

Mate selection criteria among Muslims living in America

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Abstract

There is a lively literature on sex differences in mate preferences primarily in Western cultures. The few cross-cultural studies that exist are limited, as they ignore the role of religion on mate preferences. In this article, we randomly selected 500 personal advertisements placed by Muslims who live in the United States. Content analysis revealed that there were no significant sex differences in seeking a physically attractive mate. However, women mentioned their physical attractiveness more than men did, while men, more than women, sought mates younger than themselves. Women preferred financially secure partners and placed a higher value on finding partners who were emotionally sensitive and sincere than did the men. Furthermore, women significantly, more than men, advertised their religiosity and sought religious partners.

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1. Introduction

The study of sex difference on human mate preferences has a long history. Pioneering researchers in this area (e.g., Christensen, 1947; Kirkpatrick, 1936) noted that certain characteristics were highly valued and sought by men, while others were sought and valued

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by women. They discovered that men preferred young and good looking women, while women tended to value older men and those with high social status. While the majority of these mate selection studies focus on Western societies, more recent studies have expanded not only the populations being studied but on the theories tested. Cross-cultural studies (e.g., [Hollander, 2004](#)) are scarce, despite their value in testing evolution-based hypotheses. The present study is aimed mainly at expanding some the findings reported by the international study of [Buss \(1989\)](#). We do so by content analyzing a sample of personal advertisements placed on a Muslim matrimonial web site.

[Baber \(1936\)](#) conducted one of the earliest studies on mate selection criteria. He found that 79% of the females versus 32% of the males were willing to marry someone who was not good looking. Seventy-six percent of the males said they would marry someone less intelligent or educated than themselves compared with only 18% of the females. Moreover, 75% of the males said that they preferred a mate who was younger than themselves, whereas 94% of the females wanted an older mate.

More than 40 years later, [Harrison and Saeed \(1977\)](#) did a content analysis of 800 “lonely hearts” advertisements and found that women were more likely than men to advertise their attractiveness, wanted financial security, sought someone who was older, and expressed concerns about the potential partner’s motives. Men, however, were more likely than women to advertise their financial status, indicate their interest in marriage, and seek an attractive partner who was younger than them.

A creative and recent project by [Gottschall, Martin, Quish, and Rea \(2004\)](#) conducted a content analysis of 658 traditional folktales from 48 cultures, focusing on the plot and character summaries from 240 representative works of classic Western literature. They discovered that male characters were more likely than female characters to be presented as valuing physical attractiveness in mates, while female characters were depicted as valuing a potential mate’s wealth, social standing, or both.

In short, the extant literature on mate choices shows great consistency; men generally prefer physically attractive women and women who are younger than them. In contrast, women tend to prefer men who are successful and older than them.

The findings of these and other studies on sex differences on human mating strategies are remarkable in their consistency when one considers the divergent theoretical and methodological approaches used ([Feingold, 1990, 1992](#)).

On the theoretical level, there is an ongoing debate about which perspective offers a more persuasive interpretation for these apparent sex differences in mate preference ([Eagly & Wood, 1999](#)). Theoretical perspectives used in the mate preference literature range from a sociocultural perspective, which uses exchange theory, feminist approaches, or gender-role stereotypes (e.g., [Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977](#)), to postmodern sociological approach (e.g., [Jagger, 1998](#)) and to those that take an evolutionary psychology perspective.

Supporters of evolutionary interpretations argue that sociocultural explanations, while not necessarily wrong, are incomplete. They suggest that a woman’s physical appearance is linked to age and health, which, in turn, is a significant indicator of her reproductive capabilities. Because men want to ensure that their genes are passed to another generation, physical attractiveness is important to them. Other physical features, such as breast size, body

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