

## SEX DIFFERENCES IN MATE SELECTION PREFERENCE AND SEXUAL STRATEGY: TESTS FOR EVOLUTIONARY HYPOTHESES

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According to evolutionary theories of mate selection (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Trivers, 1972), men and women value different characteristics in potential partners and adopt differential sexual strategies. Three studies were conducted to test the theories. In Study 1, 308 undergraduate students rated the relative importance of 40 characteristics in choosing a mate. These characteristics included physical attractiveness, financial prospects, and 25 attributes of the Big Five traits. Respondents also judged the effectiveness of 20 mate attraction tactics. Study 2 tested the stability of the findings of Study 1 using an older sample ( $N = 256$ ). In addition, they answered several hypothetical questions such as the advantages of polygamy. Study 3 allowed subjects to freely list 10 important characteristics in choosing a mate. Analysis of mate preference shown in a few classical and modern Chinese novels was also conducted. One prominent sex difference was that females emphasized the earning potential of the marriage mate more than did males, whereas males paid more attention to the youth and physical attractiveness of a female mate. With regard to personality traits, it was found that women tended to value conscientiousness, dominance (status striving), emotional/character maturity more than did men. However, women did not reliably value agreeableness more than did men. When encountering a not-yet-well acquainted potential mate men were more likely than women to agree to have sex if the mate is attractive. Men were also more likely than women to agree that "satisfying sex drive" is one of advantages of polygamy. Overall, these sex differences in mate preferences and sexual strategy were consistent

with the prediction of evolutionary theories. Finally, men judged the tactics of displaying good personality traits and resources as more effective in attracting the opposite sex than did women, suggesting that female mate preferences might lead to intermale competition. Analysis of the preference order of Big Five traits revealed that women valued a male mate's conscientiousness (hardworking, responsible, reliable) most, whereas men valued a female mate's agreeableness most. This finding did not seem to hold for Americans. Because men's conscientiousness implied more ability and willingness to provide stable emotional and economic resources to a marriage partner than did their agreeableness, this cultural difference suggested that Taiwanese women might have a stronger preference for a mate who can provide stable emotional and economic resources than did American women. The Chinese culture that emphasizes interpersonal interdependence might make Taiwanese women's mate preference more consistent with the predictions of the parental investment theory. The themes concerning mate preferences revealed in Chinese novels provided further support for the findings from the questionnaire studies. The implications of these findings for the evolutionary theory of mate choice, evolutionary personality theory, and the controversy between cultural and evolutionary explanation were discussed.

**Keywords:** Evolutionary theory, Parental investment, Mate choice, Sex psychology, Big-Five traits, Sex difference