Ideal Partner Preferences
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Introduction

Romantic relationships play an integral role in people’s lives with online dating sites and speed-dating events becoming increasingly popular. For example, couples from 4.77% of new U.S. marriages met via eHarmony (eHarmony & Harris Interactive, 2009) and the revenue from the dating services in the United States is estimated to be valued at $2.1 billion (Marketdata Enterprises Inc., 2012). Hence, the study of ideal partner preferences has clear societal and economic implications.

My research will involve conducting two studies on partner preferences: a cross-cultural and cross-sectional study and a longitudinal study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is being conducted to test various direct and indirect measures to determine which of these maximizes between participant variance.

Direct measures: the Perceived Relationship Quality Inventory (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000), the Ideal Partner and Relationship Scales (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999) and an adapted version of the Ideal Partner and Relationship Scales to measure qualities of the previous partner and of the previous relationship.

Indirect measures: the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), the Affect Misattribution Procedure (Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005), and the Emotional Stroop test.

Cross-Cultural and Cross-Sectional Study

The first study will be an online cross-cultural and cross-sectional study on couples ideal partner preferences to determine how these vary as a function of age, sex, culture, and relationship stage.

Social media sites will be used to advertise the study in the target countries and participants will be individuals who have lived in their home countries minimum 50% of their lives.

Longitudinal Study

The second study furthers the first study’s research regarding the role of relationship stage on partner preferences. This will be a nine month longitudinal study to determine how partner preferences vary as a function of relationship stage, and the influence of relationship termination and new relationship initiation on these preferences.

Participants will be recruited from speed dating events held in the UK and Spain. The pre-test will involve administering the measures to single participants who are open to initiating a long-term heterosexual relationship.

The post-one stage will involve administering the measures to participants from the pre-test stage who have initiated a relationship. The post-two stage will involve administering the measures to participants from the post-one stage who have ended their relationship and initiated a new relationship. In the post-one and post-two stages, measures will be administered every two weeks for nine months or until the relationship has been terminated.

Anticipated Outcomes

Research indicates that men and women prefer long-term partners who are high in attractiveness/vitality and status/resources respectively (e.g., Buss, 1989; Fletcher, Tither, O’Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2011). Nevertheless, Zentner and Mitura (in press) indicate that these sex-differentiated partner preferences diminish as countries attain higher levels of gender parity. Hence, it is expected that high gender parity countries will exhibit lower levels of the sex-differentiated partner preferences relative to middle or low gender parity countries. This outcome will provide evidence supporting socio-structural accounts of partner preferences.

With regard to relationship stage, information concerning attractiveness/vitality and status/resources is more salient than information pertaining to warmth/trustworthiness. Accordingly, it is expected that there will be greater emphasis placed on attractiveness/vitality and status/resources relative to warmth/trustworthiness in the early stages of a relationship. In later relationship stages, interdependence increases and the reverse is expected.

Conclusions

To date, little research has focused on changes in partner preferences as a function of relationship stage and age, comparing direct and indirect measures. Hence, my research will provide novel insights into the area of partner preferences with, considering the increasing popularity of dating service companies, a potential impact on society and economy.