



## Testing evolutionary and cultural theories regarding mate selection in Turkey<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Most studies on mate selection criteria have focused on women and rely on Western samples. In the present study, we tested both women's and men's mate preferences from evolutionary and cultural perspectives in a large, mostly Muslim sample ( $N = 1114$ ). Results showed that (1) the relation between women's families' income level and the income level they prefer in their potential mates is inconsistent with the cultural similarity hypothesis; (2) women place more importance on intelligence (i.e., good genes-mental), willingness to provide (i.e., good father) and ability to provide (i.e., good provider) in their potential mates, whereas men place more importance on physical attractiveness (good genes-physical); (3) in contrast to some previous findings, the importance of "willingness to provide" was negatively related to socio-economic status but positively related to religiosity; (4) "willingness to provide" properties were the most important preference criteria for women; and finally (5) as perceived attractiveness of the self increased, both women and men became more stringent in their criteria. Taken as a whole, the findings are consistent with an evolutionary approach to mate selection.

### 1. Evolutionary and cultural perspectives

Buss and Schmitt (1993) argue in Sexual Strategies Theory (SST) that the importance of economic resources possessed by a potential mate for women is an evolutionarily selected trait. In 36 of the 37 cultures tested, women rated economic resources more highly than men (Buss, 1989). One of the variables affecting this relationship is the woman's own economic resources. Townsend (1989) found that, as the income level of women increased, the importance placed on the wealth of the potential partner also increased; Wiederman and Allgeier (1992) reported similar results (see also Li, Valentine, & Patel, 2011; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005a). Buss and Schmitt (1993) claim that these findings support their evolutionary theory.

In contrast to the SST, Social Role Theory (SRT; Eagly & Wood, 1999) argues that the relationship between gender and preference for economic resources does not require an evolutionary basis and can simply be explained by women's preference for mates with status and resources similar to theirs. To the best of our knowledge, however, there are no studies that directly test these two theories against each other, and the vast majority of existing studies are from Western samples (cf. Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). In this study, we examine both men's and women's preferences to see which theory better

fits the data. If the positive relation between a woman's family's economic status and her preference for the economic status of her mate is replicated for men as well, this would support the SRT, whereas a null relationship between own and potential mate's economic status in men would be more consistent with SST. This is because the SST expects the relation to have evolved in women only. The SRT, on the other hand, expects the similarity preference to hold equally for women and men. Therefore, the first objective of this research is to pit the evolutionary perspective of SST against the cultural perspective of SRT in a mostly Muslim non-western community, a sample that is mostly under-represented in the evolutionary literature.

### 2. 3G hypothesis

In the evolutionary psychological literature, men's mate value from the perspective of women is thought to revolve around two basic categories: being a good provider (e.g., being rich) and having good genes (e.g., being physically attractive; Buss, 2015). In addition to these two, Lu, Zhu, and Chang (2015) suggested that women developed a new kind of mate selection criterion, being a good father, which has evolved in response to the pressures of modern life conditions. They argue that women in general, and in particular those who have high socio-economic status (SES) and live an

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urban life, place more importance on the good father characteristics (e.g., loving children and having a sense of responsibility). Consistent with this hypothesis, they showed in two separate correlational studies that as women's SES increased, the importance of good father properties increased as well. In a third study, they experimentally manipulated predicted future SES and found that participants in the good economic condition manipulation significantly preferred good father characteristics to good provider and good genes characteristics. All of these studies have been conducted with Chinese participants and, to the best of our knowledge, the findings have not been replicated cross-culturally. However, China has recently seen a rapid economic and social transformation (e.g., Chang, Wang, Shackelford, & Buss, 2011; Yang, 1996, 1998). For this reason, Lu et al. (2015) point to the need to test the 3G hypothesis in other cultures as well.

In addition, the research done by Lu et al. (2015) has only been performed on women, but some of the characteristics that make up the "good father" category are also those that a man might want to have in a potential wife. This is why we studied men in addition to women in the present study. As a matter of fact, Buss and his colleagues (Buss, 2015; Buss & Schmitt, 1993) divide good provider characteristics into those that correspond to "ability to provide" and those that correspond to "willingness to provide", the latter of which more or less overlaps with the category Lu et al. (2015) call the "good father". In addition, "good genes" consists of two sub-categories; physical and mental. For example, while men place more importance on physical attractiveness than women (good genes-physical), women place more importance on intelligence than men (good genes-mental; e.g., Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005b). We therefore examined these characteristics under four main categories: good genes-physical, good genes-mental, ability to provide (i.e., being a good provider) and willingness to provide (i.e., being a good father). We tested the previously reported mate preference-related sex differences in Turkey and specifically the relation between good-father characteristics and SES as predicted by Lu et al.'s hypothesis (2015).

Buss and Shackelford (2008) also report that as the self-perceived physical attractiveness of a woman increases, she wants the best of everything. In other words, if the woman finds herself attractive, she will place greater importance on both aspects of good genes (physical and mental), on ability to provide and on willingness to provide. We examine this relationship in Turkey for both women's and men's preferences.

Finally, in this research, instead of directly measuring the income level of the participants (e.g., Townsend, 1989; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992), we measured the income of their families which we consider to be more predictive. As a matter of fact, in Eagly and Wood's (1999) account, a woman is expected to choose a partner consistent with the *social stratum* of her family.

### 3. Overview of the research questions

To summarize, this research has four main objectives. First, we compare the cultural hypothesis of Eagly and Wood (1999) and Buss's evolutionary hypothesis in a sample of men and women with a Muslim majority. Second, we examine whether men and women differ in their preference for good genes (physical and mental), ability to provide and willingness to provide. Third, we test the validity of the 3G hypothesis, which has previously been tested in the Chinese culture by Lu et al. (2015), in the Turkish culture. Finally, another evolutionary hypothesis by Buss and Shackelford (2008) was tested to see whether the significance of all four mate preference categories increases as the self-perceived attractiveness of men and women increases.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants

One thousand one hundred and fourteen undergraduates (589

female and 525 male) participated in this study for extra course credit. Ages ranged from 18 to 26 for males ( $M = 22.17$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ) and 18–27 for females ( $M = 21.35$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ). The four universities the participants attended represent a broad spectrum of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in Turkey. In fact, the participants hailed from 71 (out of a total of 81) different provinces.

### 4.2. Materials and procedure

A survey form was used to collect the data. The first part contained questions about socioeconomic variables (e.g., the average monthly income of the family, father's and mother's education, etc.). In the second part, the participants were asked to rate the importance of 10 characteristics of their potential mates on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7 where 1 meant "not at all important" and 7 meant "extremely important." These 10 characteristics (namely being *religious*, being *intelligent*, having *good earning capacity*, *wanting children*, being *well-educated*, being *physically attractive*, being *ambitious*, being *loyal*, being *respectable*, having a *sense of responsibility*) were derived from the literature investigating mate preferences (e.g., Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Chang et al., 2011). The survey was administered by the investigators in classrooms with groups of 5 to 25 students. Completing the survey took about 20 min.

Being physically attractive represents the "good genes-physical" score while being intelligent represents the "good genes-mental" score. The "ability to provide" score is comprised of four items (being ambitious, having good earning capacity, being well-educated, being respectable) whereas the "willingness to provide" score is comprised of three items (being loyal, wanting children, having a sense of responsibility). Being religious was added as an extra characteristic.

## 5. Results

Table 1 and Table 2 display the correlations among the variables in this study separately for women and men. The first aim of the study was to test a claim by Eagly and Wood (1999): Women with high income have increased preference for financial resources in prospective mates because women want mates with income levels similar to them. To test this claim, we looked at the correlation between women's family income level and the importance they placed on the income level of their prospective mates and compared it with that of male's family income level and the importance they placed on the income level of their prospective mates. The results demonstrated that there is a positive correlation between women's family income and the importance they placed on the income level of their prospective mates [ $r(589) = 0.120$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ]; however, the two variables were unrelated in males [ $r(525) = 0.011$ ,  $p = 0.804$ ]. When age, parental education, and family religiosity were controlled, the results remained constant. We used Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation in order to compare the magnitude of the crucial differences in correlations (comparing women's and men's family income with the income level of their prospective mates), and the results revealed that these two correlations are significantly different from each other ( $z = 1.821$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ). The results, therefore, support the evolutionary theory of mate selection (e.g., Buss, 2015; Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Secondly, we investigated whether there are any differences between men's and women's scores on four mating preference categories (i.e., good genes-physical and mental, ability and willingness to provide). In line with the previous literature (e.g., Shackelford et al., 2005b), the results revealed that females ( $M = 6.01$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ; 95% CI [5.94, 6.09]) valued "good genes-mental" more than males ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ; 95% CI [5.49, 5.71],  $t(1111) = -0.622$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), whereas males ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ; 95% CI [5.18, 5.40]) valued "good genes-physical" more than females ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ; 95% CI [4.68, 4.87],  $t(1112) = 0.684$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, females gave more importance to both willingness to provide ( $M = 6.39$ ,

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