixteenth to fifteenth spot. Finally, *Other* enjoyed an improvement from fifteenth to twelfth across time. These changes, while ripe with statistical significance, can be explained only anecdotally at this point.

Figure 2

Group Statistics

	Participant's Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Same Religion	1.00	2	9.0000	.00000	.00000
	2.00	104	7.6346	2.66607	.26143
Liked by my Friends	1.00	3	1.6667	.57735	.33333
	2.00	62	3.4839	1.86197	.23647
Other	1.00	2	10.0000	.00000	.00000
	2.00	37	6.4595	3.57145	.58714

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Same Religion	Equal variances assumed	5.175	.025	.721	104	.473	1.36538	1.89406	-2.39061	5.12138
	Equal variances not assumed			5.223	103.000	.000	1.36538	.26143	.84690	1.88387
Liked by my Friends	Equal variances assumed	4.439	.039	-1.675	63	.099	-1.81720	1.08481	-3.98502	.35061
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.446	4.482	.009	-1.81720	.40869	-2.90534	-.72907
Other	Equal variances assumed	9.220	.004	1.384	37	.175	3.54054	2.55748	-1.64140	8.72248
	Equal variances not assumed			6.030	36.000	.000	3.54054	.58714	2.34976	4.73132

Table 3 shows the distinct rankings between the sexes and Figure 2 illustrates the statistically significant differences between males and females. *Same Religion* ranked at twelfth position for men while it was dramatically more important for women, ranking at sixth position. Further, *Liked by my Friends* is a trait that was less

important for male respondents, ranking eighteenth as compared to fourteenth for female respondents. Lastly, the ambiguous *Other* characteristic – the write-in category with no prevailing theme or dominant trait – ranked more highly for males at tenth position than for women at thirteenth place. Again, there is no firm explanation for these differences, but the merit of these distinctions is noteworthy.

Finally, t-tests were performed to determine significance by age. Because t-tests can only compare the means of two groups (Pyrzczak, 2002), it was necessary to conduct three tests: one that compared Group 1 to Group 2, one to compare Group 2 to Group 3, and a final test to compare Group 1 to Group 3.

Figure 3

Group Statistics

	Participant's Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Liked by my Friends	1.00	44	3.2045	1.71965	.25925
	2.00	18	3.8889	2.24628	.52945
Sports-Minded	1.00	19	3.6842	2.00146	.45917
	2.00	8	1.6250	.74402	.26305
Other	1.00	26	5.8462	3.65176	.71617
	2.00	6	9.3333	.81650	.33333

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Liked by my Friends	Equal variances assumed	5.359	.024	-1.298	60	.199	-.68434	.52709	-1.73868	.36999
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.161	25.548	.256	-.68434	.58952	-1.89715	.52847
Sports-Minded	Equal variances assumed	11.386	.002	2.803	25	.010	2.05921	.73475	.54596	3.57246
	Equal variances not assumed			3.891	24.867	.001	2.05921	.52918	.96905	3.14937
Other	Equal variances assumed	15.994	.000	-2.298	30	.029	-3.48718	1.51735	-6.58602	-.38834
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.414	29.972	.000	-3.48718	.78994	-5.10052	-1.87384

Figure 3 details the statistically significant differences between Group 1 and Group 2. Turning to Table 5, one can view the rank-ordered traits by age group. As a reminder, Group 1 consists of those ages 18-22 years, Group 2 contains 23-33 years, and Group 3 represents respondents' ages 34-59 years. Those in Group 1 ranked *Liked by my Friends* at sixteenth position while those in Group 2 ranked it three spots higher. *Sports-Minded* was ranked at nineteenth in Group 1 and twenty-first in Group 1. And lastly of importance, *Other* was ranked in fifteenth position in Group 1 but sixteenth in Group 2.

Figure 4

Group Statistics

	Participant's Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Good Health	2.00	36	5.3056	3.04086	.50681
	3.00	17	6.2353	2.38562	.57860
Good Housekeeper	2.00	5	3.0000	2.34521	1.04881
	3.00	3	1.0000	.00000	.00000
Liked by my Friends	2.00	18	3.8889	2.24628	.52945
	3.00	3	3.3333	1.15470	.66667
Good Speech	2.00	9	3.4444	2.50555	.83518
	3.00	9	3.5556	1.74005	.58002
Other	2.00	6	9.3333	.81650	.33333
	3.00	7	7.2857	3.72891	1.40940

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Good Health	Equal variances assumed	4.073	.049	-1.108	51	.273	-.92974	.83916	-2.61442	.75494
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.209	39.375	.234	-.92974	.76918	-2.48507	.62559
Good Housekeeper	Equal variances assumed	22.500	.003	1.430	6	.203	2.00000	1.39841	-1.42179	5.42179
	Equal variances not assumed			1.907	4.000	.129	2.00000	1.04881	-.91196	4.91196
Liked by my Friends	Equal variances assumed	4.678	.044	.413	19	.684	.55556	1.34546	-2.26053	3.37164
	Equal variances not assumed			.653	5.081	.542	.55556	.85133	-1.62244	2.73356
Good Speech	Equal variances assumed	5.334	.035	-.109	16	.914	-.11111	1.01683	-2.26670	2.04448
	Equal variances not assumed			-.109	14.261	.915	-.11111	1.01683	-2.28827	2.06605
Other	Equal variances assumed	9.730	.010	1.310	11	.217	2.04762	1.56248	-1.39138	5.48662
	Equal variances not assumed			1.414	6.665	.202	2.04762	1.44828	-1.41222	5.50746

Figure 4 demonstrates multiple statistically significant differences existing between Group 2 and Group 3. Again referring to Table 5 for a breakdown of trait rankings by age group, one can identify that *Good Health* ranked fifth in Group 2 and one position higher in Group 3. *Good Housekeeper* came in at nineteenth in Group 2 and three spots lower in Group 3. *Liked by my Friends* was might more highly ranked

among Group 2, coming in at thirteenth place as compared to Group 3's ranking of twentieth position. *Good Speech* rated higher in Group 3 at fifteenth place as compared to seventeenth place in Group 2. And finally, *Other* was much more highly ranked in Group 3 at tenth place while it ranked sixteenth in Group 2.

Figure 5

Group Statistics

	Participant's Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Good Housekeeper	1.00	12	3.9167	2.81096	.81146
	3.00	3	1.0000	.00000	.00000
Virginity	1.00	31	5.8387	3.37734	.60659
	3.00	2	8.5000	.70711	.50000
Liked by my Parents	1.00	108	5.2222	2.59523	.24973
	3.00	10	3.6000	1.64655	.52068
Good Speech	1.00	18	4.6111	3.10860	.73270
	3.00	9	3.5556	1.74005	.58002

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Good Housekeeper	Equal variances assumed	5.796	.032	1.747	13	.104	2.91667	1.66907	-1.68914	6.52247
	Equal variances not assumed			3.594	11.000	.004	2.91667	.81146	1.13067	4.70267
Virginity	Equal variances assumed	5.019	.032	-1.097	31	.281	-2.66129	2.42568	-7.60849	2.28591
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.385	5.698	.016	-2.66129	.78610	-4.60976	-.71282
Liked by my Parents	Equal variances assumed	5.348	.023	1.936	116	.055	1.62222	.83772	-.03698	3.28143
	Equal variances not assumed			2.809	13.556	.014	1.62222	.57747	.37985	2.86459
Good Speech	Equal variances assumed	7.705	.010	.942	25	.355	1.05556	1.12101	-1.25321	3.36432
	Equal variances not assumed			1.130	24.520	.270	1.05556	.93449	-.87098	2.98209

Finally, Figure 5 illustrates the statistically significant differences between Group 1 and Group 3. *Good Housekeeper* ranked twentieth in Group 1 and twenty-

second in Group 3. *Virginity* was more important to those in Group 1, ranking at fourteenth, than to those in Group 3, ranking at seventeenth. *Liked by my Parents* was significantly less important to those in Group 3 with an overall ranking of thirteenth than to those in Group 1 where it ranked at fifth. Finally, *Good Speech* was valued at eighteenth position in Group 1 while it ranked three spots higher in Group 3.

As with Year- and Sex-based differences, Age-based differences are explained purely speculatively. In this research, it is speculated that those in Group 3, as the oldest age spectrum and thus the group with the most life experience, have a different perspective than those in both Group 1 and Group 2 and potentially, a more mature valuation of what is meaningful.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

As anyone who has experienced it can attest, the process of mate selection is such a critical period of time during one's adult life. It is ripe with results, whether positive or negative. Cobb, Larson, and Watson (2003) summed it well: "The process of choosing a mate is a significant and often difficult one for many single adults. Few other choices may become as strong an epicenter for consequences that ripple out across the lifespan of the couple and of the marriage" (p. 222). Mate selection is an important and life-changing event – one that bears consideration. Because of the weight of this decision, the area of mate selection is a fascinating area for research, study, and analysis.

"Family scholars have long studied the development of intimate relationships, how individuals select mates" (Sassler, 2004, p. 492). With the initial understanding that mate selection is an entirely individual process, this research started with the hypothesis that overall preferred characteristics in mate selection would be *Warm and Affectionate* and *Well-Off Financially*. Truly, the goal was to determine which characteristics, if any at all, would persist across the lines of age, gender, and time as preferred traits when considering a potential mate.

Summary of Research

After analyzing data collected from 206 respondents – a combination of undergraduate and graduate students at a Midwestern university who enrolled in semester-long, family-related courses either in the spring semester of 1997 or the spring semester of 2005 and voluntarily completed the survey – it was clear that this study brought with it interesting, if not unanticipated, results.

After tabulating means, ranking characteristics, and performing a host of independent samples t-tests, this study found two clearly important characteristics that appealed to a broad range of individuals when selecting a mate: that the prospect be *Warm and Affectionate* and that the prospect possess a *Good Sense of Humor*. Both of these traits are highly subjective and open to personal interpretation, not easily quantifiable in any type of standardized measure. As such, the unique preferences of an individual still reign supreme. While *Warm and Affectionate* did top the list, *Well-Off Financially* trailed at a distant fifteenth position where it tied with *Virginity*.

In light of the theoretical orientation toward a blend of social exchange theory and homogamy, or assortative mating, which was used in this study, how do the results match up? To a degree, it is unsurprising that *Warm and Affectionate* topped the charts as hypothesized. This trait is multi-faceted and lends itself to a variety of theoretical standings; its universal appeal no doubt aided in its high ranking among respondents. *Good Sense of Humor* can likewise be linked to its standing, as it hints toward a warm personality. That the second part of the research hypothesis – that *Well-Off Financially* would rank among the top two traits – was so off the mark was

surprising. Even ranking among the top five or 10 preferred characteristics would have been expected. That it ranked fifteenth out of 26 was surprising. Recent research speaks to the idea of economic advantage in mate selection and speculates that perhaps with more women entering the workforce and those women earning more comparable wages to their male counterparts, a shift has taken place in mate selection preferences among both men and women. “Well-educated women can better afford to judge potential mates based on noneconomic characteristics,” states Press (2004, p. 1031). This makes sense in light of this study’s sample population being derived from a cross-listed undergraduate and graduate course at a university, particularly when the majority of respondents were female.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this current body of research provides a rather interesting insight into the mate selection process, there is further work to be done in the field. For instance, it would be fascinating to continue in the same vein of preferred characteristics, but also compare and contrast them with what each individual would rank as the characteristics he or she fulfills. Would there be similarities in traits, thus lending credence to theories of homogeneity? Or might there be differences that would allow for an “opposites attract” approach or perhaps a complementary perspective of “two halves making a whole?” Future research could gather more demographic information, such as the respondent’s race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion to be able to determine to what extent such factors might influence the mate selection process. It

would also be fascinating to include respondents' levels of education and current earnings in light of potential mate preferences.

Final Thoughts

It is hard to say how much even the most astute researcher might be able to uncover about the unique process of mate selection, or what generalizations might be able to be made. But the research does serve a valuable purpose and any knowledge ascertained from this field might prove beneficial not only to individuals desiring a mate, but to counselors, clergy, and others who might support and guide individuals through the selection process and beyond.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
IRB Approval



*Dr. Joe C. Jackson College
of Graduate Studies & Research*

October 15, 2007

Ms. Tamra Townsley
Dr. Glee Bertram
Campus Box 118
College of Education and Professional Studies
Department of Human Environmental Science
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, OK 73034

Re: Application for IRB Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

Dear Ms. Townsley and Dr. Bertram:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal entitled, "*Characteristic preferences in mate selection among college students at the University of Central Oklahoma...*," for review by the UCO Institutional Review Board. The Jackson College of Graduate Studies & Research is pleased to inform you of the approval of your application (UCO IRB# 07206).

On behalf of the JCGS&R and UCO IRB, I wish you the best of luck with your research project. If the JCGS&R can be of any further assistance in your pursuit of research, creative & scholarly activities, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Jill A. Devenport, Ph.D.
UCO Institutional Review Board
Interim Assistant Dean
Jackson College of Graduate Studies & Research
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, OK 73034
405-974-3496
JAD/

Appendix B

Survey Administered to Participants

WHAT I WOULD VALUE MOST IN SELECTING A MATE

Sex: M__ F__ Age:____
 Class: 11:00__ 4:30__

Fall__ Spring__
 200__

Indicate order of preference for Top 10 Qualities by ranking your choices with numbers 1-10 with 1 being most important and 10 being the 10th most important.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| ___ A. Good Health | ___ N. Same race |
| ___ B. Sexually responsive | ___ O. Same nationality background |
| ___ C. Good housekeeper | ___ P. Popular with own sex |
| ___ D. Imaginative cook | ___ Q. Popular with opposite sex |
| ___ E. Virginity | ___ R. Liked by my parents |
| ___ F. Desire for children | ___ S. Liked by my friends |
| ___ G. Warm and affectionate | ___ T. Well-off financially |
| ___ H. Good looks | ___ U. Sports-minded |
| ___ I. Same religion | ___ V. Fond of reading |
| ___ J. Good education | ___ W. Artistic talents |
| ___ K. Fair, willing to share unpleasant tasks | ___ X. Good sense of humor |
| ___ L. Ambitious | ___ Y. Good speech |
| ___ M. Socially adroit (skillful) | ___ Z. Other:_____ |