Gender, Gender Role Adherence, and Self-Esteem in
Long Term Mate Selection Preferences among College Students

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This thesis entitled
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Gender, Gender Role Adherence, and Self-Esteem in Long Term Mate Selection

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Profound social developments, such as the advent of the gender equality movement, have had a significant influence on many aspects of long-term romantic relationships. This is particularly noted with regards to the types of characteristics men and women desire in a long-term partner. Studies have long shown that what men and women value in a partner is not always consistent between genders. Two hundred forty-three university students from a mid-sized Midwestern university were surveyed on what they desire in a long term mate. They also completed self-esteem and gender role adherence scales. Results demonstrated traditional gender differences. However, consistent with previous literature, results also suggest that select gender differences in mate preferences are continuing a convergence trend. Evidence for self-esteem and gender role adherence as alternative predictors of traditionally gender distinct mate preference was not found. Gender differences with regards to the perceived function or benefit of favoring particular traits were uncovered for the traits concerning physical attractiveness and financial resourcefulness, but not for the trait concerning good health.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Page</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire Packet (Appendices A-H)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A) Demographics Questionnaire</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B1) Free Response Task</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B2) Factors in Choosing a Mate Questionnaire</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Bem Sex Role Inventory</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E) The Utility of Mate Characteristic Preferences</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F) Focus Group Outline</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(G) Recruitment material .................................................................96

(H) Debriefing information sheet.......................................................98
List of Tables

Table 1: Means (and Standard Deviations) in descending order of the 18 Mate Preferences for the Total Sample (N= 243) on the Factors Desired in a Mate Questionnaire .............................................................................................................46

Table 2: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females .........................................................................................................................................................47

Table 3: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for Buss’s 1996 data vs. Demyan’s 2004 data........................................................................................................48

Table 4: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for Gender Role Adherence (androgynous vs. sex typed) ........................................51

Table 5: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for High and Low Self-Esteem using median split technique.......................53

Table 6: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for High and Low Self-Esteem using the lower and upper third split technique ......54

Table 7: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Utility of Mate Preferences Scale items for Males vs. Females.............................................................................................................................55

Table 8: Frequency and Percentage of Traits cited in the Free-Response Task by Gender.................................................................................................................................57
Gender, Gender Role Adherence, and Self-Esteem in Long Term Mate Selection Preferences in College Students

Introduction

The remarkable social and cultural changes that have taken place in the U.S. over the last five decades have had a profound effect on the institution of marriage and long-term romantic relationships. Increased education and work experience, primarily among women, have been linked with the desire to marry later in life, as well as with a delay in child bearing (Norton & Miller, 1990). Today 30% of working women earn more than their husbands (Tyre & McGinn, 2003), and women’s participation in the labor force has increased from 40% to over 70% between the years of 1970 and 1999 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1999, Table 659). White-collar professions, typically the domain of men, have also seen an influx of female employees. Over 40% of the law degrees awarded in 1995 were to women, compared with only 5% in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1999, Table 333). Additionally, a rise in average educational attainment has been associated with increases in the average age at which individuals complete their education and leave school (Mare, 1991). Consequently, the average age of individuals marrying for the first time has significantly increased over the past three decades. The average age of first-time brides was reported as 21 in 1964, compared with age 25 in 1990. For grooms, the average age was 24 in 1964, compared with an average age of 27 in 1990 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995). The traits individuals desire in a long-term mate have also changed over time. Empirical evidence has provided us with overwhelming support for the fact that men and women have distinct preferences regarding the characteristics
they desire in a long-term mate as well as numerous overlapping preferences (Baize & Schroeder, 1995; Buss, 1989, 1991; Buss et al., 1989; Sprecher, Sullivan & Hatfield, 1994). These findings have been established as reliable over time (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick & Larsen, 2001) and have also been demonstrated across cultures (Buss et al., 1989; Goodwin, & Tinker, 2002). Despite consistent results, the degree to which these disparities exist has come under investigation (Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002).

Theories have been developed to explain their origins and predict changes in mate selection preferences. In an effort to contribute to this investigation, the present study will probe into individuals’ perceptions regarding the function and benefit of traits valued in a mate. Results will be compared to prior research as a means of assessing changes over time. The study will also examine how gender role adherence and self-esteem levels influence the qualities men and women value in a long-term mate. In the following review of the literature, historical trends in human mate selection will be discussed. The principal theories of the gender distinction literature will then be outlined and critiqued, and the purpose of the study will be elaborated. Hypotheses will then be described regarding the present state of gender distinct mate characteristic preferences as well as the relationships between gender role adherence and self-esteem levels, and traits desired in a long-term mate.

Review of Literature

Contemporary research on gender differences focused first on cognitive abilities, (e.g., Anastasi, 1958; Garai & Scheinfeld, 1968; Maccoby, 1967; see also review by
Feingold 1993: Linn, 1992; Wilder & Powell, 1989) which facilitated the exploration of
gender differences in the social realm (for a review, see Eagly, 1987) including mate
selection (e.g., Buss, 1989; Feingold, 1990, 1991, 1992). Over a half a century ago Hill
(1945) and his colleagues were the first to examine gender specific relationship
approaches now summed up by the contemporary adage, “Men are from Mars, Women
are from Venus.” Mate selection preference questionnaires were constructed to gauge the
preferences of characteristics valued in a mate (Baber, 1936; Christensen, 1947; Hill,
1945; Strauss, 1946). Utilizing this type of measure, Hill’s (1945) study of college
students was one of the first to reveal prominent distinctions between the genders
regarding the specific characteristics desired in a long-term mate. The methodology
required respondents to peruse a list of partner attributes and rate each on its importance.
Currently, similar methods are being employed, primarily to preserve the ability to
compare and track changes in preferences over time (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, &
Larsen, 2001). However, it is important to note that although gender distinctions
concretely exist with regards to the traits preferred in a mate, many consistent similarities
have also emerged through the numerous studies conducted in the human mating
literature. In Hill’s (1945) initial research the six most desired traits in a long-term mate
reflected no gender differences. Those six traits included: (a) dependable character, (b)
emotional stability, (c) pleasing disposition, (d) mutual attraction, (e) good health, and (f)
desire for home and children (Hill, 1945). In addition, the top rated trait, mutual love and
attraction, demonstrated no gender differences in Buss and colleagues’ (2001) study on
mate selection preferences. Similar results were found in a related study for the trait
labeled mutual love, as well as the trait of trust and honesty (Doosje et al., 1999). Lastly, kindness and intelligence were found to be necessities to both men and women equally (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeiser, 2002). Previous literature suggests that men and women tend to agree on the traits they rate as the most important. The distinctions then emerge in the subsequent tier of desired traits, outlined in the following section.

Gender Differences in Mate Selection Preferences

Hill’s (1945) mate selection study explored attributes desired in a mate, number of children hoped for, and preferred age at marriage. The preferred age at which the males and females in Hill’s university sample ($N = 600$) wished to marry was 25 and 24 respectively. The six traits rated as most important by the combined sample were: (a) dependable character (b) emotional stability (c) pleasing disposition (d) mutual attraction, love (e) good health, and (f) desire for home and children. The traits which revealed significant gender differences were: (a) ambition and industriousness (b) good financial prospects (c) good cook and housekeeper and (d) good looks. Women valued the traits ambition and industriousness as well as good financial prospects to a significantly greater degree than men. Men, on the other hand, tended to value the traits of good cook/housekeeper and good looks significantly more than the women in the sample. Many of Hill’s (1945) results have since been confirmed in replication studies (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen 2001; for a review see Feingold’s 1992 meta-analysis). For example, using similar methodology Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield (1994) found support for these gender differences in their national sample of unmarried individuals. The mean age of their sample was 25 and no individual over the age of 35
was included in the analysis. Using a modified version of Hill’s (1945) questionnaire, the traits youth and physical attractiveness were found to be more important for men than women, and earning potential was found to be more important for women than for men. When applying Hill’s (1945) questionnaire, Buss and his 54 co-authors (1989) also found cross-cultural support for these traditional gender differences in all 37 cultures studied. Their sample included 4,499 males and 5,310 women between the ages of 17-30, with a mean age of 23.3 for males and 22.6 for females.

The terms traditional and nontraditional will be used throughout this paper to distinguish between those individuals who do and do not endorse the customary mate selection preferences. For women, customary mate selection thus refers to the preference for older mates who embody the previously mentioned resource cues. When referring to men, the term traditional will be used in reference to men’s propensity to value physical attractiveness in a mate, including youthfulness. Nontraditional mate preferences are those preferences that do not reflect the traditional mate characteristic preferences. These gender distinct preferences will be elaborated below.

First, compared with men, women have been shown to express a greater preference for earning potential and social status (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Howard, Blumstein, and Swartz, 1987). This preference has been demonstrated in women of various ages (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer & Kenrick, 2002) from various cultures (Buss et al., 1989). Moreover, in content analysis of personal advertisements, financial security has been found as more likely to be requested in ads placed by women, and more likely to be offered in ads placed by men (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparkles
1977). Woll (1986), utilizing similar content analysis methodology, revealed in his investigation of data from video dating organizations that women were more likely than men to report that they consider occupation as a factor when choosing someone to date. Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, and Trost (1990) also found in their undergraduate sample that women rated characteristics linked to dominance and status as more important criteria for choosing a partner than did men in their self-report study. Similar self-report measures have also shown women to express a greater preference for traits such as kindness, expressiveness, and consideration (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Howard et al., 1987; Hudson & Henze, 1969). Women have furthermore been shown to prefer a wider array of personality characteristics when compared to men (Feingold, 1991).

Second, gender differences are also demonstrated concerning the value men and women place on the physical attractiveness of a mate. Feingold (1990) revealed evidence across his meta-analysis of five distinct research paradigms (including questionnaire studies) that men do indeed place more value on the physical attractiveness of a potential mate when compared with women. He further reports these gender differences to be stronger under those paradigms which relied on self-report. In a follow up study, Feingold (1991) revealed that women also tended to value similarity in a mate over physical attractiveness.

Analysis of personal advertisements reveal men requesting physical attractiveness at a greater rate then women, with women being more likely than men to describe their physical traits (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparkles 1977). The National Survey of Family and Households surveyed 1,329 single individuals under the age of 35 and found that
men were less likely than women to marry someone whom they considered to be “not
good-looking” (Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994). Moreover, men rated
attractiveness as more important than similarity in a mate, which as mentioned previously
was contrary to what was preferred by their female counterparts (Feingold, 1991).
Similarly, D’Agostino and Day’s (1991) study of college students found that men
preferred complementary attributes to similarity in a long-term mate. Although these
findings have consistently emerged across studies, not all gender distinct mate
preferences have stood the test of time.

Qualities such as good housekeeping skills and good cook were originally slated
as male-distinct preferences. In Hill’s (1945) study, the trait good cook and housekeeper,
was ranked eighth out of the eighteen traits listed. In Buss and colleagues’ (2001)
longitudinal study, the ranking peaked in 1967 as sixth out of the eighteen, but then
dropped steadily in importance, ranking fourteenth in 1996. Women consistently ranked
this trait as sixteenth across all six points time periods (Buss et al., 2001) and this gender
distinct preference has all but faded away over the twentieth century. Potential reasons
for this change are later elaborated.

Finally, one of the most robust findings in the human mating literature is men’s
tendency to prefer younger mates when compared with women (Buss, 1989; 1994;
Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Symmons, 1979). Likewise, women have consistently been
found to prefer older mates when compared with their male counterparts (Buss et al.,
1989; Spreecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994). Buss (2000) further demonstrates that men
wanting many children express a stronger desire for a younger marriage partner. Over
time, empirical research has defined and supported traditional gender disparities, where men prefer physical attractiveness and women prefer financial achievement in a long-term mate. However, it is far less certain as to why they exist.

Contrary to the vast amount of data demonstrating gender differences in self-reported mate preferences, numerous studies have described the tendency for persons to choose partners of similar social standing, including educational attainment (Rockwell, 1976), ethnicity (Pagnini & Morgan 1990), religion (Johnston, 1980), occupation (Hout, 1982), and other social, psychological, and biological characteristics (Esptein & Guttman, 1984). Some researchers criticize the mate selection literature for focusing so heavily on the gender differences when in fact, the majority of the characteristics preferred in a mate do not differ with regards to gender (Feingold, 1990). Again, in Hill’s (1945) original study, the top six traits desired were shown as having no significant gender differences. Buss and colleagues’ (2001) longitudinal study likewise revealed no gender differences in the top two desired traits of mutual attraction and love. In the same study cross-gender correlations ranged from .94 to .98 in their 1984/1985 sample, suggesting high levels of similarity in the relative valuation of the 18 characteristics in Hill’s (1945) inventory. In addition to the strong overlapping preferences between the genders that have been recorded through research, the value placed on certain traits has not remained stable over time. It is the intention of the current study to document the current preferences of traits desired in a long-term mate.
Changes in Mate Selection Preferences

Despite the general consistency in research findings since the 1940’s, several social changes may be contributing to a shift in characteristic preferences in a long-term mate. However, as Marc (1991) noted, “studies of changes in patterns of assortative mating are rare, despite recent changes in social factors that appear to be related to marriage, including educational attainment, women’s participation in the labor force, fertility, cohabitation between unmarried persons, and average age at marriage” (p. 15.).

The rise of women in the workforce, predominately in fields that have previously been male-dominated, has allowed women increased access to financial independence. These shifts are said to result in changes in the division of household labor and the value that men place on a potential mate’s housekeeping skills. Based on their analysis of the 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995 National Survey of Families and Households, Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson (2000) report that men’s participation in household chores has increased steadily from 1965, with the largest increase from 1975 to 1985. Also reported is a larger reliance on out-sourcing goods previously made in the home (take-out meals for example) as well as a general devaluation of housework. Additionally, Buss and colleagues (2001) compared results from the Factors in Choosing a Mate Questionnaire (Hill, 1945) at six points over time from 1939 to 1996. Longitudinal analyses of these preferences reveal many more similarities than differences between the genders over the last three decades. Buss and colleagues (2001) report greater similarity between the sexes in 1977 and 1984/1985 than reported in 1967, and an even greater convergence in 1996. Furthermore, both genders increased the importance they placed on the physical
attractiveness and good financial prospects of a mate. This finding reflects the need for researchers to continue to develop a theoretical framework which can best explain these changes.

Theories of Origin

Although no researcher will argue against the strategic aspects of human mating, the current literature reflects a great deal of debate regarding the function of gender distinct preferences in mate selection (Archer, 1996; Buss, 1995; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Weiderman & Alleiger, 1992). Initially, this human mating research was atheoretical in nature, but two prominent theories have been developed to explain these gender differences: the evolutionary perspectives, and the sociocultural perspectives. Together these perspectives have been coined theories of origin in that they are thought to explain all empirically supported gender differences (Archer, 1996). Interestingly, these two views have been considered competing explanations, and until recently, there have been few efforts at theoretical integration (Archer, 1996). The bulk of the research effort in this area attempts to differentiate between the two perspectives with the objective of identifying a superior framework for explaining gender differences. The current study makes no assumption regarding the superiority of a theoretical stance, and it does not assume that the two theories of origin are incompatible explanations. Rather it aims to contribute towards the development of a functional theoretical framework that might later be used to explain and predict trends in human mating characteristic preferences. As Eagly and Wood (1999) have pointed out, “both theories offer a functional analysis of behavior that emphasizes adjustment to environmental conditions” (p. 408). Both theories
see biology and culture as the chief catalytic components of their respective theories and both work under the premise that these components serve as either proximal or distal causes of gender differences. As Feingold (1994) points out, evolutionary theorists view biology as the proximal cause of gender differences, while the influence of culture and society are viewed as distal causes. The sociocultural stance, on the other hand, finds biology to be the distal cause of gender differences whereas culture and society are held to be proximal. Even in the most thoughtful research design, it can be difficult to tease out which particular theory results appear to support. Research results in this area of study typically come with multiple interpretations. One study may at first appear to support the evolutionary stance, but an alternative interpretation of the same study may emerge providing equally compelling evidence for the opposition. Given this, it is easy to see why debates between these two stances often continue unresolved, leaving this field inherently muddled. These two positions will subsequently be outlined and discussed in light of the supporting evidence. Limitations of each perspective will also be presented.

**Evolutionary Perspective**

According to Buss (1995), evolutionary theory predicts that males and females will be the same or similar in those domains in which the sexes have faced the same or similar adaptive problems. Evolutionary psychologists such as Buss uphold that distinct adaptive problems are responsible for gender disparities, including those that are related to mate selection preference.
Darwin’s (1871) explanation of the mysteries of mating reflects species benefits related to reproduction advantages rather than the customary focus on survival gains. This phenomenon is referred to as the sexual selection theory (SST). SST was first developed by Darwin (1871), and further explored by Trivers (1972). It is divided into two key concepts, the first of which being that males compete with one another for the most desirable mates, and the victor is awarded greater sexual access to potential mating partners. This is labeled sexual selection through *intrasexual* competition and it grants the “winner” the ability to contribute their characteristics (genes). The next facet of sexual selection asserts that members of one sex choose a mate based on preferences for a particular characteristic and those individuals who possess that trait are permitted greater access to mates. This is labeled *intersexual* selection. Intrasexual selection asserts that contemporary women desire ambitious, wealthy, and high status mates, as the preference for these characteristics have granted reproductive advantages to women in the past (Kasser & Sharma, 1999). This theory is maintained by the parental investment model which states that not only are there differences in characteristic preferences when evaluating a potential mate, but that there are also differences in selectivity levels of mates. According to the parental investment model, women who make apparent high investments in their offspring should largely be more selective than men who have the option to invest minimally, with one act of sexual intercourse being the lowest possible investment (Triver, 1972). In other words, the gender that invests the less should be less choosy about with whom they mate. However, Buss and Schmitt (1993) found no gender distinctions between the number of partners men and women in their college sample.
(n=148) ideally desired over a given time period. This inconsistency paved the way for alternative models. The qualified investment model was developed under the opposing sociocultural stance, which predicts that men should be equally as selective as women with respect to long-term relationships due to the fact that men may also invest heavily in their offspring (Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990).

Concealed ovulation is also postulated by the evolutionary theorists as the grounds for various gender disparities, especially with regards to jealousy (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelrouth, 1992; Symon, 1979). Concealed ovulation is put forth as a male-specific problem requiring adaptation. It states that men, with a lack of external cues, are unable to determine if they were successful at impregnating their partner. Even if the female does becomes pregnant after intercourse, the male is still left with some uncertainty about whether or not fertilization occurred due to the transfer of his genes, or as a result of another male’s efforts in his absence. This is referred to as uncertain paternity and is best summed up by the question, “Is that my biological son/daughter that I am raising?” Females are rarely concerned that the child they bear reflects half of their genetic makeup since they carry and birth the child. This does not imply that the female always knows who the father of their children are, only that they know that they are the biological mother. These male-specific adaptation problems of concealed ovulation and uncertain paternity, have led researchers to examine facets of jealousy. In particular, researchers are interested in how jealousy varies as a function of gender since females are not as concerned with concealed ovulation and issues of uncertain paternity. Interestingly, some evidence of gender dissimilarities has been uncovered concerning
jealousy. Men have been shown to report being more troubled by infidelities of an intimate sexual nature, whereas women report being more troubled by infidelities of an intimate emotional nature (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). These findings provide support for the evolutionary theory’s explanation of gender differences due to issues of uncertain paternity, which would lead men to be concerned that sexual infidelities could lead to impregnation of their mate by another (Buss, 2001). Women however are thought to be more troubled by extramarital emotional relationships due to concerns about accessing their mate’s resources for survival. However, later studies have not supported the disparity, and earlier results demonstrating gender differences in regards to jealousy have been attributed to methodological error (DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002).

Those in the evolutionary camp consider adaptation to the problem of concealed ovulation as the basis for the male propensity to focus on the external cues of potential mates, which are said to convey female health and reproductive potential (Buss, 1987; Feingold, 1990; Furhan, Tan, & McManus, 1997; Kenrick, 1989; Symons, 1979; Townsend, 1989). Given that men are unable to identify fertile women, they are thought to rely on physical attractiveness cues. Because men are generally able to provide fertilization without restrictive cycles, it is argued that women do not have to rely on physical indicators of male fertility, thus reducing the value placed on physical attractiveness cues. To explore this perspective, psychologists have designed studies testing the perceived value of physical features and how well they predict general and reproductive health of women as perceived by men. Evolutionary psychologists have
focused on the perception of three major cues that may underpin biologically significant assessments of mate value: (1) symmetry, (2) averageness, and (3) nonaverage sexually dimorphic features; such as neotenous or youthful features such as large lips and eyes. Attractiveness can then be viewed as falling into two primary categories: facial attractiveness and bodily attractiveness.

Facial symmetry reflects an overall high quality of development, especially the ability to resist environmental perturbations during development. Fink, Grammer, and Thornhill (2001) showed that women’s facial skin texture influences men’s assessment of their facial attractiveness. Skin infections may denote a disturbance of the production of androgen and estrogen and may be interpreted as inhibiting reproductive ability, and facial symmetry has likewise been shown to be positively correlated with genetic diversity (inbreeding versus out-breeding) (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002). However, Rhodes, Zebrowitz, Clark, Kalick, Hightower, and McKay (2001) reveal little association between human facial symmetry and either past, present, or future health within their sample of \( n = 48 \) college students, and \( n = 316 \) 17 year-olds.

Bodily features such as waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) have also been shown to play an important role in the determination of attractiveness. Singh (1993) believes that facial features are secondary when considering physical attractiveness, and that bodily features offer a superior means for men to gauge the physical attractiveness of potential female mates, primarily via the consideration of WHR. The WHR for a healthy, pre-menopausal female is approximately between 0.67 and 0.80, and for a healthy man is between 0.85 and 0.95 (Frunham, Tan, & Mcmanus, 1997). Some evidence has been provided by
Singh (1993) that a female’s WHR, which is predictive of reproductive health, may be related to attractiveness judgments by males. Furnhan, Tan, and McManus (1997) were able to replicate Singh’s findings in their investigation. Therefore, due to the fact that women have a shorter reproductive lifespan when compared with men, men are said to be attracted to mates by primarily relying on visual cues such as physical attractiveness and youth (Feingold, 1992). These results are hypothesized to reflect men’s need to identify reproductive health in women in the absence of more overt external cues.

According to evolutionary theorists, women also face gender-specific problems which require adaptation. For example, women need to first identify and select mates who are able to invest in them and their offspring (Buss, 1995). The evolutionary perspective proposes that due to the physical burden of a nine-month gestation period as well as the following lactation period, women who partner with resourceful mates achieve a survival advantage compared with women who do not (Buss, 1995). The survival and reproductive benefits of a resourceful mate are thought to be responsible for women’s propensity to value resource cues over men. Support for this notion is found in Townsend’s (1989) study examining the mate characteristic preferences of medical students. Townsend (1989) hypothesized that women who had achieved good financial prospects would still assign a high value to the resourcefulness cues desired in a mate. In his analysis of female medical students’ mate preferences, he found that increasing the socioeconomic status of women does not eliminate the emphasis placed on the socioeconomic status of potential long-term mates when compared to men. Therefore, this study suggests that women do not appear to value resource cues because they
themselves lack financial access (which is posited by the opposing sociocultural stance), but rather because they have evolved a preference for those traits based on the success of our female ancestors who valued and paired with resourceful mates.

*Limitations of the Evolutionary perspective*

Despite overwhelming empirical support, the evolutionary perspective does not come without its shortcomings. First, evolutionary theory does not predict gender distinctions regarding characteristics which are not thought to have an effect on reproductive benefits or survival of the self. Therefore, the evolutionary stance has little to say regarding individuals who choose to remain childless or adopt. Secondly, the evolutionary theorists do not address the utility of valuing similarity in a long-term mate. Lastly, the research that casts the most doubt on the evolutionary perspective as the sole framework for the origin of gender differences are the subsequent reanalyses of Buss and colleagues’ (1989) cultural data by Kasser and Sharma (1999) and by Eagly and Wood (1999). In their ambitious international study Buss and his colleagues (1989) collected data from approximately 10,000 participants across 37 cultures. In this study, gender differences consistent with previous mate selection literature were revealed. However, Kasser and Sharma (1999) and Eagly and Wood’s (1999) reanalyses of the data revealed a decrease in women’s desire for resource cues when they were offered reproductive and educational freedom by their culture. This suggests that sociocultural factors play important roles in the preferences for certain mate characteristics. The limitations of the evolutionary perspective allowed for the emergence of an opposing theoretical framework to explain gender differences.
The primary alternative theory of origin lies within a sociocultural framework, the most prominent being the social role theory. Sociocultural theorists acknowledge the physical differences between men and women, and look mainly at how those differences interact with culture and economic development. From this perspective, gender differences are viewed as having arisen historically from the societal positions of men and women, in other words, the division of labor into homemakers and paid employees (Eagly, 1987). These different roles then produced specific expectations concerning the characteristics associated with these roles. The first of these expectations involves learning sex-typed skills and beliefs through the socialization process. The second expectation is that individuals will learn behaviors and traits associated with gender roles which are referred to as gender schema (Bem, 1983). Gender roles are thought to portray women as domestically skilled social individuals and men as instrumentally capable, self-assured individuals (Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002). Communal characteristics, such as nurturing behaviors and concern over personal relationships are typically assigned as feminine traits, while aggressiveness and leadership qualities are viewed as masculine and are labeled as agentic (Johannesen-Schmit & Eagly, 2002). The terms masculine and feminine are more thoroughly reviewed in the methodology section. They are defined for the purposes of this paper in accordance with the definitions suggested by Bem (1974). ‘Feminine’ is defined as representing those traits which have been shown to be more socially desirable for a woman, and the term masculine refers to those traits which are thought to be more socially desirable for a man.
Another theory influenced by the sociocultural framework is the expectancy model. This model asserts that gender differences are merely the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim, 1986; Miller & Turnbull, 1986). It posits that sociocultural factors contribute to the development of stereotypes. Individuals then treat others in accordance with these stereotypes and develop biased interpretations of the target group member’s behavior (Pronin, Steele, & Lee, 2004). This results in possible compliance from the individual on whom they are projecting the stereotypical belief. The end result is gender differences based on stereotypes due to individuals compliance with those stereotyped expectations. Along the same lines is the artifact model, originally proposed by Feingold (1990, 1991, 1992). The artifact model identifies self-report measure bias in conjunction with social desirability as liable for the gender distinctions that have been reported in the literature. Feingold (1994) explains that society has defined appropriate and desirable traits for men and women. The artifact model holds social desirability responsible for self-report gender disparities as opposed to actual evolved dispositions based on the notion of reproductive success. According to the artifact model, gender distinctions exist within the human mating literature because participants respond on self-report measures according to gender specific expectations due to the pressures of social desirability.

A final theory in support of the influence of culture on sex differences is the structural powerlessness hypothesis. The structural powerlessness hypothesis predicts that where women have economic equality the differences in mate characteristic preference should converge (Kasser & Sharma, 1999). For example, Hatfield and Sprecher (1995) found in a sample of U.S., Russian, and Japanese college students that
the U.S. had the smallest gender differences when examining the traits preferred in a long-term mate. While some studies have not found support for this hypothesis (Buss, 1989; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992), Kasser and Sharma (1999) note two major weaknesses of these studies. Limitations include the fact that they have focused primarily on the U.S. population, and solely on economic factors as opposed to exploring multiple ways in which women might feel disadvantaged. In order to address these issues, Kasser and Sharma (1999) reanalyzed cultural data collected by Buss and his colleagues (1989). Again, they found that the female-distinct preference for resource acquisition potential in a mate decreases as cultures provided females with more reproductive freedom and educational opportunity (Kasser & Sharma, 1999). Eagly and Wood (1999) also revealed, from the same study, data indicating that stronger gender differences existed in mate preferences where women enjoyed less power. From the same study the tendency for men to prefer younger mates with housekeeping skills became less pronounced with gains in women’s reproductive and educational freedom.

When gender differences are observed, they typically follow stereotypic expectations (Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Women have been found to be more expressive of certain emotions, where men have been shown better at controlling certain emotions (Brody, 1996: Brody & Hall, 2000). It has also been demonstrated that women are more concerned with maintaining intimacy in their close relationships, whereas men are more driven to uphold their autonomy (Christensen, 1987, 1988).
Limitations of the Sociocultural Theories of Origin

Perhaps the most prominent contemporary evolutionary researcher, Buss (1996) criticizes the sociocultural theories by condemning the treatment of individuals as mere passive receptacles of the roles they are assigned. Evolutionary theorists also claim that the sociocultural theorists approach gender as “essentially arbitrary” (Buss, 1996, p. 19) or by “historical accident” (Archer 1996, p. 915). But sociocultural theorists like Eagly (1999) defend their stance by noting that, “…gender roles are not arbitrary, but embedded in social structure and culture” (p. 414).

The evolutionary and sociocultural perspectives offer explanations for mate preference distinctions with regards to gender. However, many other factors have been associated with differences in mate characteristic preferences.

Other Socio-demographic and Personality Correlates of Mate Characteristic Preferences

From an evolutionary and sociocultural perspective, distinct preferences for characteristics in a mate have been explained largely as a function of gender despite the fact that meta-analytic reviews report that men and women agree on preferred mate characteristics about 98% of the time (Canary & Hause, 1993; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991). Since gender on its own accounts for only a small proportion of variance in mate selection preferences it is important to include other factors, not only to facilitate our understanding of the full complexity of long-term partner preferences, but also in order to make theoretical progress in this area. Other possible factors that influence traditional gender-specific mate preferences have been identified in the literature. For example, Hill’s (1945) analysis revealed variations in mate characteristic preference based on year
in school, religious affiliation and fraternity/sorority affiliation. Mathes and Moore (1985) found variations based on self-esteem levels. They found that individuals with low self-esteem were more prone to desire a complementary relationship rather than valuing similarity when compared to those individuals who exhibit high self-esteem. Self-esteem has also been shown to affect the choices women make when evaluating the attractiveness of potential mates; women with low self-esteem rated dominance cues as more important than women who exhibited high self-esteem (Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink and Grammer, 2001). However, self-esteem has primarily been examined in the context of self-perceived mate value, which has been examined as a possible predictor of mate selection preference (Murray, Holmes, & Griffen, 2000). Little has been done to explore self-esteem as a direct predictor of mate preferences.

Similarly, gender role adherence has been found to result in mate preference distinctions. Evolutionary theory has given little attention to variations in gender differences in response to individual, situational, and cultural conditions, aside from acknowledging that these factors may trigger change. Evolutionary theorists tend to view their predictions in “conditional universals.” The sociocultural stance however takes an individual differences approach and argues that the individual and contextual factors are critical to gender differences in mate selection preferences. In line with Kasser and Sharma (1999) and Eagly and Wood’s (1999) cross-cultural results, Johannesen and Eagly (2002) presented a conceptual replication of these studies by examining the mate preferences within a U.S. college population. They assert that American society offers ample variation in individuals’ personal endorsement of the traditional division of labor
and hypothesize that the extent to which individuals endorse the traditional female gender role should be critical to the characteristics valued in a mate. Johannesen and Eagly (2002) measured support for the traditional female role as a predictor of mate characteristic preferences. Using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick and Fiske, 1996), the findings suggest that females who endorsed the traditional female role tended to prefer an older mate with good earning potential. In addition, the extent to which male participants endorsed the traditional female role was inversely related to preferred age in a mate; males who endorsed the traditional female role preferred younger mates when compared to males who did not endorse the traditional female role, or those who endorsed it to a lesser degree.

In a similar investigation Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, and Grammer (2001) investigated females’ endorsement of their traditional role utilizing the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Their findings revealed that women who scored low on the BSRI’s (1974) masculinity scale significantly differed in their preferences for a mate when compared with those who scored high on the masculinity scale of the BSRI. Furthermore, in a BSRI (1974) assessed college sample, gender-typed individuals showed a preference for more complementary relationships when compared with androgynous students (D’Agostino, & Day, 1991).

Demographic variables have also been associated with mate preference distinctions. Perrett, Little, and Voak (2002) showed that in adulthood, the offspring of older parents tended to place less value on youth in a potential mate than the children of younger parents. Furthermore, Doosje, Rojahn, and Fischer (1999) were able to
demonstrate no differences between men and women and the importance they placed on
the socio-economic status of a mate. Rather, differences in socio-economic preferences
in a mate were better explained by a composite of one’s political affiliation, level of
education, and gender. In the same study it was revealed that women who were less
egalitarian in their political orientation preferred a partner with more social resources.
Buunk and colleagues (2002) also found differences in mate characteristic preference as a
function of age. In their sample of 70 men and 67 women five age groups were defined:
age 20 ($n = 28$), 30 ($n = 36$), 40 ($n = 30$), and 60 ($n =15$). For all age groups, individuals
who varied one year older or one year younger were also included in the group. For
example, the 40-year–old group included individuals age 39, 40, and 41. They found that
older participants were more selective with regards to the education level of a potential
long-term partner.

Significant differences in the importance of mate characteristic preferences have
also been found between cultures. In Buss and colleagues’ (1989) international study, the
effects of gender were small when compared with those of culture. For culture, the
variable chastity showed the largest effect size. The variables of being a good
housekeeper and the desire for children also showed large significant cultural differences.
South African (Zulu), Estonian, and Columbian samples placed significantly higher
values on good housekeeping traits in a mate as compared with the United Sates, Canada,
and Western Europe (excluding Spain), who rated it with a relatively low value.
Preferences for personality traits labeled as pleasing disposition, exciting, and easygoing
also demonstrated significant cultural differences in the same study. In this same study
the Netherlands sample showed the greatest gender similarity. Furthermore, in a smaller, cross-cultural comparison between the United States and China, Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) reported that Americans valued a significantly greater number of traits than the Chinese respondents. These studies all utilized similar self-report measures, which required participants to respond according to the traits they would desire in a long-term (i.e. marital) partner (Buss et al., 2001).

**Long versus short-term relationships**

The present study focuses its investigation on mate selection preference in long-term relationships. However, human mating literature has also investigated short-term relationships. Why focus only on long-term mating? Although short-term relationships do merit inquiry, Pedersen, Miller, Putcha-Bhagavatula, and Yang (2002) revealed that 98.9% of men and 99.2% of women sampled want to settle down into a mutually exclusive sexual relationship. In the same study, a cross-species comparison found little evidence for short-term mating tendencies in humans when compared with primates who engage in short-term mating practices. Long-term relationships appear to be of greater importance to individuals when seeking a companion and are therefore the focus of the present investigation.

**Summary of Literature**

Striking social changes have resulted in changes regarding the types of traits desired in a mate and the degree to which they are desired. Several studies have attempted to capture snapshots in trait preferences in long-term partner selection. The results of those studies provide evidence suggesting that these preferences may evolve
and/or respond to social changes. Theories of origin have been developed to explain and predict trends in the desire for and value placed on certain partner attributes. Mate selection studies to date have focused primarily on gender differences despite overwhelming similarities between the two groups. The exclusive focus on gender as the sole determinant of mate preferences may have obscured the intricacies of how men and women in current societies come to select their partners. Recently, research has begun to investigate additional variables that might account for preference variation among individuals. The present study aims to contribute to future research efforts in mate selection preferences by exploring the perceived utility of characteristics valued in a mate. Although these benefits may appear to be specific to one theory over another, it is impossible to interpret endorsement of a particular benefit as evidence of one theory over another. Rather than offer imprecise interpretations, this study seeks to facilitate future research by illuminating individuals’ perceptions of why they value certain characteristics in a long-term mate. It is also the intention of the present study to examine additional factors which might contribute to variability in mate characteristic preferences, as well as examine factors which might influence gender differences in mate selection preference.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the present study is threefold: (1) to examine current gender differences in mate characteristic preferences, (2) to explore the differences in mate characteristic preferences as a function of self-esteem, gender role adherence, and select demographic variables, and (3) to explore the perceived function and possible benefit of key traits thought to be desirable in a long term-mate.
First, the present study will examine contemporary mate characteristic preferences. The current study employs the same instrument, first developed by Hill, (1945) to compare research findings with Buss and colleagues’ (2001) 1996 results. As previously discussed, Buss and his colleagues (2001) revealed the gradual muting of gender differences in mate preferences at six points in time over 57 years. An important aim of the present research is to assess the extent to which this convergence trend has continued into 2004. The same cross-generational design was utilized by Buss and colleagues (2001) to compare their data from 1984/1985 and 1996 to data collected from Wisconsin college students in 1939 (Hill, 1945), to a similar Wisconsin sample collected in 1956 (McGinnis, 1958), to yet another Wisconsin sample collected in 1967 (Hudson and Henze, 1969) and lastly, to a sample consisting of Arizona students in 1977 (Hoyt and Hudson, 1981).

Second, this study also seeks to explore other variables that might influence trait preferences in a long-term mate. The high convergence in mate selection preferences between men and women illuminates the fact that features beyond gender are likely to play a role when dissimilarities are revealed. Researchers such as Doosje and colleagues (1999) point out the importance of exploring psychological variables that might influence the effects of demographic characteristics in predicting trait preferences. Two psychological variables of interest include that of gender role adherence (D’Agostino et al., 1991; Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagley, 2002) and self-esteem (Johnston et al., 2001).

Past human mating research exploring gender role adherence has been conducted under the premise that androgynous individuals prefer other androgynous individuals as
long-term romantic partners (D’Agostino & Day, 1991). For example, McCutcheon (1988) employed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (1974) to assess androgynous and gender-typed individuals. Respondents were then required to complete the BSRI items for their ideal partner. Results indicated support for the hypothesis that androgynous females prefer androgynous companions. In a similar study utilizing the BSRI, D’Agostino and Day (1991) reported that gender role flexibility contributes to relationship preferences when comparing the desire for a complementary long-term partner versus the desire for similarity in a partner. They also used the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (1974) to assess androgynous and gender-typed individuals in university students (mean age = 18.9). Respondents were then required to complete a scale constructed specifically for the study. The scale contained 60 adjectives coded by four raters into one of the BSRI’s three categories: masculine, feminine, and neutral. Results indicated that androgynous individuals prefer androgynous companions, and gender-typed individuals had significantly higher complementary scores than androgynous students. Additionally, Johnston and colleagues (2001) have incorporated the BSRI to investigate females’ evaluations of male attractiveness. Participants in the study were instructed to choose a face based on one of three items: dominance, averageness, or attractiveness. Through a computer program, facial images were able to be morphed along a continuum from “extremely male” to “extremely female” by the respondents until they constructed their desired face. Women who scored high on the BSRI masculinity scale chose a more masculine face when instructed to depict a dominant male face, whereas respondents who scored low on the BSRI masculinity scale
required a much less masculine face along the continuum to depict dominant male facial features. To summarize, gender role adherence has been used to predict preferences for androgynous companions and for complementary versus similarity in a long-term partner, but it has not been utilized to predict mate preferences as assessed using the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire.

Self-esteem has been found to mediate relationship preferences as a function of gender role orientation, making it an equally compelling psychological factor to explore as a predictor of mate selection preferences. Masculine and androgynous groups have been shown to have significantly higher self-esteem than feminine and undifferentiated groups (Fontayne, Sarrazin, & Famose, 2000; Koffman & Lips, 1980; Moore & Rosenthal, 1980). In addition, Mathes and Moorse (1985) found that low self-esteem individuals are more prone to desire a complementary relationship. But studies utilizing self-esteem as a predictor of traits desired in a mate appear to be rare. Investigations in the human mating literature thus far have focused primarily on how self-esteem operates as a function of self-perceived mate value rather than as a predictor of mate selection preferences (Brase & Guy, 2004; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Additionally, studies which do include self-esteem as a predictor of mate selection preferences have been limited in that they primarily restrict their sample to female respondents (Johnston et al., 2001). The current study aims to explore self-esteem as a predictor of mate selection preferences for both male and female respondents given that it has been previously shown to affect certain related aspects of mate selection preferences.
Third, the present research effort aims to contribute towards a functional analysis of gender distinction mate preferences rather than offer evidence of one theory’s superiority over the other. As discussed in the review of the literature, empirical support has been demonstrated for both the evolutionary and social role theories of origin for gender differences in mate selection criteria. These studies however have generally employed covert methodology, susceptible to possible errors of interpretation. For example, Townsend, (1989) concluded that the results of his study provided support for the evolutionary theory of origin based on a social role perspective prediction; that his sample of medical students would be aware of their high-income potential and would not require financial support from their mates. However, gender differences did result and were presented as support in favor of the evolutionary stance, which endorses the belief that men’s reproductive value is closely tied to economic prowess regardless of the female’s personal resource level (Townsend, 1989). Townsend established that increasing the socioeconomic status of women does not decrease the value placed on resources cues when evaluating a potential mate. He found evidence of a positive correlation between the SES of females and the value they place on resource cues. His conclusion is based both on the utility of resource cue traits (i.e. good financial prospects, ambitiousness, education and intelligence, and favorable social status) from the evolutionary stance, and social role theorists who hold gender differences as arising from gendered divisions of labor and lack of past economic opportunities for women. However, the positive relationship between female SES and preferred partner SES may also be interpreted as support for a desire for similarity between participants and a
potential long-term partner. Therefore, ambitious females with high resource potential may tend to desire ambitious mates with high resource potential in the pursuit of a mate who is similar to them.

The present study contributes towards future research by examining the functionality of gender distinct mate preferences. This study intends to assess more directly the perceived utility of specific traits. On the basis of research literature as well as the present focus group data, the characteristics investigated are the physical attractiveness of mate, the health of mate, and the financial resourcefulness of a potential mate. Physical attractiveness and financial resourcefulness were chosen based on the universally reported gender distinctions. Health was chosen to provide a contrast, as gender differences concerning the importance of this trait in a long-term mate are uncommon. This inventory, The Utility of Mate Trait Preference Scale, further outlined in the methodology section, was created specifically for the present research study.

Hypotheses

1. When compared with mean scores reported by Buss et al.'s (2001) longitudinal study, it is hypothesized that gender differences (women > men) with regards to preferences for resource cues will be significantly less pronounced.

2. When compared with mean scores reported by Buss et al.’s (2001) longitudinal study, it is hypothesized that gender differences (men > women) with regards to preferences for physical attractiveness will be significantly less pronounced.

3. The between (gender) group differences on resource cues (good financial prospects, favorable social status, ambition and industriousness, education and
intelligence) of potential mates will be significantly greater between men and women classified as sex typed (feminine/ masculine) when compared with men and women classified as androgynous.

4. Between (gender) group differences on the physical cues (good looks) of potential mates will be significantly greater between sex typed men and women (feminine/masculine) when compared with men and women classified as androgynous.

5. The between (gender) group differences on resource cues (good financial prospects, favorable social status, ambition and industriousness, education and intelligence) of potential mates will be significantly greater between men and women with low self-esteem when compared with the between group differences of those men and women who display high self-esteem.

6. Between (gender) group differences on the physical cues (good looks) of potential mates will be significantly greater between men and women with low self-esteem when compared with the between group differences of those men and women who display high self-esteem.

Methods

Participants

The undergraduate psychology subject pool was used. Keeping in line with previous human mating research, 243 university students were recruited to participate in this study, which is comparable to the sample sizes collected by Buss et al. (2001). Of these 243 students, 140 were females, and 103 were male. Respondents received course
credit for their participation. The sample had an age range of 18 to 50 years with 98.4% falling between age 18 and 22 years of age. The mean age of the sample was 18.93 (SD = 2.43). The majority of the sample was single, with 98.8% identifying themselves as unmarried.

The current sample was demographically similar to Buss et al.’s (2001) 1996 sample with regard to subject recruitment procedures, age and marriage status. Buss et al’s (2001) sample of convenience voluntarily completed the questionnaires for introductory psychology courses where they received course credit. Subjects’ mean age was 19.2 (SD = 2.6), and 99.0% of the sample were unmarried. Other than geographic location, no other demographic information was provided by Buss and his colleagues.

**Measures**

*Demographics Information.* Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that assessed their age, year in school, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, and dating status. The questionnaire also required respondents to provide information regarding the socioeconomic and marital status of their parents, as well as their own anticipated socio-economic status (see questionnaire packet in Appendix A).

*Open ended responses.* Respondents were asked to list the top six characteristics or traits that they desired in a long term partner.

*Factors in Choosing a Mate Questionnaire.* First developed by Hill (1945) but later expanded, this instrument assesses the importance a respondent places on certain characteristics in evaluating a potential long-term mate (Appendix B). The original measure was created in 1945 and has a list of 18 traits, which were assumed to be
desirable in a mate. Respondents were instructed to place checkmarks (0-3 checks) next to the trait, based on its importance when sizing up potential partners. This methodology has been widely used despite several flaws. Buss et al. (2001) lists 3 probable defects. The first area of concern for Buss and his colleagues (2001) was the 4-point scale, which he felt might not allow respondents ample variability. Secondly, many of the traits are confounded with others such as “education and intelligence” and uncoupling the choices has been recommended. Lastly, some of the traits have been described as ambiguous (i.e. “favorable social status”) and needing clarification. It has also been felt that that Hill’s (1945) 18 traits may be limited and outdated and in need of modification based on today’s standards (Toro & Sprecher, 2003). With these shortcomings in mind, the original measure was used in order to allow direct comparison to previous studies. However, the inclusion of the open-ended question prior to the administration of Hill’s measure will permit the evaluation of the comprehensiveness of Hill’s list for contemporary samples.

*Bem Sex Role Inventory*. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) was used to assess adherence to traditional masculine/feminine roles (Appendix C). This self-report measure was normed in 1974 on Stanford University students, and additionally on junior college students. It consists of 60, 7-point Likert scale items: 20 masculine items, 20 feminine items, and 20 neutral filters, each of which represents a personality characteristic (Lenney, 1990). Respondents are instructed to endorse each item based on how well they feel the characteristic describes them. For a characteristic to be classified as a masculine, feminine, or neutral item it first had to be cataloged by Bem and her
students as such. The final version of this inventory takes about 15 minutes to complete (Lenney, 1990). The revised BSRI (1977) allows the classification of respondents into four groups: androgynous (high masculine/high feminine), masculine (high masculine/low feminine), feminine, (low masculine/high feminine), and undifferentiated (low masculine/low feminine) (Auster & Ohm, 2000).

Debates over the validity of this measure are fueled by controversies in modern sex role research. Historically, characteristics have been differently desired by males and females, meaning that masculinity and femininity are dynamic constructs which respond to social change. These characteristics are traditionally stereotypic, with some empirical evidence to support the fact that the sexes do differ when it comes to select traits. But, given their adaptive qualities, defining exactly what is “feminine” and what is “masculine” becomes a near impossible task. Constantinople (1973) concluded after his review of this area of research that “this [masculinity and femininity] seems to be among the muddiest concepts in the psychologist’s vocabulary” (p. 390).

In addition to the disagreements about what the BSRI is actually assessing, critics have questioned the validity of the instrument for use with diverse populations. It has been shown as less reliable for Latinos and African Americans compared to Caucasians (Harris, 1994).

Defenders of the BSRI have noted that although this measure was normed on Stanford students, it was also given to junior college students with similar results and therefore thought to be generalizable across college populations. It has been successfully used with samples ranging from high school students to the elderly (Lenney, 1990), and
although this measure has been criticized for possible irrelevance in contemporary society based on its 1974 inception date, it allows for the capture of more traditional gender role characteristics. Consequently, this limitation is not anticipated to be a detriment to the current study, as it is interested in investigating traditional, rather than contemporary, male and female characteristics. In response to critics who note the limitations of self-report inventories, all the traits on the BSRI are relatively high in social desirability. Thus respondents are not tempted to avoid endorsing negative traits about themselves, therefore limiting the effects of social desirability. Lastly, given that the present study is not up to the challenge of clarifying the terms masculine and feminine, these terms will be used in accordance with the BSRI. Feminine and masculine are viewed as a continuum with feminine referring to items being statistically more socially desirable for women and masculine items being more socially desirable for men per the original ratings derived from Bem’s (1974) methodology.

As Lenney (1990) concluded, “despite the tremendous amount of controversy it has engendered, the BSRI has good reliability and its validity seems quite adequate when it’s used in ways suggested by the theoretical rationale” (p. 596). The selection of the BSRI in the present investigation was based on a full consideration of its strengths and limitations. First, because previous researchers examining sex roles in the context of human mate selection have utilized this measure, its use in the present study will allow for better comparison with previous results (Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, & Grammer, 2001). Second, this measure reports good internal consistency: masculinity $\alpha = .86$, femininity $\alpha = .80$, neutral $\alpha = .75$ and androgynous $\alpha = .85$ in the Stanford sample.
and masculinity $\alpha = .86$, femininity $\alpha = .82$, social desirability $\alpha = .70$, and androgynous $\alpha = .86$ in the junior college sample (Bem, 1974). Moreover, similar internal consistency coefficients were reported by Wilson and Cook (1984) a decade later: masculinity $\alpha = .88$, femininity $\alpha = .78$.

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (SES). The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (1965) was used to assess self-esteem (Appendix D). Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as “favorable or unfavorable attitude towards oneself” (p. 15). Some researchers believe that self-esteem represents the discrepancies between the actual and ideal self (Cohen, 1959). The SES’s design makes it very user-friendly with its high face validity and succinctness. Originally designed as a Guttman-type scale, the SES is now scored most frequently utilizing a 4-point Likert-type scale. It was originally developed to measure adolescents’ global feelings of self worth or self-acceptance. Results have been shown to reflect good internal validity ($\alpha = .88$) (Fleming & Courtney, 1984) and test-retest reliability with Silber and Tippett (1965) reporting a correlation of .85 over a 2 week interval and Fleming and Courtney (1984) reporting .82 for a 1 week interval. This measure has been shown to correlate with self-esteem related constructs such as popularity, ($r = .39$), and confidence, ($r = .65$) as well as showing negative relationships with anxiety ($r = -.64$) and depression ($r = -.54$) (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Potential drawbacks of the measure include the previously mentioned high face validity of the instrument which, when paired with the sensitive topic of self-esteem, might tempt respondents to reply in such a way that portrays them in a more desirable light. However, a social desirability effect is a limitation of all self-report self-esteem
measures since it socially undesirable to present oneself with low self-esteem. Additionally the 4-point Likert-type scale might not allow for ample variability.

Despite limitations, this particular measure has been used in previous human mate selection research dealing with gender distinction and was favored based on its reliability as well as its application in comparable studies. Utilizing this measure in the current study will allow for more accurate comparisons by way of uniformity in this area of study (Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, & Grammer, 2001).

**Utility of Mate Trait Preference Scale (UMP).** Created especially for the current study through extensive focus group discussions, this measure was designed to examine the perceived function underlying the characteristics individuals’ value in a long-term mate (Appendix E). What benefits do individuals believe they gain from preferring certain traits in a long-term partner? Four, 10-person focus groups were run following a structured outline of strategic questions prepared prior to the groups’ meetings. These questions were based on previous research (see Appendix F for the focus group outline). Male and female groups were conducted separately to minimize socially desirable responses. The groups were audio and video taped. The tapes were then reviewed by the primary investigator and a research assistant to uncover patterns and themes in responses, which were then modified into question format. The resulting measure asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement with 11 statements where 1 = *I strongly disagree*, 7 = *I strongly agree*, and 4 = *unsure*. The 11-item scale will be used to discuss the reasons that key traits are important to individuals and their perceptions regarding how they might benefit from selecting long-term partners with these traits. This focus group study
received prior approval by Ohio University’s Office of Research Compliance’s Institutional Review Board.

Procedure

Upon completion of the consent form, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire packet. Respondents were notified that they could discontinue the study at any time without penalty. They were instructed to complete the packet in its entirety in the order received. They were also told not to move on to the next section until the previous sections had been completed. The questionnaires were presented in the following order: the demographics questionnaire, the open-ended question, the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Utility of Mate Trait Preferences Scale. The respondents were told simply that the purpose of the study was to collect information regarding long-term mate selection. At the completion of the study, participants were offered a debriefing sheet, which included contact information to obtain the results of the study at its completion. All procedures received prior approval from Ohio University’s Internal Review Board.

Results

First, information on which traits were most and least preferred overall are presented. Table 1 shows the list of 18 traits and their means with standard deviations for the total sample. The traits are listed in order of their importance, from most to least important.
TABLE 1

Means (and Standard Deviations) in descending order of the 18 Mate Preferences for the Total Sample (N= 243) on the Factors Desired in a Mate Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual love, attraction</td>
<td>2.955</td>
<td>.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability, maturity</td>
<td>2.712</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable character</td>
<td>2.630</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for home, children</td>
<td>2.523</td>
<td>.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, intelligence</td>
<td>2.358</td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociability</td>
<td>2.313</td>
<td>.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>2.132</td>
<td>.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition &amp; industriousness</td>
<td>2.115</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing disposition</td>
<td>2.037</td>
<td>.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good looks</td>
<td>1.724</td>
<td>.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar education</td>
<td>1.708</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinement, neatness</td>
<td>1.683</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable social status</td>
<td>1.424</td>
<td>.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good cook</td>
<td>1.284</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar religion</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>1.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chastity</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar political</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>.911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender Differences. Next, gender differences were examined. For each item, an independent t-test was conducted comparing the male and female scores. To control for Type I errors the Bonferroni procedure was applied and the significance level was set at $p < .003$ (0.05/18). As shown in Table 2, significant gender differences were found on four of the 18 traits. Compared to women, men expressed a stronger preference on the item, good looks, $F(1, 241) = 11.034, d = .43, p = .001$. Compared to men, women expressed a greater preference for, desire for home, children, $F(1, 241) = 16.893, d = .52, p < .001$, ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 241) = 24.374, d = .63, p < .001$, and good financial prospects, $F(1, 241) = 24.826, d = .64, p < .001$. Age at which men and women preferred
to marry or settle down also demonstrated significant gender differences, $F(1,226) = 20.642$, $d = 1.06$, $p < .001$, with men ($n = 98$) preferring to marry at a mean age of 26.75 ($SD = 2.714$) and women ($n = 130$) preferring a mean age of 24.21 ($SD = 2.038$).

Participants also indicated whom they would prefer to be the older of the two partners. Men ($n = 95$), more than women ($n = 138$), preferred to be the older partner, $F(1, 231) = 11.524$, $p < .001$. Participants who responded with an age range or those who did not respond to the item pertaining to preferred age at marriage were not included in the analysis.

TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Females ($n = 140$)</th>
<th>Males ($n = 103$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual attraction, love</td>
<td>2.979 (.145)</td>
<td>2.922 (.269)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability, maturity</td>
<td>2.750 (.482)</td>
<td>2.660 (.534)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable character</td>
<td>2.664 (.583)</td>
<td>2.583 (.619)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for home, children</td>
<td>2.700 (.675)*</td>
<td>2.282 (.912)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, intelligence</td>
<td>2.450 (.567)</td>
<td>2.233 (.614)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociability</td>
<td>2.307 (.688)</td>
<td>2.320 (.630)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>2.136 (.712)</td>
<td>2.126 (.776)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition &amp; industriousness</td>
<td>2.300 (.621)*</td>
<td>1.864 (.755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing disposition</td>
<td>2.064 (.578)</td>
<td>2.000 (.700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>2.029 (.667)*</td>
<td>1.544 (.849)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good looks</td>
<td>1.600 (.687)*</td>
<td>1.893 (.670)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar education</td>
<td>1.821 (.821)</td>
<td>1.553 (.894)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinement, neatness</td>
<td>1.621 (.694)</td>
<td>1.767 (.703)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable social status</td>
<td>1.436 (.858)</td>
<td>1.408 (.845)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar religion</td>
<td>1.314 (1.032)</td>
<td>1.068 (1.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good cook</td>
<td>1.221 (.524)</td>
<td>1.369 (.671)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chastity</td>
<td>.843 (.939)</td>
<td>1.000 (.939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar political background</td>
<td>.936 (.907)</td>
<td>.796 (.911)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significant differences between males and females $p < .003$, significance was reduced from .05 to .003 by Bonferroni correction (.05/18 = .003)
Gender Differences over Time. A comparison between data collected by Buss and colleagues (2001) in 1996 and the current research study show greater gender convergence in mate preferences in the current results. However, the following results should be interpreted with caution as means presented by Buss are actually the average means of data collected from college students located in three geographical regions: Texas, Virginia, and Michigan. From their total sample, Buss and colleagues revealed significant gender differences for nine of the 18 traits evaluated by respondents on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire (Hill, 1945). The current results reveal significant gender differences for four of the original 18 traits. Table 3 lists the female and male means and standard deviations from both Buss’s 1996 sample and the current 2004 sample. Buss’s 1996 (2001) and Demyan’s 2004 data were compared using a 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA); gender and study were the between subjects factors and the independent variables were the four traits that showed gender differences for both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Buss</th>
<th>Demyan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F (n =381)</td>
<td>M (n =226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual attraction, love</td>
<td>2.97 (0.22)</td>
<td>2.93 (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability, maturity</td>
<td>2.80 (0.40)*</td>
<td>2.64 (0.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable character</td>
<td>2.81 (0.44)</td>
<td>2.72 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Desire for home, children</td>
<td>2.44 (0.81)*</td>
<td>2.10 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, intelligence</td>
<td>2.58 (0.53)*</td>
<td>2.40 (0.61)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociability</td>
<td>2.29 (0.58)</td>
<td>2.16 (0.69)</td>
<td>2.307 (0.688)</td>
<td>2.320 (0.630)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>2.18 (0.65)</td>
<td>2.22 (0.67)</td>
<td>2.136 (0.712)</td>
<td>2.126 (0.776)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition &amp; industriousness</td>
<td>2.39 (0.62)*</td>
<td>1.97 (0.76)</td>
<td>2.300 (0.621)*</td>
<td>1.864 (0.755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing disposition</td>
<td>2.64 (0.53)*</td>
<td>2.49 (0.55)</td>
<td>2.064 (0.578)</td>
<td>2.000 (0.700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>1.99 (0.73)*</td>
<td>1.42 (0.89)</td>
<td>2.029 (0.667)*</td>
<td>1.544 (0.849)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Good looks</td>
<td>1.63 (0.67)*</td>
<td>2.12 (0.67)</td>
<td>1.600 (0.687)*</td>
<td>1.893 (0.670)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar education</td>
<td>2.11 (0.73)*</td>
<td>1.75 (0.86)</td>
<td>1.821 (0.821)</td>
<td>1.553 (0.894)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinement, neatness</td>
<td>1.75 (0.70)</td>
<td>1.76 (0.77)</td>
<td>1.621 (0.694)</td>
<td>1.767 (0.703)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable social status</td>
<td>1.43 (0.83)*</td>
<td>1.20 (0.81)</td>
<td>1.436 (0.858)</td>
<td>1.408 (0.845)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar religion</td>
<td>1.44 (1.44)</td>
<td>1.31 (1.13)</td>
<td>1.314 (1.032)</td>
<td>1.068 (1.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good cook</td>
<td>1.27 (0.64)</td>
<td>1.40 (0.72)</td>
<td>1.221 (0.524)</td>
<td>1.369 (0.671)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chastity</td>
<td>1.01 (1.08)</td>
<td>1.20 (1.01)</td>
<td>0.843 (0.939)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar political background</td>
<td>0.89 (0.87)</td>
<td>0.79 (0.84)</td>
<td>0.936 (0.907)</td>
<td>0.796 (0.911)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates significant differences between males and females within each sample $p < .003$ by Bonferroni correction (.05/18 = .003)
**indicates a significance main effect for study, $p < .01$

Buss and Demyan. This was done in order to establish if the gender differences demonstrated for each trait support the notion that gender distinct mating preferences may be converging over time. Due to the aggregate nature of Buss’s data, analyses were computed by hand. In all cases the significance level was set at $p < .01$ per application of the Bonferroni correction (.05/4). As expected, all four traits analyzed showed significant gender differences across study. Desire for family/child, $F(1, 846) = 34.11, p < .001$, ambition/industriousness, $F(1, 846) = 66.88, p < .001$, good financial prospects, $F(1, 846) = 76.34, p \leq .001$ and good looks, $F(1, 846) = 56.37, p < .001$, were the four traits compared. Significant main effects of study were found for the traits labeled desire for family/child, $F(1, 846) = 11.02, p < .001$, and good looks, $F(1, 846) = 6.10, p < .01$ only. Additionally, no significant interactions between gender and study were found,
which offers little evidence to support a significant convergence between the sexes on the four traits investigated over the past eight years.

**Sex Role Adherence.** Hypotheses three and four examined the relationship between sex role identification and endorsement of traditional mate characteristic preferences. Traditional preferences are defined for the purpose of the current study as those preferences which adhere to the predictions made by both evolutionary theorists as well as social role theorists. For men they include a disproportionate endorsement of physical cues when compared with women, and for women they reflect a disproportionate endorsement of resource cues when compared with men. Traditional mate characteristic preferences also include discrepancies in the preferred age of a mate, with men preferring younger partners and women preferring older partners. Testing hypothesis three and four required female and male respondents, who were classified sex-typed by the BSRI, to be compared for significant differences to those individuals classified as androgynous for the following items on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire: good financial prospects, favorable social status, ambition and industriousness, desire for home, children, and good looks. The Bonferroni procedure was used to correct for increased Type I error rate. Statistical significance was reduced from .05 to .01 (.05/5). Four 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) were computed; gender and gender role adherence were the between subjects factors and the independent variables were the four traits that showed gender differences. A significant main effect for gender was found for the traits labeled desire for family/child, $F(1, 239) = 9.17, \eta^2_p = .037, p < .003$, ambition/industriousness, $F(1, 239) = 15.98, \eta^2_p = .063, p < .001$, good
financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = 14.15, \eta^2 = .056, p < .001$. Good looks, $F(1, 239) = 6.19, \eta^2 = .025, p < .014$, did not demonstrate a significant main effect for gender. A significant main effect for gender role adherence was not found for any of the four traits examined; desire for family/child, $F(1, 239) = 3.82, \eta^2 = .016, p < .052$, ambition/industriousness, $F(1, 239) = 4.74, \eta^2 = .019, p = .030$, good financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = 3.19, \eta^2 = .013, p = .076$, or good looks, $F(1, 239) = .718, \eta^2 = .003, p = .398$. Nor was there a significant interaction where gender and gender role adherence serve as the between factor variables; desire for family/child, $F(1, 239) = .324, \eta^2 = .001, p = .570$, ambition/industriousness, $F(1, 239) = .001, \eta^2 \leq .000, p = .975$, good financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = .347, \eta^2 = .001, p = .556$, or good looks, $F(1, 239) = .503, \eta^2 = .002, p = .479$. Means and standard deviations for the four traits analyzed are listed in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**

*Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for Gender Role Adherence (androgynous vs. sex typed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Androgynous F (n =39) Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Sex Typed F (n = 101) Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Androgynous M (n =21) Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Sex Typed M (n = 82) Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire for home, children</td>
<td>2.821 (.451)</td>
<td>2.524 (.873)</td>
<td>2.654 (.741)</td>
<td>2.220 (.917)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition &amp; industriousness</td>
<td>2.461 (.643)</td>
<td>2.048 (.740)</td>
<td>2.238 (.602)</td>
<td>1.817 (.756)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>2.128 (.767)</td>
<td>1.762 (.889)</td>
<td>1.990 (.624)</td>
<td>1.488 (.835)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good looks</td>
<td>1.718 (.647)</td>
<td>1.905 (.625)</td>
<td>1.555 (.700)</td>
<td>1.890 (.685)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) was additionally evaluated in four 2(gender) x 2(self-esteem) analyses of variance. The independent variables were the four traits that showed gender differences. Low and high self-esteem were first determined by a median split. The traits analyzed were: good financial prospects, ambition and industriousness, desire for home, children, and good looks. A significant main effect for gender was found ($p \leq .001$) for all four traits: good financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = 25.89$, $\eta_p^2 = .098$, ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 239) = 25.85$, $\eta_p^2 = .098$, desire for home, children, $F(1, 239) = 17.54$, $\eta_p^2 = .068$, and good looks $F(1, 239) = 10.79$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$. A significant main effect for self-esteem was not found for any of the four traits: good financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = 2.04$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$, $p = .154$, ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 239) = 6.09$, $\eta_p^2 = .025$, $p = .014$, desire for home, children, $F(1, 239) = 3.61$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$, $p = .059$, and good looks $F(1, 239) = 2.72$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$, $p = .101$, nor was there a significant interaction of gender and self-esteem: good financial prospects, $F(1, 239) = 2.02$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$, $p = .157$ ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 239) = 0.17$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$, $p = .679$, desire for home, children, $F(1, 239) = 0.30$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$, $p = .583$, and good looks $F(4, 239) = 0.67$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, $p = .414$.

In addition to the median split comparison of low and high self-esteem, a lower and upper thirds comparison was additionally computed. In four 2(gender) x 2(self-esteem) analyses of variance, a significant main effect for gender was found for the trait labeled ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 120) = 14.259$, $\eta_p^2 = .106$, $p \leq .001$. Good financial prospects, $F(1, 120) = 5.515$, $\eta_p^2 = .044$, $p = .020$, desire for home, children, $F(1, 120) = 3.555$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$, $p = .062$, and good looks $F(1, 239) = 333$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, $p =$
.565 did not demonstrate a main effect of gender. A significant main effect for self-esteem was found for the item desire for home, children, $F(1, 120) = 6.894, \eta_p^2 = .054, p = .010$. Good financial prospects, $F(1, 120) = 1.113, \eta_p^2 = .009, p = .294$, ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 120) = 2.443, \eta_p^2 = .020, p = .121$, and good looks $F(1, 239) = 2.72, \eta_p^2 = .011$ did not demonstrate a significant main effect for self-esteem. Lastly, none of the four traits examined showed a significant interaction of gender and self-esteem: good financial prospects, $F(1, 120) = .312, \eta_p^2 = .003, p = .578$, ambition and industriousness, $F(1, 120) = 0.378, \eta_p^2 = .003, p = .540$, desire for home, children, $F(1, 239) = .445, \eta_p^2 = .005, p = .445$, and good looks $F(4, 239) = .294, \eta_p^2 = .002, p = .588$.

Table 6 lists the means and standard deviations for the four traits analyzed utilizing the lower and upper thirds comparison.

### Table 6

Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for High and Low Self-Esteem using median split technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>High Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Low Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F (n = 71) M (n = 48)</td>
<td>F (n = 69) M (n = 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for home, children</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.578 (.805)*</td>
<td>2.208 (.988)</td>
<td>2.826 (.483)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td>2.211 (.653)*</td>
<td>1.729 (.736)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>2.028 (.654)*</td>
<td>1.396 (.917)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good looks</td>
<td>1.493 (.754)*</td>
<td>1.854 (.583)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significant main effect of gender, $p < .0125$
## TABLE 6

*Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mate Preferences for Males vs. Females for High and Low Self-Esteem using the lower and upper third split technique*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>High Self-Esteem</th>
<th></th>
<th>Low Self-Esteem</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F (n = 20)</td>
<td>M (n = 9)</td>
<td>F (n = 55)</td>
<td>M (n = 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire for home, children</strong></td>
<td>2.300 (1.129)</td>
<td>2.111 (1.054)</td>
<td>2.873 (0.336)</td>
<td>2.425 (0.844)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td>2.250 (0.716)*</td>
<td>1.729 (1.014)</td>
<td>2.400 (0.574)</td>
<td>1.900 (0.757)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good financial prospects</td>
<td>1.950 (0.686)</td>
<td>1.556 (1.014)</td>
<td>2.036 (0.719)</td>
<td>1.725 (0.816)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good looks</td>
<td>1.550 (0.826)</td>
<td>1.556 (0.726)</td>
<td>1.745 (0.552)</td>
<td>1.925 (0.829)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significant main effect of gender, *p* < .0125  
**indicates significant main effect of self-esteem, *p* < .0125

**Exploratory Analysis.** The Utility of Mate Trait Preference Scale was analyzed by mean comparisons based on the endorsement of each of the 11 items on a 1-7 Likert-type scale. Due to the exploratory nature of this endeavor no specific hypothesis was offered. It was the intention of the study to identify key themes that may inform the development of future research on beliefs and values regarding the function of certain mate characteristics. In order to determine gender differences, eleven one-way ANOVA's were conducted for each item. By the Bonferroni procedure, statistical significance was reduced from .05 to .005 (.05/11). Gender differences were found for
TABLE 7

Means (and Standard Deviations) of Utility of Mate Preferences Scale items for Males vs. Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Females (n = 140)</th>
<th>Males (n = 103)</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  physical attractiveness &amp; social status</td>
<td>3.279 (1.61)*</td>
<td>4.480 (1.70)</td>
<td>27.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  physical attractiveness &amp; health</td>
<td>4.671 (1.51)*</td>
<td>5.379 (1.39)</td>
<td>13.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  physical attractiveness &amp; sex</td>
<td>4.900 (1.75)*</td>
<td>5.699 (1.43)</td>
<td>14.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  health &amp; children</td>
<td>6.021 (1.22)</td>
<td>6.097 (1.07)</td>
<td>00.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  health &amp; active lifestyle</td>
<td>6.243 (1.17)</td>
<td>6.301 (0.94)</td>
<td>00.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  financially established, primary caretaker</td>
<td>3.621 (2.15)*</td>
<td>2.146 (1.35)</td>
<td>37.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  financially established, discrimination</td>
<td>3.050 (1.74)</td>
<td>2.602 (1.67)</td>
<td>04.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  financially established, similarity</td>
<td>5.371 (1.64)</td>
<td>4.952 (1.61)</td>
<td>03.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  mate primarily for children</td>
<td>5.057 (1.62)</td>
<td>4.854 (1.59)</td>
<td>00.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 mate primarily for self</td>
<td>6.729 (0.92)</td>
<td>6.700 (0.69)</td>
<td>00.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 children not important</td>
<td>2.600 (2.12)</td>
<td>3.330 (2.12)</td>
<td>07.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significant differences between males and females p < .005, significance was reduced from .05 to .005 by Bonferroni correction (.05/11 = .005)

items one through three, and for item six. Men, more than women, agreed with the following statements: (1) I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because it positively affects my social status and how others view me, $F(1, 241) = 27.84, d = .68, p < .001$; (2) I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because it can be a good reflection of an individual’s overall health and fertility, $F(1, 241) = 13.89, d = .49, p < .001$; and (3) I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because it will contribute to a more satisfying sex life, $F(1, 241) = 14.441, d = .50, p < .001$. Support for gender differences were also found pertaining to the one item concerning financial resources. Women, more then men, tended to agree with the following statement: 6. I value a financially established long-term partner because I want to stay at home and be the primary caretaker of our children, $F(1, 241) = 37.630, d = .82, p < .001$. Lastly,
analysis of the final item shows a gender difference that approached significance, with women reporting higher levels of agreement with the statement, “When I am ready to settle down it will not be important for me to have children.” $F(1, 241) = 7.017, d = .34, p = .009$. No evidence for gender differences were found for the items pertaining to good health.

Open-Ended Responses. As mentioned, participants were asked to list the top six traits they felt were most important when evaluating a long term mate. Participants listed a total of 1,403 responses in the free-response task. Coding of the traits proceeded first by categorizing them into one of the original 18 categories as listed on the Factors Desired in a Mate questionnaire (Hill, 1945). When a trait did not fit into one of these categories, a new category was created. Traits were coded into 39 categories by the principal researcher. An additional coder then independently assigned each response to one of the categories. Coders (principal researcher and research assistant) agreed on the categorization of 80.1% (1,135 of the 1,403 traits) of the coded traits. All discrepancies were resolved through discussion until unanimous agreement was reached. Twenty-eight responses (1.9%) were ultimately omitted from the analysis due to inadequate clarity, resulting in the retention of 1,375 responses. Table 8 lists the 39 categories into which the 1,375 traits were coded. As shown, the five largest categories were dependable character (responsible for 18.1% of the total responses), loving, caring (14.0%), humor (11.9%), good looks (9.7%), and education, intelligence (8.1%). The five largest categories accounted for 61.9% which suggests high response consistency among participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait Category</th>
<th>Total N Responses</th>
<th>Female (N=811)</th>
<th>Male (N=564)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependable character</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>174 (21.2%)</td>
<td>75 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving, caring</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>151 (18.6%)</td>
<td>41 (07.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>92 (11.3%)</td>
<td>72 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Good looks</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>57 (07.0%)</td>
<td>77 (13.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Education, intelligence</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>56 (06.9%)</td>
<td>56 (09.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Ambition, industriousness</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39 (04.8%)</td>
<td>27 (04.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Pleasing disposition</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>30 (03.7%)</td>
<td>34 (06.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Good financial prospects</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23 (02.8%)</td>
<td>13 (02.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Sociability</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15 (01.8%)</td>
<td>18 (03.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Desire for home, child</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17 (02.1%)</td>
<td>8 (01.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Similar Religion</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13 (01.6%)</td>
<td>12 (02.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7 (00.9%)</td>
<td>16 (02.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17 (02.1%)</td>
<td>5 (00.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Good Health, active</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9 (01.1%)</td>
<td>11 (02.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Emotional Stability, maturity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8 (01.0%)</td>
<td>10 (01.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6 (00.7%)</td>
<td>11 (02.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8 (01.0%)</td>
<td>7 (01.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9 (01.1%)</td>
<td>6 (01.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy-going</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>8 (01.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4 (00.5%)</td>
<td>8 (01.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mutual attraction, love</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8 (01.0%)</td>
<td>4 (00.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10 (01.2%)</td>
<td>2 (00.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>6 (01.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatible</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7 (00.9%)</td>
<td>4 (00.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morals, values</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>6 (01.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>5 (00.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 (00.4%)</td>
<td>5 (00.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open minded</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>3 (00.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite, well-mannered</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 (01.0%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 (00.6%)</td>
<td>2 (00.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual desire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 (00.2%)</td>
<td>5 (00.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Refinement, neatness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 (00.4%)</td>
<td>2 (00.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not jealous</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 (00.1%)</td>
<td>2 (00.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (00.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Favorable social status</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (00.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Good Cook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (00.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Similar political</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (00.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (00.1%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Chastity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Similar Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates a category derived from the Factors Desired in a Mate questionnaire
Demographic Information. Age (Doosje et al., 1999; Buunk et al., 2002), political orientation, level of education (Doosje et al., 1999) and of course gender (Hoyt & Hudson, 1981; Townsend, 1993; Doosje et al., 1999; Regan et al., 2000; Buunk et al., 2002), have all been shown to correlate with certain mate characteristic preferences. Unfortunately, the sample of the current study was predominantly homogenous and did not provide adequate variability to analyze between group demographic differences. Ninety-seven percent of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 98.8% reported never having been married, and 81.0% reported that they were from an intact family (parents not divorced). Eighty-six percent of the participants were financially dependent on their parents, with 93.0% identifying their family of origin’s economic status as middle or upper-middle class. Moreover, 94.0% of the participants describe themselves as having a Christian religious background. Political party affiliation was one exception to the relatively homogenous group of participants. Individuals identified themselves on the demographics questionnaire as either Republican \( (n = 101) \), Democrat \( (n = 89) \), Independent \( (n = 24) \), or Unaffiliated, \( (n = 40) \). Those who reported themselves as Republican or Democrat expressed a stronger preference than those who reported themselves as Independent or Unaffiliated on for the trait similar political background, \( F(3, 239) = 10.121, p < .001 \).

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was first, to examine current gender differences in mate characteristic preferences, second, to explore the differences in mate characteristic preferences as a function of self-esteem, gender role adherence, and select
demographic variables, and lastly, to provide insight towards future research by exploring the perceived utilities of traits thought to be desirable in a long term-mate. The results of this study indicate that although both overall mate preferences and gender distinct mate preferences are changing, they are still evident in this sample of university students. In addition, no evidence was found to substantiate the hypothesis that these gender distinctions might be better explained as a function of gender role adherence or self-esteem level. Political party affiliation was the only variable with sufficient variability to merit between group comparisons. It was found that respondents who identified themselves as Republican or Democrat valued the trait, similar political affiliation to a greater degree than those who identified themselves as independent or unaffiliated. It seems reasonable that individuals who commit themselves to one of the two major U.S. political parties would prefer that their partner share a similar political stance, when compared to independent and unaffiliated individuals, who might tend to be more flexible in their political stance. This may be even more salient during this year’s contentious presidential election.

*Constancy and Change in Mate Preferences.* The top five traits as rated on the Factors Desired in a Mate questionnaire were, (1) mutual attraction, love, (2) emotional stability, maturity, (3) dependable character, (4) desire for home, children, and (5) education, intelligence. And, although the trait, desire for home, children, showed a significant gender difference, with women rating it higher than men, these five traits ranked similarly for both male and female respondents. These results are consistent with
previous research which shows men and women agreeing on of the majority of traits desired in a long term partner.

*Gender Distinct Mate Preferences.* Again, despite the reported gender differences, both genders showed a noticeably high degree of similarity in the overall valuation attached to desirable mate characteristics. Compared to Buss and colleagues (2001) 1996 data, it appears that there has been a general increase in value for both men and women for the traits, desire for home, child, and good financial prospects. Moreover, there appears to be a general decrease in value for men and women since 1996 for the traits pleasing disposition, good looks, and similar education. Additionally, Buss and colleagues (2001) showed the decreasing valuation of the trait, ambition, industriousness for females in their 1984/85 compared to their 1996 sample. This trend is also reflected in the current results, although as mentioned, all results from these analyses should be interpreted cautiously. The results presented by Buss and colleagues (2001) represent data averaged from three geographical regions (Texas, Virginia, and Michigan) whereas the current sample was collected solely from an Ohio college population. With this limitation in mind, a direct comparison of data collected in 1996 to data collected in 2004 reflects less gender distinct preferences in the sheer number of traits that demonstrated gender differences. Buss and colleagues (2001) study demonstrated significant gender differences for eight of the 18 traits, whereas the current study replicated significant gender distinct mating preferences for only four of the 18 traits. Similar education, education/intelligence, pleasing disposition, emotional stability/maturity, and favorable
social status were the five traits which generated gender differences in 1996 but not in 2004.

In the present study, the trait similar education decreased in value for both men and, in particular, for women therefore weakening the gender difference. The trait education, intelligence also decreased in value for both sexes. The college town in which the participants (university students) reside is densely populated with university students. This might lead respondents to take this trait for granted being that they are surrounded by potential mates of similar education level. Moreover, at a national level, rates of individuals obtaining university degrees are on the rise. Rates of individuals obtaining college degrees are also set to increase 13% between the years 2000-2013 (Young & Jeffery, 2004). Perhaps it is somewhat expected that the majority of potential mates will have a college degree, resulting in the prioritization of other traits. Yet one would expect that Buss et al.’s (2001) sample of college students would also be exposed to similar rates of university students being that his sample was also taken from college campuses. Therefore geographical differences rather than the passage of time may be responsible for some of the between study differences demonstrated.

Pleasing disposition also demonstrated a similar decrease in value. This trait was previously criticized for being ambiguous and outdated (Buss et al., 2001; Toro and Sprecher, 2003). This ambiguity may have contributed to the decrease in overall mean value and lack of significant gender differences in the 2004 sample. Conceivably, participants may have given little thought to this item as they were confused about its meaning.
Lastly, there was an increase in the valuation of favorable social status for male participants when compared with Buss and colleagues’ (2001) 1996 results. This is could be due to the fact that women are now able to attain status at unprecedented levels. The wave of gender equality has opened continuous opportunities for women to advance, thus offering another area in which to be evaluated and desired by potential partners. Again, results derived from the comparison of Buss and colleagues’ (2001) 1996 data and the current study should be interpreted cautiously due to geographical differences between samples.

Despite a decrease between the two samples in the total number of traits demonstrating gender differences, the current study was unable to provide statistical evidence to suggest the attenuation of gender distinct mating preferences for the four traits which did reflect significant gender differences in both the 1996 and 2004 sample. Perhaps eight years is not enough time to register a significant convergence for these four traits. Women, when compared to men, in both the current study and the Buss et al.’s (2001) study showed a significant preference for the traits good financial prospects, and ambition and industriousness. A possible explanation is that although there have been substantial advancements with regards to gender equality; total equality has yet to be achieved. Male and female focus groups conducted for the current research project echoed the lack of a female U.S. president as evidence of continued gender inequality. Results from the Utility of Mate Preference scale add additional explanations for the continuance of gender differences on these two traits. Women, more then men, tended to agree with the following statement: 6. I value a financially established long-term partner
because I want to stay at home and be the primary caretaker our children. A desire to be the primary caretaker of children may lead women to desire ambitious, financially successful mates, irrespective of their own earning potential. A mate who is not ambitious and financially successful would be less likely to offer their partner the luxury of focusing on child rearing, as paid employment may be necessary for both partners. This explanation is favored over one rooted in gender inequality based on the results from the Utility of Mate Preferences Scale. The lack of gender differences for the item pertaining to sexual discrimination in the workplace on the Utility of Mate Preferences Scale suggests that this sample of women did not desire ambitious partners because they felt disadvantaged in the workplace when compared with men, but rather so they could have the option of staying home and raising their child. This is further supported by the data from this study suggesting that women respondents value the desire for home and children in a potential mate to a greater degree then men respondents.

Analyses of the Utility of Mate Preferences measure also yielded gender differences. The first three items assessed the utility/advantage of valuing physical attractiveness. For all three items men reported higher levels of agreement when compared with women. Previous research studies, including the current study, demonstrated that men desire physical attractiveness in a mate to a greater degree than women. Given that, it makes sense that men would also tend to identify and agree with the potential benefits of desiring that particular trait. Women, who tended to desire physical attraction to a lesser degree also tended to agree less with the postulated benefits of the said trait. It may be that they do not recognize or enjoy the same advantage from
valuing these traits as their male counterparts; therefore they place emphasized value on alternative traits which they believe will yield greater benefits. As mentioned, women in this sample valued financial resourcefulness over men so that they would have the option of not engaging in paid employment and as a result be able to focus on child rearing if so desired. Interestingly, there was no gender difference found for the item pertaining to gender-based sexual discrimination in the workplace. This suggests that among the study’s respondents, gender inequality in the workplace is currently not a major explanation for gender-specific mating preferences concerning financial resourcefulness with this sample of women. Despite findings consistent with previous literature, the newly developed scale needs to be analyzed for potential improvements.

**Free Response Task.** As mentioned, participants were asked to list six traits which they felt were the most desirable to them in a long term mate. Sixty-one percent (61.90%) of the responses were captured in the top five categories: (1) dependable character, (2) loving, caring, (3) humor, (4) good looks, and (5) education, intelligence. Three of the top five categories were categories taken directly from the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire. The added categories of loving, caring and humor ranked second and third, respectively. Being that these categories were so frequently endorsed, it might benefit future studies to modify the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire by adding these two highly ranked trait categories.

**Updating the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire.** All 18 traits from the Factors in Choosing in a Mate questionnaire were represented in the free response task with the exception of the traits labeled chastity and similar education. No participant
responded with a trait that could be sorted into either category. Furthermore, chastity was ranked 17th out of the 18 traits on the Factors in Choosing Mate questionnaire (see Table 1); further suggesting a need to modify the original measure. This trait was also ranked 16th for men and 17th for women across Buss et al.’s (2001) 1996 sample. Revision is recommended given that this trait has failed to emerge as a trait thought to be desired in a long term mate across several recent studies, including the present. Further support is evident through the creation of the additional category entitled sexual desire, which accounted for .05% (7 out of 1375) of the free responses. This category represents traits thought to reflect a healthy and compatible sexual appetite. Perhaps chastity as a trait desired in a long term mate has simply become outdated since the measure’s 1938 inception, and rather than desire a partner with a lack of sexual experience, students now appear to be concerned with sexual compatibility and level of sexual desire in a long term relationship.

A surprising finding when comparing the free response task to the results of the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire concerns the top ranked trait, mutual attraction, love. This trait was created as a free response category, however only 12 of the 1,375 responses were placed in this category. This is quite shocking given that this trait was ranked most important for both men and women on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire. It appears that when given traits to rate, love and mutual attraction are consistently highly rated, however when asked to generate free response traits, love is not always considered. Another explanation is that love is always considered, and perhaps becomes so second nature that it is overlooked in the list and is simply assumed. Yet
another explanation is that love is represented more specifically in the generated list. In other words, rather than spontaneously produce the trait love, respondents list the qualities they feel best represent the trait of love. In the free response section, 192 of the 1,375 (14%) responses were sorted into the category labeled loving, caring. Kind, thoughtful, gentle, helping, devoted, compassionate, and considerate are examples of responses that made up the category of loving, caring. Rather then produce the trait love in the free response section, these trait responses may have been intended to represent the more specific behaviors thought to demonstrate love.

Trustworthy, honesty, loyalty, trust, reliable and dependable were responses that were coded under the category dependable character. Although this category was taken directly from the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire, no participant actually replied with the trait dependable character verbatim. This suggests that the qualities of this trait, while still relevant, may require updated phrasing. Another revision suggested by the results of the current study is the inclusion of the trait, humor. The trait humor was not one of the 18 traits evaluated on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire, yet it was created as a category to classify 164 of the 1,375 categorized free responses. Toro and Sprecher (2003) created an updated and extended list of the original 18 traits that included the addition of humor. This trait merited a mean of 3.85 (SD = .97) on a 5-point Likert-type scale. They also included the additional traits of honest and trustworthy (M = 4.59, SD = .74), warm and kind (M = 4.15, SD = .89), and exciting personality (M = 3.88, SD = .88) in their list.
The trait pleasing disposition was rated as “important, but not indispensable” on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire, with a mean of 2.037 (SD = .63). This particular item was the only trait where participants requested clarification while completing the questionnaire. When asked, research assistants advised participants to answer according to what they thought it meant, rather than attempt to offer a definition. Furthermore, in the free response section of the study, no participant responded with the phrase, “pleasing disposition”. This category was comprised primarily of the responses good personality, and good character, further supporting the need for modifying the trait pleasing disposition.

In addition to these suggestions, Buss and his colleagues (2001) recommend expanding the 4-point rating scale to allow for increased variability. This suggestion is additionally recommended by the results of the current study. Due to the fact that there is some evidence to suggest that gender distinctions are becoming less prevalent with the passing of time, an expanded scale would more accurately capture participants’ responses by increasing variability. Buss and colleagues (2001) also advise separating the traits which are confounded such as, education and intelligence. They also recommend additional clarification on traits such as favorable social status, which might seem unclear to respondents. As Toro and Sprecher (2003) concluded, the 18 traits listed on the Factors in Choosing a Mate questionnaire is a useful measure, but does appear to call for updating and expansion in order to be more applicable for use in today’s society. Comparing Hill’s (1945) original measure to expanded and updated trait lists as well as the above open response items is essential given that no formal validity assessments...
appear to be available for the original measure. Comparing these results to Hill’s (1945) 
original measure can assist in offering insight towards the modern day validity of the 
measure.

Many comparisons have been made between the results of the current study and 
the results of Buss and colleagues (2001) 1996 sample. However, readers are advised to 
keep sample differences in mind when interpreting results. While the current study 
utilized the same measure as Buss et al. (2001), the sample came from only one 
Midwestern university as opposed to the average of three geographical regions, 
Michigan, Virginia, and Texas. While Michigan, Virginia and Ohio may share many 
qualities, past research has established geographical differences (Buss et al., 2001; Toro 
and Sprecher, 2003). Thus, distinctions between the studies cannot be assumed to be due 
solely due to the passage of time. Future research would benefit from testing and 
comparing geographically and demographically similar samples, if not the same sample 
(longitudinal research) to accurately gauge changes over time.

A key purpose of the current study was to explore factors beyond that of gender 
as alternative explanations for the distinctive mating patterns demonstrated in previous 
human mating literature. Both gender role adherence and self-esteem were chosen based 
on their previous roles in the human mating literature. The present research study 
utilized the BSRI as a measure of gender role adherence with the expectation that gender 
role might be playing a part in the gender distinctive mating preferences revealed in 
previous literature. However, results did not uncover evidence for this claim, and
participants’ biological sex remains the best predictor of mate selection for those traits which, in the past and present, have demonstrated gender distinctions.

Many potential explanations exist for this finding, or lack thereof. First, the measure utilized (i.e. the BSRI) to assess gender role adherence was created thirty years earlier. It was normed on Stanford university students, and was based on the foundation that certain traits were thought more desirable for men than women. The current study was interested in traditional gender roles, and though it considered the fact that the measure may be outdated, it did not anticipate this as a problem. However, it is possible that those individuals, who were labeled androgynous by the BSRI’s 1972 standards, might not be considered so by contemporary standards. Moreover, studies have investigated the degree to which the BSRI has remained valid over the years with inconsistent results (for review see Hoffman and Borders, 2001). Future research utilizing the BSRI might benefit from running a pilot replication study where a sample from the population of interest is required to reassign Bem’s original items in order to re-evaluate the modern day validity of the measure on the population in question.

In addition to gender role adherence, self-esteem was also investigated as a possible predictor of mate characteristic preferences. Results did not provide evidence for self-esteem as an accurate predictor of mate selection preferences for the four traits investigated, nor was there a significant interaction between gender and self-esteem, despite past research results suggesting otherwise (D’Agostino & Day, 1991). Social desirability is always of concern when measuring sensitive personal attributes such as self-esteem. Measures which present with high face validity may not be the most suitable
method of assessing self-esteem in this area of research. In order to present themselves positively, participants might be tempted to endorse items reflecting high self-esteem even if they do not actually agree with the items. Selecting a measure with a more covert method of evaluating self-esteem would benefit future research designs. Further studies might also profit by treating self-esteem as a continuous variable. The use of the median-split, and the upper third, lower third, method though appropriate for the present research study, comes with criticism and a reduction in statistical power.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research. There are several limitations in the methodology of this research investigation, which if corrected, would strengthen the study. The first limitation concerns the sample’s age. A major disadvantage to utilizing college-aged participants in this and previous like studies includes the fact that they are relatively young and are most likely inexperienced at long term romantic relationships. Participants with more relationship experience would be better able to accurately convey their opinions on traits preferred in a long term mate due to fact that they have previously had the opportunity to evaluate the traits first hand. These individuals would be better capable of responding according to what they liked and disliked in their previous relationships, rather than answering based on what they think they would prefer in a long term partner. Individuals inexperienced with long term romantic relationships would be more likely to be influenced by and respond according to traditional, mass media ideals and social desirability rather than their actual desires derived from experience. Feingold (1992) additionally warns that societal values may inhibit people from expressing the
actual importance they attach to certain traits such as looks and financial status, introducing a concern with the possible effects of social desirability.

In addition to being young and inexperienced when it comes to long term relationships, these participants are, for the most part, freshly graduated from high school and at the commencement of their college career. Consequently, settling down with a long term romantic partner may be the furthest thing on their mind, with the few exceptions of those who favor marrying earlier in life. Since these individuals are unlikely to be contemplating and evaluating individuals based on with whom they’d like to “settle down”, it might be difficult to expect them to fully take on this mind set when instructed by a researcher/assistant. Recommendations for future research include utilizing a sample of individuals whose ages fall within the previously reported means for preferred marrying age in order to accurately capture the desirability of traits preferred in a long term romantic relationship. For men the mean preferred marrying age was 26.75 ($SD=2.714$) and for women it was 24.21 ($SD=2.038$). When requiring participants to evaluate the traits they desire in a long term mate, it makes sense to utilize a sample of individuals experienced in evaluating these traits outside a research setting.

Lastly, geographic limitations reduced the variability within the sample resulting in a largely homogenous group. Modest variability between demographic items provided few opportunities to make between-group comparisons. The current research study would have benefited from a more diverse sample. This would have allowed for the comparisons of groups based on demographic factors other than gender. An increase in variability would have also made the Buss/Demyan comparison more reasonable given
that Buss’s sample consisted of data averaged from different geographical regions where regional differences have been demonstrated (Buss et al., 2001). Yet, the same cross-general design was utilized by Buss and colleagues (2001) to compare their data from 1984/1985 and 1996 to data collected from Wisconsin college students in 1939 (Hill, 1945), to a similar Wisconsin sample collected in 1956 (McGinnis, 1958), to yet another Wisconsin sample collected in 1967 (Hudson and Henze, 1969) and lastly, to a sample consisting of Arizona students in 1977 (Hoyt and Hudson, 1981), resulting in comparisons over six points in time.
References


Higgins and A.W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 3-38). New York: Guilford Press.


APPENDIX A

Demographics Questionnaire

Gender:  Male (2)  Female (1)
Circle one

Age  __________  please specify

Number of Siblings:  _______ Brother(s)  _______ Sister(s)

Year in College:
Circle one  First Year (1)  Sophomore (2)  Junior (3)  Senior (4)

College Major________________________________________________________
please specify

Anticipated Career____________________________________________________
please specify

Race:
Circle one  Caucasian (1)  African American (2)  Hispanic (3)  Asian (4)
Native American (5)  Other (6):  __________ please specify

Marital Status:
Circle one  Single (1)  Married (2)  Separated (3)  Divorced (3)

Marital Status of Parents:
Circle one  Single (4)  Married (1)  Separated (4)  Divorced (2)

Socioeconomic Status:
Circle one  Financially Dependent (1)  Financially Independent (2)

Socioeconomic Status of Parents:
Circle one:  Low (1)  Low Middle (2)  Mid (3)  Upper Middle (4)  Upper (5)

Education Level of Parents:
Mother:  High school(1)  College(2)  Graduate/Professional degree(3)
Father:  High school(1)  College(2)  Graduate/Professional degree(3)

Anticipated Socioeconomic Status
Circle one:  Low (1)  Low Middle (2)  Mid (3)  Upper Middle (4)  Upper (5)

Religious Affiliation____________________________________________________
please specify

Political Party Affiliation________________________________________________
please specify
APPENDIX B: Part 1

Factors in Choosing a Mate Questionnaire: Open-ended responses

There are certain characteristics which are thought to be desirable in a long-term mate. We are interested specifically in the characteristics you find to be the most important when evaluating a long-term mate.

Please list below the top six traits you find to be most important when evaluating a potential long-term mate.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
Appendix B: Part 2

Factors in Choosing a Mate Questionnaire

Part I: Biographical Data
1. Age: _____
2. Sex: __________ (male or female)
3. Religion: ______________________
4. Marital status (please circle): single dating engaged married divorced
5. Class or year: ________________
6. Number of brothers: ___________ Number of sisters: ________________

Part II: Evaluative Section* PLEASE DO NOT PUT DOWN A RANGE
1. At what age would you prefer to settle down or marry? ______________
2. What age difference would you prefer between you and your partner? __________ years
   Whom would you prefer to be older (please circle): self partner
3. Please evaluate the following factors in choosing a long-term mate. If you consider it
   indispensable, give it 3 points
   important, but not indispensable 2 points
   desirable, but not very important 1 point
   irrelevant or unimportant 0 point

   _____ (1) Good cook and housekeeper (15) Similar political background
   _____ (2) Pleasing disposition (16) Mutual love and attraction
   _____ (3) Sociability (17) Good health
   _____ (4) Similar educational background (18) Education & Intelligence
   _____ (5) Refinement, neatness
   _____ (6) Good financial prospect
   _____ (7) Chastity (no previous experience in sexual intercourse)
   _____ (8) Dependable character
   _____ (9) Emotional stability & maturity
   _____ (10) Desire for home and children
   _____ (11) Favorable social status or rating
   _____ (12) Good looks
   _____ (13) Similar religious background
   _____ (14) Ambition & industriousness
**APPENDIX C**

**BEM Sex Role Inventory**

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<th>7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never or almost</td>
<td>Never true</td>
<td>Always or almost</td>
<td>Always true</td>
<td></td>
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Indicate how well each item describes you using the above scale of 1-7

1. **Self-reliant**
2. **Yielding**
3. **Helpful**
4. **Defends own beliefs**
5. **Cheerful**
6. **Moody**
7. **Independent**
8. **Shy**
9. **Conscientious**
10. **Athletic**
11. **Affectionate**
12. **Theatrical**
13. **Assertive**
14. **Flatterable**
15. **Happy**
16. **Strong Personality**
17. **Loyal**
18. **Unpredictable**
19. **Forceful**
20. **Feminine**
21. **Reliable**
22. **Analytical**
23. **Sympathetic**
24. **Jealous**
25. **Has leadership abilities**
26. **Conventional**
27. **Truthful**
28. **Willing to take risks**
29. **Understanding**
30. **Secretive**
31. **Makes decisions easily**
32. **Compassionate**
33. **Sincere**
34. **Self-Sufficient**
35. **Eager to soothe hurt feelings**
36. **Conceited**
37. **Dominant**
38. **Soft Spoken**
39. **Likable**
40. **Masculine**
41. **Warm**
42. **Solemn**
43. **Willing to take a stand**
44. **Tender**
45. **Friendly**
46. **Aggressive**
47. **Gullible**
48. **Inefficient**
49. **Acts like a leader**
50. **Childlike**
51. **Adaptable**
52. **Individualistic**
53. **Does not use harsh language**
54. **Unsystematic**
55. **Competitive**
56. **Loves children**
57. **Tactful**
58. **Ambitious**
59. **Gentle**
60. **Sensitive to the needs of others**
APPENDIX D

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

1 - Strongly agree
2 - Agree
3 - Disagree
4 - Strongly disagree

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. _____
2. At times, I think I am no good at all. _____
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. _____
4. I am able to do things as well as most people. _____
5. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of. _____
6. I certainly feel useless at times. _____
7. I feel that I am a person of worth; at least I am on an equal plane with others. _____
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. _____
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. _____
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. _____
APPENDIX E

The Utility of Mate Preferences Scale

Age __________  Gender __________  Race __________

Certain traits are thought to be universally desirable in a long-term mate. This questionnaire is interested in helping to interpret the reasons that these traits are important and how individuals benefit from selecting long-term partners who have these traits.

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following reasons for valuing the traits of (1) Attractiveness, (2) Health, and lastly, (3) Status & Financial Resourcefulness in a long-term partner.

Remember, you are answering based on why you might value these traits in a long-term life partner.

1. **I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because** it positively affects my social status and how others view me.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   I strongly disagree unsure I strongly agree

2. **I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because** it can be a good reflection of an individual’s overall health and fertility.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   I strongly disagree unsure I strongly agree

3. **I value physical attractiveness in a long-term partner because** it will contribute to a more satisfying sex life.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   I strongly disagree unsure I strongly agree

4. **I value good health in a long-term partner because** I want to make sure I have healthy children.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   I strongly disagree unsure I strongly agree

5. **I value good health in a long-term partner because** I would like to have an active lifestyle together.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   I strongly disagree unsure I strongly agree
6. I value a financially established long-term partner because I want to stay at home and be the primary caretaker of our children.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I strongly disagree</em></td>
<td>unsure</td>
<td>unsure</td>
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7. I value a financially established long-term partner because, in my career path, I will most likely experience discrimination in the workplace with regard to salary, status, and opportunities for promotion.

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8. I value a financially established long-term partner because I intend on being financially well established and would like a partner of equal socioeconomic status.

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9. When I am ready to settle down I will choose a mate based primarily on whom I’d like to be the parent of my children.

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</table>

10. When I am ready to settle down I will choose a mate based primarily with whom I’d like to share my life.

<table>
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11. When I am ready to settle down it will not be important for me to have children.

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APPENDIX F
Focus Group Outline

Confidentiality & Consent Forms:
At the start of the study confidentiality and its limits should be discussed and consent forms should be explained and signatures obtained as outlined below.

Efforts to maintain the confidentiality of participant information include 1) ensuring that no data identifying individual participants will be released to persons other than the Primary Investigator and the Advisor and 2) recording all study information anonymously, using only a participant ID code. There will be no way to tie respondents’ names to any of their responses. Group members will be cautioned however that participants' confidentiality in the group can only be protected as far as the other participants in the group do not repeat what is discussed in the group setting.

Again, Focus group participants will be both audio taped and videotaped. The audio and videotapes will be stored in Anderson 111, which is the Gender X Culture lab of Dr. Doris Chang. They will be locked in a file cabinet and only Dr. Chang, the principal investigator and approved research assistants will have access.

Purpose of the study:
Next, the purpose of the study should be briefly introduced:

This project will be used as a preliminary study to collect information for a larger thesis project. The group’s responses will be used in the construction of a new measure to be used in my thesis. Past research has shown gender differences in preferences for characteristics in a long-term mate. Specifically, men have been shown to prefer young, physically attractive mates and women have been shown to prefer older, intelligent, more resourceful mates, with less emphasis on physical characteristics. The purpose is to elicit subjects’ interpretations of why certain mate characteristics are preferred by males and females. I will be using the information collected to create a measure that will be used to examine subjects’ endorsement of the hypothesized social and evolutionary context of mate selection preferences.

Completion of Traits desired in a Mate Inventory:
Subjects will then be asked to complete the above-mentioned questionnaire.

5 minutes - Opening Question (Round Robin style) using the questionnaire as a guide
1. What quality or qualities do you find most important when evaluating a potential long-term romantic partner?
   • Do you feel that if there was a group of women in the room that their responses would be the same? Why or why not?
• Where do you think men and women might differ with regards to what they value in a long-term partner? Why?

**REVIEW OF MAJOR FINDINGS IN HUMAN MATING RESEARCH WITH REGARDS TO GENDER**

• Research shows that women value resource cues when they are evaluating a mate, such as financial success, social status and power, ambitiousness, and intelligence as well as the future potential of these characteristics. They also prefer an older partner when given the choice between older or younger than them.

• For men, when evaluating a mate, attractiveness via physical cues such as a symmetrical face, clear complexion, a low waist-to-hip-ratio, and youthful features (large eyes and lips) are rated as more important when compared with women. They also prefer a younger partner when given the choice between older or younger than them.

**30 minutes - Introductory Questions**

2. **Do you agree with the previous findings, that men and women value different qualities when evaluating a potential long-term romantic partner?** (Probe specifically about the previous findings, that men emphasize attractiveness and physical cues over women, and that women when compared with men, place a greater importance on resource cues)

3. **Why do you think that certain characteristics are valued over others when choosing a mate?** (these can be similar or the same for men and women, they do not have to be divergent between the sexes)

**30 minutes - Transition Questions**

Think about these from a socio-cultural (social role) or bio-cultural (evolutionary) stand point – ie men look for attractive women because it signifies good health and reproductive qualities per the evolutionary stance, or: men look for attractive women because it enhances their social status per the social role stance. Women look for resourceful men because they can’t take care of things while they are incapacitated by pregnancy according to evolutionary theory. Women look for resourceful men because they haven’t been afforded the same opportunities as men and need them to provide for them what they themselves have not been afforded.

4. **What possible social or biological advantages do women gain by valuing those qualities?** Are there benefits to women who have a mate who embodies the previously mentioned resources cues?
   • What are the possible social advantages?
   • What are the possible biological advantages?

5. **What social and biological advantages do men gain by valuing those qualities?** Are there benefits to men who have a mate who are young and physically attractive? If yes, move to next question, if the group answers no, which is very unlikely but could happen, ask what then would drive us to be so strategic in choosing a mate, then move to the next question.)
When asking these questions try to refer to the traits they listed as most important on the questionnaire. Ask them why they would choose someone with that trait over someone without it. If they rate, “good looks” as a 3, but “ambition” as a 1 ask what their strategy was. Why did they make that distinction?

- What are the possible social advantages?
- What are the possible biological advantages?

**30 minutes - Key Questions**

6. Based on your experience, are men and women offered the same opportunities in the U.S.?

Listed below are possible follow up questions to facilitate thought and discussion if necessary.

a. If not in what area(s) do you think men or women have an advantage?

b. In what area(s) do you feel that men or women have a disadvantage?

c. In what ways, if any, do they contend with that disadvantage?

d. Are the same educational and employment goals achieved by both men and women with similar effort?

e. Are men and women encouraged into the same careers?

f. Do you think that most men/women are in agreement with the state of the gender equality movement?

**20 minutes - Ending Questions**

Group facilitator will summarize the group’s discussion regarding mate selection preferences and reflect the group’s consensus regarding specific traits the group found valuable in a mate and ask if the summary was a correct interpretation of the focus groups efforts. Group facilitator will also summarize the focus group’s discussion regarding the potential benefits of valuing certain characteristics over others and ask the group if they captured their comments accurately for this topic. A summary will also be offer regarding the gender equality comments. Feedback will be solicited.

**Final Question**

7. If given the task, how would you go about investigating an individual’s perception of gender equality regarding education and employment opportunities? Are there certain questions that you would ask? How would they be worded?

Soliciting Feedback - Group facilitator will ask: Are there any suggestions you might have to improve the effectiveness of this group keeping in mind the intention is to develop a measure which evaluates the respondents’ perception of gender equality in order to see if level of gender equality perception moderates what kind of traits individuals value when evaluating a long-term romantic partner?

At the conclusion of the group the participants will be given information on how to obtain the results of the study (amy’s e.mail – ad143602@ohio.edu) and be thanked for their participation and feedback.
## Experiment Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiment Name</th>
<th>Exploring gender distinctions in human mate selection characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Participants will complete a brief demographics questionnaire and will complete questionnaires regarding human long term mate selection characteristic and their personal beliefs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participants will be asked to provide opinions on human mate selection characteristic preferences through a series of questionnaires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject Restrictions</td>
<td>Females only, age 18+</td>
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<td>Credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimenter</td>
<td>Amy Demyan&lt;br&gt;Office: Porter 44J-Phone: 740.953.0568&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:ad143602@ohio.edu">ad143602@ohio.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB Approval Code</td>
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<td>1 credit</td>
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</table>
| **Experimenter**    | Amy Demyan  
Office: Porter 44J-Phone: 740.953.0568  
ad143602@ohio.edu |
| **Experiment Status** | SAMPLE ONLY |
| **IRB Approval Code** | SAMPLE ONLY |
APPENDIX H

DEBREIFING INFORMATION

Thank you for your participation in this study. The study’s objective is to investigate preferences in long-term mate selection. It seeks to explore the relationship gender, self-esteem, gender-role adherence, and select demographic items, for example, age, political party affiliation, race, and socioeconomic status. To accomplish this goal you were asked to complete questionnaires which specifically address the aforementioned areas. The responses will be compared to other students.

Your participation will help us understand how certain characteristics might influence the traits we prefer in a mate. As a reminder, your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the survey administer. If you would like further information, here are some suggested places to contact:

1. Project Supervisor: Keith Markman
   203 Porter Hall  740-593-1707
   Principle Investigator: Amy Demyan
   111 Anderson Hall, Phone:  740-597-2565
   Home: 740-953-0568

2. Hudson Health Counseling Center (CPS)
   A campus agency that can provide further assistance or information
   Phone: 740-593-1616

3. Tri-County Community Mental Health Center
   A community agency that can provide further assistance or information
   Phone: 740-592-3091