

“I looked for something more than just the physical”: Men and mate selection

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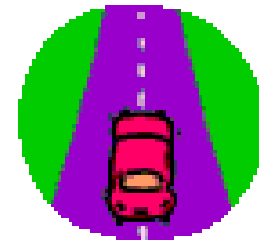
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The study

- Overall aim: To explore how men and women experience, perceive and perform love, romance, relationships, attraction, mate selection and masculinity/femininity within steady romantic heterosexual relationships
- This paper only overviews the findings relating to the mate selection component
 - How do young adult men '*choose*' their partners?

Mate selection

- We do not choose our romantic partners, but that *love* and *fate* chooses for us
- Mate selection is a rational choice which is sequentially processed



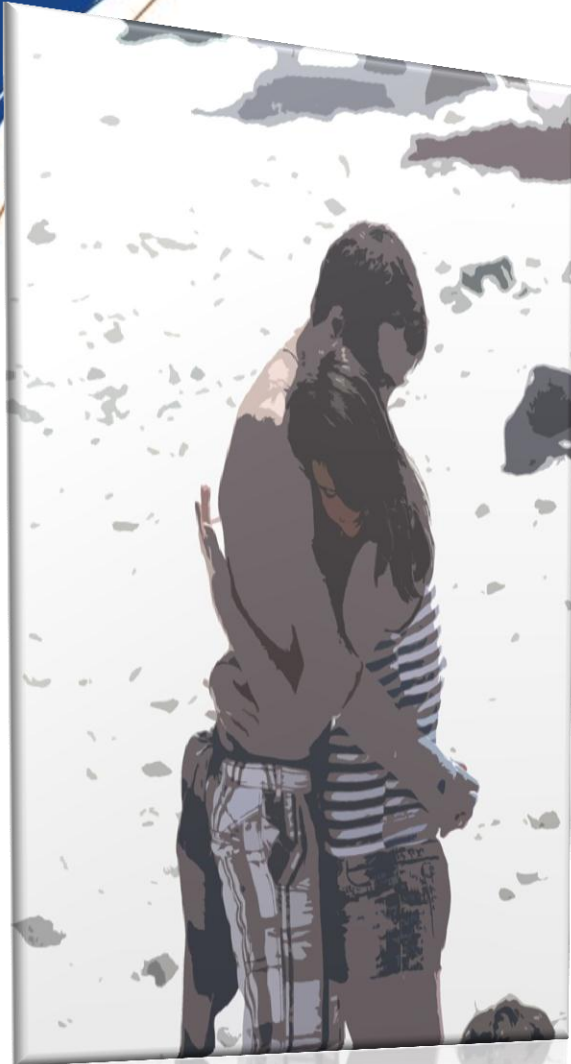
Bee (1994)

When individuals choose their partners, they evaluate three variables

1. **External characteristics:** comparing physical appearance, social class and manners of their partners to their own
2. **Attitudes and beliefs:** systems like religion, culture, and sex are compared
3. **Roll fit:** evaluating whether their partner's ideas of relationships and sex roles match theirs and whether they are sexually compatibility

The importance of similarity: Assortative mating

the “coupling of individuals based on their similarity on one or more characteristics” such as ethnicity, religion, personality, age, education, attitudes etc. (Buss, 1985)



BUT, is this the case for all societies, does manhood make a difference, and are there other factors that come into play?

Gathering the information

- **Qualitative design**

- Sample (social networking sites)
 - Coloured
 - Young adult heterosexual men in 'steady' same-race relationships
 - Western Cape
- Semi-structured one-on-one interviews
- Discourse analyses

- **Focus question**

- What were the things that may have influenced the development of your relationship?
 - We probed for factors such as personality characteristics, culture, background, money etc.

Some findings

- Men evaluated various factors like personality, physical appearance, background and upbringing, culture, and race
 - Implicit and explicit evaluations
- However contrary to the similarity principle, some of the men were searching for personality characteristics dissimilar to their own.





“a person who has a strong need to be nurturant should like one who has a strong need to be cared for, and vice versa” Barron and Byrne (1984)

Personality dissimilarity

- “I enjoy other people who are quite loud and exciting... [But]I wouldn't do it myself. I think I live in my head; so I may think like an extravert but I act like an introvert...”
- I looked for someone, I looked for something more than just the physical... So it wasn't really the fact that uhm... the physical thing didn't attract me to her, it's the fact that she was smiling and she was spontaneous... she was kind...”
(Ben, 27 years)

Implicit evaluations of physical attractiveness

“because we live and we always amongst lots of people we always look around so your eyes will always go you know and you will always ask yourself the question *couldn't I have done a little bit better?*” (Howard, 27 years)

Implicit evaluations of race

- “I think it does play a part... Because of more of like culture way of things... You know what I’m saying... like take for instance if I would’ve met with like a African woman you know... the way their culture operates you know... the way they do things and stuff... it would be like obviously like a culture shock for me you know...”
(George, 27 years)
- “... it didn’t really play a part we just... got attracted to each other...”
- we were attracted to each other because the school that we went to... there wasn’t a lot of coloured people... so that’s just the way it happened...” (Peter, 24 years)

Explicit evaluations of culture and background

- we could relate with how maybe our grandparents raised us and laugh about it and where we... you know there's this respect for adults and you know things like... similar things like that man and that obviously shapes the morals so ja that's also similar... (Carl, 27 years)
- I don't think we spoke too much about that [referring to race] in the beginning, but culture it would be the same I think our parents are pretty similar... (Peter, 24 years)

Concluding remarks

- Both psychological influences, and not readily acknowledged social ones, play a significant role when men choose a long-term intimate partner.
- This was a qualitative study, we could not objectively establish which of these factors contributed mostly to mate selection. Further quantitative investigations are recommended.
- While personality was explicitly assessed, both race and physical attractiveness were implicitly evaluated.
- Implicit evaluations of these factors may suggest two things:
 - 1) that men (and possibly women) feel uncomfortable to discuss issues pertaining to physical attributes as to avoid appearing somewhat judgemental or discriminatory;
 - 2) that men (and possibly women) are not aware of how aware they are regarding the important role physical attributes play in mate selection or attraction.
- Further research is recommended with other male and female groups as well as couples in racially similar and dissimilar intimate relationships.