Debate

Do Nice Guys Finish Last?

Instructions:
1. Read both the pro and con side of this article.

2. All students are to type out the answers to the questions below, regardless of whether they signed up to be on this panel. This will be collected.

3. Everyone on the panel will be expected to participate in the debate. Thus, you may want to take additional notes on the article or write down some on the points that you think are important to make during the debate.

4. Part of this assignment involves fine tuning your ability to define terms or narrow parameters within debates pertaining to gender. Therefore, I have intentionally left the initial question somewhat vague.

Questions:
1. According to Jonason et al., what is the dark triad, and how has it been used to explain evolutionary differences in mating patterns?

2. What are the limitations of Jonason et al.'s study, and how could they be addressed in future research?

3. According to Furnham, what is the “mating market model,” and what is the evidence to support it?

4. What evolutionary explanation does Furnham give for some of his results?

5. In your view which study method best addressed the question of “do nice guys finish last?”
Do Nice Guys Finish Last?


NO: Adrian Furnham, from “Sex Differences in Mate Selection Preferences,” *Personality and Individual Differences* (2009)

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

YES: Psychologist Peter K. Jonason, taking an evolutionary perspective, demonstrates that the “Dark Triad” of attributes (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) promotes a reproducitively adaptive strategy, especially for short-term mating behaviors.

NO: Psychologist Adrian Furnham found consistent sex differences that revealed women’s preference for “nice guys,” that is, those who were intelligent, stable, conscientious, better educated, with good social skills and political and religious compatibility.

Google the phrase “What do women want?” and you will get over a 100 million hits. Similarly, if you Google “Do nice guys finish last?” you will get over 10 million hits. These are obviously questions that fascinate, provoke, and frustrate, and there is no shortage of Web sites claiming to have the answer. The stereotype is that the “bad boy” gets the girl. In this section, we want to examine what it is about men that women seem to want in a partner. All relationships begin with attraction. Research by relationship experts in psychology and sociology attempt to answer these questions using various scientific strategies such as surveys and experimental studies, and by posing theories to explain attraction and relationship development. Some research attempts to identify whether there are physical characteristics that make some people more appealing as a partner than others. In this research, women and men are presented with photos and asked to provide attractiveness ratings. Features of the individuals in the photos are then measured (size of chin, size of eyes, shape of eyes, distance between the eyes, etc.), and these measurements are then correlated with the attractiveness ratings. These studies find remarkable similarity across cultures. In general, large
eyes, prominent cheekbones, and a big smile are found attractive in both women and men.

Other research focuses on status factors (education, income) or personality attributes, shared values, interests, and character. In these studies, researchers may ask people to rate the attributes they want in a partner and then present them with opportunities to interact with another person, giving them information about several people and letting them select which they would prefer to meet. Interestingly, these studies suggest that in spite of the fact that women say they value personality, values, and character over looks, physical attractiveness wins out over similarity, just as it does for men. One theory suggests that the physical-attractiveness stereotype is at work. Beautiful people are perceived to be more sociable, extraverted, and socially competent when compared to less attractive people. They are also seen as more sexual, happier, more fun loving, and successful. Thus, first impressions are likely to be based on looks because of the inferences we make about personality and status. However, in spite of this stereotype, we all know that all beautiful people do not have wonderful relationships and that many unattractive people do. So, what is going on? The answer lies in what we mean by terms such as “relationship” and “partner.” When researchers are looking at what men and women want, are they looking at whom they want to hang out with, hook up with, or go on a first date, or are they looking at with whom they want a fifty-year marriage? Relationships have a life cycle. The first stage is the attraction stage, when emotions run high, and physical attractiveness plays a prominent role. The vast majority of attraction research has focused on the initial stage of a relationship. However, it turns out that excitement and good looks cannot sustain a relationship. As a relationship develops, its success becomes more dependent on factors such as trust and shared values and interests, with physical attractiveness becoming less important. Violations of trust, as well as the lack of shared values and interests, are often at the core of relationship dissolution. Research on long-term relationships finds that women and men in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships want remarkably similar things in their relationships, such as companionship and the ability to communicate.

In these selections, think about what stage of a relationship the authors are discussing. Peter Jonason and colleagues suggest that the dark triad of attributes contribute to a successful short-term mating strategy for men. This triad includes narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Typically, psychologists would consider these attributes to be abnormal and maladaptive. So why would women initially be attracted to men who are so clearly self-centered and manipulative? Jonason suggests that these attributes include a drive for power and extraversion that might have at least a short-term advantage in the dating game. Adrian Furnham’s research seems clearly opposite in what he finds women desire in a mate. Women reported valuing intelligence, stability, conscientiousness, height, education, social skills, and political/religious compatibility as highly desirable in their ideal mates. Are they lying, or do they really not know what they want? Consider his research methods. Are his findings more reflective of attributes that would contribute to a successful long-term mating strategy?
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**YES**

Peter Jonason, et al.

**The Dark Triad: Facilitating a Short-Term Mating Strategy in Men**

**Introduction**

Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy—collectively known as ‘The Dark Triad’—are traits that are linked to negative personal and societal outcomes and are traditionally considered maladaptive. However, the persistence of these traits over time and across various societies, as well as linkages to positive traits, suggests that the Dark Triad can be advantageous in some ways. For instance, subclinical psychopathy is associated with a lack of neuroticism and anxiety, which may facilitate the pursuit of one’s goals through adverse conditions. Similarly, narcissism is associated with self-aggrandizement, and Machiavellianism is associated with being socially manipulative, both of which may aid in reaping benefits for oneself at the expense of others, especially in initial periods of acquaintance. In the current study, we examine the links between the Dark Triad traits and a short-term mating orientation, and suggest that the Dark Triad traits represent one end of a continuum of individual differences that may facilitate a particular mating strategy.

**The Dark Triad Traits: An Exploitative Social Strategy**

The Dark Triad is composed of Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy. Machiavellian individuals tend to be manipulative, while demonstrating a “cool” or “cold” approach to others. Subclinical narcissists, sometimes called “normal narcissists,” tend to have a sense of entitlement and seek admiration, attention, prestige, and status. Subclinical psychopaths are characterised by high impulsivity and thrill-seeking and tend to have low empathy. Associations among the three traits have been studied in both clinical and nonclinical settings. The three traits are moderately intercorrelated, and each contains a degree of self-aggrandizement, aggression and duplicity. We contend that the three traits may be best viewed as one particular social orientation towards conspecifics.


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Specifically, various lines of research suggest that the Dark Triad may facilitate a social style geared towards exploiting others in short-term social contexts. For instance, narcissists tend to be more agentic, with a desire for power and dominance, are less communally oriented, and have a lower tendency to feel guilt or shame. Those with high levels of Machiavellianism are described as charmers and as exploitative demonstrate less empathy, and are less willing to help others in need. Psychopaths have an exploitative nature, with high levels of egocentrism, impulsivity, and irresponsibility, and have low levels of empathy, shame, and guilt.

Clearly the three traits are associated with both high levels of self-interest and low levels of empathic qualities. As such, individuals who score high on the Dark Triad traits are not well suited for or interested in maintaining long-term relationships, where continued reciprocity is integral. Likewise, once their qualities are evident to others, excessively self-serving individuals should be viewed as undesirable, and thus, to be avoided by potential long-term partners. To the extent that this occurs, a self-serving, exploitative nature should be better suited to transacting with others in shorter-term durations (i.e., “hit and run” strategy).

An Exploitative Short-Term Mating Strategy

In a mating context, those high on the Dark Triad traits may be especially well suited for an exploitative, short-term approach. For example, all three traits are correlated with low agreeableness, which is associated with conflict in long-term relationships and marital dissatisfaction. Machiavellianism is associated with promiscuous, as well as sexually coercive behaviour. Narcissists tend to have an unrestricted sociosexuality and higher levels of infidelity. Narcissists find it easy to start new relationships, but are less committed to and interested in staying in existing relationships, hence, they may pursue exploitative short-term matings to improve their own reproductive interests at the expense of their partners. We predicted that the three individual measures associated with the Dark Triad—narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism—would be positively associated with behavioural and attitudinal measures of short-term mating.

Pursuing an exploitative short-term mating strategy may be more advantageous for men than women. First, short-term mating may, on average, provide more reproductive benefits to men. That is, women—but not men—are physiologically required to undertake pregnancy and nursing. Because pregnancy was always a possible outcome of sexual intercourse in the ancestral past, casual sex resulted in higher potential costs for ancestral women than men. As such, women may have evolved to be less open than men towards casual sexual opportunities. Indeed, men tend to favour short-term sexual relationships much more than women do, and narcissistic men—but not women—have more illegitimate children. Second, men tend to score higher on the Dark Triad personality traits than women. Therefore, we would expect the facilitation of a short-term mating strategy from having high level of the Dark Triad traits to be more applicable to men than women. Thus, we predicted
that the sex of the participant will moderate the positive correlations between scores on the Dark Triad, such that the correlation will be stronger in men than women.

This moderation prediction is informed by the pervasive fact that sex differences persist in mating behaviour. Men’s greater interest in short-term sexual relationships compared to women is one of the most consistent and strongest sex differences in the field. However, personality traits like the Dark Triad may facilitate the pursuit of short-term mating in men. Thus, we conducted mediation analyses on the relationship between the sex of the participant and rates of short-term mating. Therefore, we predicted that when the Dark Triad is treated as a unit, it will partially mediate the relationship between the sex of the participant and rates of short-term mating behaviour.

However, only partial mediation is expected because numerous other individual differences, including extraversion, are likely to facilitate short-term mating. Extraversion may be related to extrapair mating in men and lower relationship commitment in women. Extraverts are generally more interested in short-term mating than introverts. Extraversion and the Dark Triad traits are positively correlated. In addition, variables such as age and sex of the participant are also associated with higher self-reports of sexual behaviour. Therefore, we also investigated the correlation between the Dark Triad and short-term mating when we control for the potential confounds of extraversion, age, and sex.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and twenty-four psychology undergraduate students at New Mexico State University (88 men, 136 women) aged 17–43 years (mean = 23.50, median = 21, SD = 6.40) received extra credit for participation. The majority of the sample (88%) was heterosexual, 5% was homosexual, and 6% was bisexual (1% nonresponsive).

Procedures

Participants received a packet that (a) informed them of the nature of the study, (b) asked demographic questions, and (c) asked them to respond to the self-report items described below. Participants completed the survey alone in a room with a closed door and a two-way mirror that allowed an experimenter to monitor the participant’s progress. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures of the Dark Triad

Narcissism was assessed with the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a validated and widely used measure. For each item, participants chose one of two statements that they felt applied to them more. One of the two statements reflected a narcissistic attitude (e.g., “I have a natural talent for influencing people”), whereas the other statement did not (e.g., “I am not good at
influencing people"). We summed the total number of narcissistic statements the participants endorsed to measure overall narcissism.

The 31-item Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III was used to assess subclinical psychopathy. This measure has good psychometric properties. Participants rated how much they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) with statements such as: “I enjoy driving at high speeds” and “I think I could beat a lie detector.” The items were averaged to create an index of psychopathy.

Machiavellianism was measured with the 20-item MACH-IV. This measure has good psychometric properties. Participants were asked how much they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) with statements such as: “It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there” and “People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.” The items were averaged to create a Machiavellianism index.

We also treated the three Dark Triad measures as a composite measure of an exploitative sexual strategy. We first standardised (z-scored) overall scores on each measure and then averaged all three together to create a composite Dark Triad score. Overall scores were used as opposed to using the complete set of items from all the scales because dichotomous data, like that in the NPI, is problematic in factor reduction procedures. We then conducted analyses on an overall Dark Triad score in addition to the constituent parts. Such an estimate of internal consistency is reasonable for a three-item scale in basic research.

**Measures of Short-Term Mating**

Sociosexual orientation (SOI) was assessed, measuring both sociosexual attitudes (e.g., “I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying casual sex with different partners”) and behaviours (e.g., “With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse within the last year”). As in prior work, individual SOI items were standardised (z-scored) prior to computing an index of sociosexuality.

Participants reported the degree to which they were seeking a short-term mate (1 = not strongly currently seeking, 7 = strongly currently seeking) using a single-item, face-valid question. Such a measure may provide a rough estimate of participants' sociosexual desires. Additionally, we assessed the degree to which participants were seeking a long-term mate as a means of briefly assessing a contrasting mating strategy. It was assessed just as the corresponding item for seeking a short-term partner.

Participants also reported their number of lifetime vaginal-sex partners. Because these numbers were positively skewed, we performed a log-transformation before analyses.

All the short-term mating measures were standardised (z-scored) and then averaged to create an index of attitudes, behaviours, and desires towards short-term mating. The measures of short-term mating were moderately correlated with each other. We did not include the item for degree of seeking a long-term partner in this composite.
Extraversion as a Covariate

Extraversion was measured with seven self-descriptive statements from the NEO-PI-R that are cross-culturally reliable and valid. Participants were asked how much a series of statements fit with their self-concept of how extraverted they were (1 = not at all; 5 = very much). Specifically they were asked: “I see myself as someone who...” (e.g., “Is talkative,” “Generates a lot of enthusiasm”). The responses to these statements were averaged to create an index of extraversion (α = .75).

Results

Compared with women, men scored higher on Dark Triad traits, as well as short-term mating behaviors and attitudes. Men did not show a significantly... higher preference for seeking long-term mates... than women. . .

To examine the possibility that the Dark Triad may reflect a single, underlying social strategy, we conducted three separate tests. First, we tested the intercorrelations among the three measures to determine how strongly correlated they were with one another. Narcissism was significantly correlated with Machiavellianism... and psychopathy... and psychopathy was significantly correlated with Machiavellianism. . . Next an exploratory factor analysis yielded a one factor solution when we considered all three measures of the Dark Triad. . . .

Last, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to examine the possibility that the three measures reflected a single latent factor that we will call “an exploitive social style.” . . . These . . . tests provide convergent evidence that the three measures of the Dark Triad can be treated as a composite. With this support in hand, subsequent analyses were conducted on the Dark Triad composite and its components.

To examine whether the Dark Triad was related to short-term mating, we assessed the intercorrelations between the Dark Triad measures and the short-term mating measures. People’s standings on each of the three components of the Dark Triad were related to their history of, orientation towards, and interest in short-term mating, but not long-term mating.

To address the possibility that the Dark Triad is a suite of traits that facilitate short-term mating in men, we tested whether the sex of the participant moderated the relationship between a Dark Triad composite and a short-term mating composite. . . . The Dark Triad composite and short-term mating composite were correlated in men . . . and in women. . . . Second, . . . the Dark Triad was correlated with short-term mating in men . . . and women. . . . [Results] confirmed our prediction that the sex of the participant would moderate the relationship between the Dark Triad and short-term mating.

We hypothesized that the Dark Triad would partially mediate the sex difference in short-term mating. Mediation is present when the relationship between two variables is carried by a third variable that is related significantly to the first two variables. . . . We found significant partial mediation. . . .

To confirm that variables such as age, participant’s sex, and extraversion were not driving the correlation between the Dark Triad and short-term
mating, we built a hierarchical regression model. The Dark Triad composite remained a significant predictor of short-term mating whereas extraversion did not. This analysis also demonstrated that the mediation was robust after controlling for other sources of variability that have been associated with short-term mating.

Discussion

Although most studies have focused on the negative aspects of the Dark Triad, our evidence suggests that there might be some up-sides to these anti-social personality traits. We found that the scores on the Dark Triad traits were positively related to having more sex partners, an unrestricted sociosexuality and a greater preference for short-term mates. We demonstrated that the association between the Dark Triad composite was correlated with short-term mating above and beyond effects of participant's age, sex and extraversion. We also provide evidence that the three measures of the Dark Triad can be compressed into a composite measure, most notably evidenced in the exploratory and the confirmatory factor analyses.

We confirmed sex differences in all three Dark Triad measures when using a college-student sample. We found a rather high sex difference in psychopathy which may reflect greater rates of secondary psychopathy in some college-aged American men than women. Because we had a smaller amount of men than women in our sample, a few men may have had an undue influence on this sex difference. We confirmed sex differences in short-term mating and a convergence in interest in long-term mating.

Results are consistent with the possibility that the Dark Triad traits may facilitate an exploitative, short-term mating style in men and with work on Machiavellianism, narcissism, and the complete Dark Triad. Our mediation tests showed that personality traits such as the Dark Triad partially mediate the relationships between the sex of the participant and short-term mating. However, this was merely a partial mediation, which we suspect is caused by (a) the reliance on a student sample which may mask some of the extremes of these traits in the population, (b) response biases endemic to self-reports of socially undesirable traits, and (c) the large array of possible individual differences that could also partially mediate the sex difference in short-term mating.

Adaptive Individual Differences?

Whereas personality psychology has been primarily concerned with documenting trait-level individual differences among people, evolutionary psychology has typically been concerned with identifying adaptive, species-typical traits and commonalities among peoples. In recent years, these two approaches have been integrated to yield powerful explanations of individual differences. It is via this adaptive individual difference perspective that we will interpret our results.

An evolutionary view of personality considers traits to have been naturally selected, allowing individuals to compete against conspecifics and
deal with the environment. Although directional selection tends to decrease trait variation, localising it in species-typical traits, trait continuums can be maintained in a population if different levels of traits are reproductively useful. For instance, a trait may consist of a dimension whereby both poles of the trait can yield adaptive benefits or bear adaptive costs under certain conditions. That is, one end on a trait (e.g., dominance) might have associated costs and benefits (greater risk and rewards), and the other end of a trait (e.g., submissiveness) might have its own costs and benefits (e.g., lower risks and rewards). However, as long as net fitness gains are achieved by individuals at both ends, then individual differences on this trait may be maintained in the population via balancing selection.

Our study indicates a connection between the Dark Triad and more positive attitudes towards casual sex and more casual sex behaviours. To the extent that lifetime number of sexual partners is a modern-day marker of reproductive success, and given that the Dark Triad traits are heritable and exist in different cultures, we speculate that these traits may represent one end of a set of individual differences that reflects an evolutionarily stable solution to the adaptive problem of reproduction.

Limitations

Personality traits, such as those associated with the Dark Triad, are often considered to be global, continuous measures. We agree that global measures, such as SOI, may obscure the sophisticated or multidimensional nature of personality traits. Independently, the three Dark Triad measures may have distinct implications for psychological and interpersonal functioning. However, in the case of mating, it appears that all three may be measuring the same or a similar social strategy. Specifically, those who score high on the Dark Triad traits may be equipped to engage in exploitative (e.g., deceptive promises of commitment, behaviourally aggressive) short-term mating, which may be a viable reproductive strategy when the relative frequency of exploitable cooperators in a population is sufficiently high. Whereas such a strategy capitalises on quantity at the cost of receiving long-term benefits, individuals who are not high on the Dark Triad traits—the majority of populations—may be better equipped to form cooperative long-term relationships and, to a lesser degree, short-term relationships without deception. This long-term, nonexploitative strategy may represent a slower but more stable approach to reproduction. These two mating strategies have been described as the Cad and Dad strategies or in literature analyses, the “dark hero” and the “proper hero.” Furthermore, because of the asymmetries in reproductive constraints between the sexes, a short-term mating strategy, and by extension, the Dark Triad traits, are more likely to benefit men’s reproductive fitness than women’s.

This study was based on self-report data offered by psychology undergraduate students from the southwestern United States, and thus, our results are limited in their generalisability. Future work should attempt to replicate our findings with a more diverse, cross-cultural sample. Additionally, we cannot exclude the possibility that the present results were partially caused by
some individuals (i.e., high scorers on the Dark Triad measures) positively biasing their sexual success in the form of reported lifetime sex partners. We feel our utilisation of multiple measures of short-term mating should alleviate such concerns. Future research should examine whether scores on the Dark Triad traits mediate the sex difference in sexual success.

In our analyses, we used overall measures of narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and sociosexuality. However, work suggests that these measures can be broken down into sub-dimensions. For instance, SOI can be divided into sociosexual attitudes and behaviours or into past behavioural experiences attitudes towards uncommitted sex, and sociosexual desire; the NPI can be divided into four or seven components; psychopathy can be divided into primary and secondary psychopathy; and at least two different factor structures have been used with Machiavellianism. While we reported only the overall results, we did assess different scale dimensions during our analyses and did not find differences among them. For instance, both sociosexual behaviour and attitudes were moderately correlated with all three of the Dark Triad measures and with the composite variable of the Dark Triad.

All three Dark Triad traits are associated with an exploitative social style. However, actual exploitative behaviours in mating, and in general, are rarely addressed. Future work should examine the Dark Triad traits along with mating-related deception, mate-poaching, coercive mating, and other more general measures of this exploitative approach to conspecifics.

Conclusion

The personality traits that compose the Dark Triad have typically been considered abnormal, pathological, and inherently maladaptive. Although individuals with these traits inflict costs to others and themselves, the Dark Triad traits are also associated with some qualities, including a drive for power, low neuroticism, and extraversion, that may be beneficial. Together with its amounts of empathy and agreeableness, such traits may facilitate—especially for men—the pursuit of an exploitative short-term mating strategy. Although our study is limited, it suggests a potentially interesting new avenue of research to explore. More generally, the application of evolutionary reasoning to the study of personality traits may yield fruitful insights into the wide array of individual differences that exist on various dimensions.
Sex Differences in Mate Selection Preferences

1. Introduction

There is an extensive literature on mate selection and preferences in evolutionary and social psychology. Studies in the area have been particularly concerned with two areas, namely sex differences and similarity preferences in mate attraction. The fact that women are particularly interested in "resources" and males in "attractiveness" has lead to various theoretical explanations.

The sex-role socialisation hypothesis suggests that females' "comparative structural powerlessness" leads them to hypergamy or marrying-upward in socio-economic status while men are more likely to accept the concept of "exchange object." Therefore physical attractiveness becomes the central mechanism or criterion for measuring relative value in exchange commodity. Traditional sex-role socialisation is assumed to be designed to support those structural differences. On the other hand, the evolutionary theory explanation is concerned with reproductive success: females focus on the social and material provisioning for offspring while males seek out fecundity. Whilst there appear to be different explanations for mate choice based on different theories, there is little evidence that they yield dramatically different hypotheses in terms of what they would predict. The aim of this study is primarily to look at sex, personality, and ideological predictors of mate choice.

There is also a "birds of a feather" and assortative mating literature which shows that people seek out those similar to themselves. It has been found that newlyweds showed substantial similarity on attitudes but not traits, yet a positive relationship between spouse similarity and marital quality for traits but not attitudes.

There is a literature on the influence of personality factors on their similarity, complementary and assortative mating concepts. My colleagues and I have proposed a "mating market model," which assumes that individuals examine competitors in the mate market and both negotiate and adjust their criteria based on their self and competitor ratings.

Various studies have specifically examined real, media-based personal or lonely-hearts advertisements.
There have been a number of studies using “lonely hearts,” mate attraction published advertisements which have been surprisingly consistent. One analysed 800 lonely-heart advertisements of American men and women aged 20–59. They found women were more likely than men to offer attractiveness, seek financial security, express concerns about the potential partner’s motives, and seek someone who was older. Men were more likely than women to seek attractiveness, offer financial security, profess an interest in marriage, and seek someone who was younger. Offers of, and demands for, financial security varied systematically with age, but concerns about appearance and character did not.

In an analysis of 98 advertisements it was found that males seek attractiveness (health, sexiness) and offer resources, while females seek resources and offer attractiveness. This is simple evidence of sexually dimorphic mating strategies. Yet another analysis of 1000 advertisements showed, as hypothesised, men sought women of reproductive value (young, attractive) while women looked for ability to acquire resources and provide resources (time, emotions, money, status) in the relationship. Men were more promiscuously indirect while women sought long-term monogamous relationships....

Heterosexual women place emphasis on wealth and status as well as the man’s willingness to invest time and effort in the relationship. Females also consistently signify physical attractiveness and social skills; males tend to emphasise physical attractiveness above all other features. The advertisements also indicate that males tend to advertise for females younger than themselves whereas females do the opposite. Further, both sexes know what the other wants. Women offer attractiveness and charm and seek commitment and resources. Men offer attractiveness, charm and resources but seek predominantly the first two.

Some studies have examined the desirability of traits in mate selection. For both males and females the top five most desirable traits are: sincerity, faithfulness, tenderness, reliability, and communicative. This suggests Conscientiousness and Agreeableness of the Big Five are the most desirable traits. In a study using experimentally designed advertisements matched to photographs, it was found that females prefer men of medium rather than high socio-economic status. The idea was that females would be worried that (very) high socio-economic status would be very desirable to all women some of whom might encourage the male to cheat or desert the partner.

In this study participants were asked to freely express what they would say about themselves and the people they are looking for. They were also asked to rate the importance of various characteristics. However, they were also asked to complete a Big Five personality measure and specific details like their height and weight, religious and political beliefs. Hence it was able to look at individual difference predictors of preferences. Whilst studies appear to support the socio-biological theories on mate choice, there appear to have been no individual difference correlates of these factors.

Based on the previous literature, it was hypothesised first, that females would place higher emphasis on education, social skills, emotional intelligence, and conscientiousness while males would place greater emphasis on
attractiveness. Second, it was hypothesised that there would be a “birds of a feather”/ assortative mating effect in that people would seek out those with personalities similar to themselves, specifically Extravers would seek out Extravers, Agreeable participants Agreeable partners, and Open participants, Imaginative partners. Third, it was hypothesised that there would be a strong ideological compatibility effect in that for those of stronger beliefs and commitments to religious and political causes this would be an overwhelmingly important factor in their preference. Specifically that those with strong ideological beliefs would emphasis the role of partner value compatibility.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

There were 250 participants of which 110 were all single male and 140 female. They ranged in age from 18 to 41 with a mean of 22.25 (SD = 5.03 yrs). They rated themselves 5.03 (SD = 1.16) on a 7-point attractiveness scale; 4.48 (SD = 2.03) on a 7-point religious scale (1 Very, 7 Not at All), and 3.98 (SD = 1.12) on a political scale (1 = right wing, 7 = left wing). Their mean weight was 62.38 kg (SD = 13.07) and height 169.80 cm (SD = 9.38). Around a third were Asian from Hong Kong, China, and Singapore, half European, mainly British, and the remainder from North America and Australasia. Around three quarters were students at a variety of higher education institutions, mainly universities.

2.2. Questionnaire

They completed either on-line (80%) or on paper (20%) a two page questionnaire. The first part required participants to write down five characteristics that they believed best describes themselves, then write down—in rank order—the five characteristics that they most want in a long-term romantic partner. They then rated the characteristics. These were rated on an 11-point scale where 0 = Not Desirable to 11 = Extremely Desirable.

Personality was assessed by a frequently used brief (15 item) measure of the Big Five questionnaire. It has adequate evidence of internal reliability as well as construct and predictive validity. They were also asked to indicate personal details like age, sex, height, weight, strength of religious beliefs, political leaning, marital status, etc.

2.3. Procedure

Ten research assistants contacted around 25 friends mainly by emailing, asking if they or their friends would complete a short and interesting questionnaire. This may mean this is a very unrepresentative sample. They were asked to ensure that they were roughly half male and half female, between the age of 18 and 35 yrs old, unmarried, and heterosexual. They reported on average a 96% response rate. Ethical approval was sought and obtained for the study.
3. Results

A content analysis of the free responses based on a frequency count of the qualities/traits mentioned by each participant was done. Some categories showed relatively big differences between the descriptions given by the male and female respondents. Females were more likely to describe themselves as outgoing/sociable/extraverted, cheerful/optimistic, and caring/loving compared to males who were more likely to describe themselves as intelligent/competent/capable and good looking/attractive.

The top three categories of adjective/descriptions listed by the males for what characteristics they wanted in a partner were looks/attractiveness, caring/loving, and intelligence. For females it was caring/loving, then funny/humorous, and third loyal/honest.

3.1. Rated Preference

... Females showed a significant higher preference compared to males for cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, conscientiousness, height, education, social skills, and political compatibility. It was only good looks where male ratings were significantly higher than females. This confirms the first hypothesis. Effect sizes were greatest for height, Conscientiousness, and social skills. ...

The results showed Agreeableness, Emotional Intelligence and Emotional stability were rated highest (i.e., most desirable) while political and religious compatibility as well as height rated lowest (i.e., least desirable). Abilities and personality tended to be more highly rated than physical factors and looks.

Preferences were correlated with various individual difference factors, two demographic, one self-rating of attractiveness, and the final two of the “ideological” or belief variable. Age of participant showed few correlations. The importance of the physical attractiveness of the partner was confirmed by the ratings. The more religious the person the greater importance they attached to personality (stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and values, especially religious compatibility. Religious compatibility was more important to females than males, but the relationship was consistent for both sexes. Political beliefs of the participants had few significant relationships.

The participants’ height, weight, and BMI were also correlated with the ratings. Heavier participants rated Conscientiousness ..., height ..., and education lower than lighter participants. Taller participants rated good looks more highly ... but Conscientiousness lower ... than shorter people. Participants’ BMI was correlated negatively with the rated importance of partner conscientiousness ..., height ..., education ..., and social skills .... Height of participant was correlated ... with ratings of height in a partner. For males the correlation was .63, but for females it was $r = .23$.

Thereafter a set of regressions were performed to examine which, and to what extent, the participant individual difference variables predicted their separate ratings ....

A. Ability: the only significant regression was for intelligence as criterion factor. Conscientious females rated this more highly ....
B. Personality: all except one regression was significant. The pattern showed that the participants' personality was the best predictor of personality trait preferences and that there was clear evidence of "like attracts like." Conscientious participants rated Conscientiousness in potential mates highly, as was the case with Openness which predicted ratings of Imaginativeness. Stable, Conscientious females rated Stability in a partner highly while open extraverts rated extraversion highly. However, Neurotic participants preferred stable partners and the participants' Agreeableness scores were unrelated to all ratings. This confirms the second hypothesis.

C. Physical: all four regressions were significant. Surprisingly neither sex, nor age, nor BMI were related to the overall ratings of physical characteristics. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were the only predictors. Disagreeable Conscientious participants rated physical attractiveness highly. Age was related to looks; older, Disagreeable people rated looks less important than younger people. Sex was the only predictor of ratings of height (not BMI) and thus accounted for over 10% of the variance. Open, Disagreeable, Conscientious people rated health most highly.

D. Social Factors: again, all regressions were significant and results showed three participant characteristics were consistently significant predictors. Conscientious, low BMI, females rated the overall factor most highly. Slimmer, conscientious people rated education highly, while Conscientious females rated social skills highly. However, it is possible that slimmness is a correlate of, and index of, higher socioeconomic status and education. This study did not measure socioeconomic status which would be desirable in future studies.

E. Values: all three regressions were significant. . . . Females with a conservative ideology (highly religious and right wing) placed high value on political compatibility. Low Openness participants with a conservative ideology placed considerable emphasis on religious compatibility. This confirms the third hypothesis.

4. Discussion

The results of this study provide broad support for the hypotheses, which are similar to other studies. Females did rate cognitive ability, social skills, height and conscientiousness more highly than males who in turn rated "good looks" more highly. This confirms nearly all the content analysis studies reviewed in the introduction. However, . . . differences in sex partner preferences are restricted to very specific areas. This study did not include wealth or profession but it could be argued that intelligent (cognitive ability), highly educated, Conscientious, and socially skilled males are most likely to have stable, well-paid, professional jobs. It is interesting to notice that height seemed of particular importance to females though overall it was the third lowest rated factor. Recent studies on height preferences showed that both men and women preferred relationships in which the woman was shorter than the man.

This study showed that there were individual differences, as well as simply sex differences in mate selection. For some factors there was general
agreement that the rated factor cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, physical health, social skills—was desirable. However, personality factors did clearly play a part in preferences for personality traits, particularly extraversion and conscientiousness.

There was clear evidence of the “birds of a feather” personality-likeness factor. For each of the regressions, with the exception of Agreeableness, the trait score of the participants on each of the five factors was predictive of the desired trait in a mate. This was strongest for Extraversion and Conscientiousness and throws in dispute Jungian ideas of “opposites” attracting one another, which have not seen much empirical support.

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of this study was to include political and religious beliefs as both a criterion and predictor variable. Overall religious and political compatibility was not rated as particularly important for these participants but religious compatibility more highly than political compatibility. Further the religious beliefs of participants were a more powerful predictor in their mate choice criteria than political beliefs. Other studies have documented the importance of religion in mate preferences. However, participant ideology did have predictively a very powerful impact on participants’ preference for political and religious compatibility. Indeed, together with openness, participant ideology predicted 30% of the variance in the ratings of religious compatibility.

How would evolutionary psychologists explain this? Religion is a strong predictor of values and life style. Religions pre- and prescribe behaviour with respect to money, alcohol, child-rearing. People of similar beliefs are less likely to argue about important social issues and to have similar aims and goals. Most religions still seem conservative with respect to sex-roles and encourage both in-group marriages and having many children to support the youth. People who stay within the faith are likely to be protected and assisted by others while the opposite is true for those who marry out. In this sense there are probably evolutionary advantages to select out people of similar religious beliefs.

Like all others this study has its limitations. The participants were all young and it would have been better to have had a wider age range from a more representative population group. Further it would be most desirable to know about the nature and status of their current relationship and whether they had indeed ever used lonely hearts columns. There is also a problem with respect to questionnaire methodology. Various evolutionary psychology studies have shown that females respond to testosterone-related markers of male physical traits as well as cues to facial and body bilateral symmetry. This means that there may be a mismatch between what females say they may want in a partner and what they actually seek or respond to. This is an important theoretical and methodological issue.

Research using photographs and “live models” suggest that small visual cues have a powerful effect below consciousness on the ratings of attractiveness, … such as the symmetry, length and size of fingers, hands, feet and legs, skin-tone, facial hair as well as face structure and shape. These have predictable and consistent relationships with ratings of attractiveness, health, preferences and therefore mate selection. Yet few if any person-descriptions used
in questionnaires contain such data preferring to mention more sociological markers like education or ability factors like intelligence or vocabulary. Thus, it may be that results in this area are very methodologically dependent because people actually respond more powerfully to physical cues they rarely mention and maybe are even unaware of. It may be possible to test the relative power of different factors experimentally by varying body-cues and verbal descriptions to see whether mate selection is based more on subtle physical markers of health, than sociological markers of status or wealth. It may also mean that ultimately the self-report methodology of questionnaires may lead to findings that are misleading in the sense that they do not represent how people behave when faced with visual cues.
POSTSCRIPT

Do Nice Guys Finish Last?

What do the more than 50 reality dating shows, from The Bachelorette to Average Joe to Hell Date, have in common? What assumptions do they reflect about what people are looking for in a relationship? What assumptions are they making about how relationships begin? What are the odds that the relationships formed on these shows will last? What can the lessons learned by relationship researchers tell us about these shows? Issues of women’s and men’s desired mating strategies abound and cover a range of relationships from one-night stands to short-term to long-term relationships. Two sets of explanations are advanced, one resting on evolutionary theory and one on sociocultural theories. Evolutionary theorists tell us that a combination of short-term and long-term mating strategies has the greatest reproductive advantage, especially for men. This approach is used to explain the greater tendency for infidelity among men than women and men’s greater intolerance for sexual than emotional infidelity in their female partners. Sociocultural explanations, on the other hand, look at the historically lower status of women and dependence on men for care of themselves and their children. These explanations suggest that women have learned to be more pragmatic in their mate selection. Character traits, values, and status are better indicators of a man’s willingness and ability to care for a family than his physical attractiveness. However, with greater opportunities for education and economic security, women may now have more choices than in earlier times for a variety of types of relationships. Yet, there are still questions about whether women can express their relationship desires free of societal constraints.

How do discussions of attraction and mate selection relate to issues of sexuality and sexual expression? Over the past three decades, women’s sexuality has changed—by some accounts dramatically—in ways more commensurate with men’s sexuality. In general, women are gaining greater sexual experience. They engage in intercourse at a younger age, they have more sex partners, they engage in sexual intercourse more frequently, and they are increasingly likely to engage in casual sex. Yet, despite this trend toward sex equality in behaviors, traditional gender socialization and the sexual double standard continue to act as an interpretive filter for sexual experience.

Competitiveness, assertiveness, and coercion often characterize males’ sexual experience. Males’ self- and peer-esteem are linked to sexual experience and performance. Many future-oriented sexologists caution that in striving for sexual equality, we must not limit ourselves to a preset “male” definition of sexual freedom.

Psychologist and sex researcher Leonore Tiefer argues that we need to encourage women’s sexual experimentation and explore sexual possibilities.
Furthermore, new ideas need to be developed about desire and pleasure. To facilitate this, there needs to be freely available information, ideas, images, and open sexual talk. Tiefer asserts that if women develop sexual knowledge and self-knowledge, they can take more responsibility for their own pleasure.

Traditional sex education programming has overlooked the possibility of female desire and sexual pleasure, nor does it focus on relationship issues. Some argue that sex education programs can be used to help females not allow themselves to be treated as objects but think of themselves as sexual subjects. Women as sexual subjects would feel free to seek out sexual pleasure and know that they have a right to this pleasure. This argument supports the assertion that we also need to raise boys to avoid treating females as sexual objects. The challenge for sex education programming is to inform women about the possible risks of sexual relationships without supporting the double standard that limits, inhibits, and controls their sexuality.

Ideally, sex education programming would include education specifically about gender ideology, as it influences sexual perceptions, decisions, and experiences. Conformity to gender-based norms and ideals for sexual activity and relationships is the most important source of peer sexual pressure and risky sex among youth; youth "perform" gender roles in sexual relations to secure gender affirmation.

Advocates of sex education reform also call for incorporating definitions of "good sex"—sex that is not coercive, exploitative, or harmful. Thus, greater attention to the meaning of healthy relationships is also necessary; young people could learn how to think about attributes to look for in an ideal partner and perhaps, in males in particular, can avoid the "dark triad" in potential mates. They caution not to impose rigid definitions of "sexual normality"; rather, identify some dimensions of healthy sexuality as examples upon which individuals can explore and develop their own unique sexual identity and style. It has been observed that a central practice in the social construction of gender inequality is compulsory heterosexuality or societal pressure to be heterosexual. Many sexual revolutionaries argue that an important condition of sexual freedom is freedom from pressures to be a particular "type" of sexual being or to be in a particular type of relationship.

Return to the questions asked at the beginning of this postscript about reality dating programs (RDP) and the impact of watching them in the context of this discussion about sex education programs. Unfortunately, watching RDPs has effects that run counter to good sex education programs. Research has shown that there is a correlation between the amount of RDP viewing and sexual attitudes and behaviors, such that greater consumption is associated with stronger endorsement of the sexual double standard, that dating is a game, the belief that appearance is important in dating, strong adversarial sexual beliefs, and that men are sex-driven. This finding is true for women and men, but men report using RDPs for learning more than women do. In discussing this research, Eileen Zurbriggen has said, "Thus, ironically, reality dating programs that purport to show "real" people in dating situations may actually be an impediment to viewers who hope to create healthy intimacy in their own relationships and to make intelligent decisions about sexuality."
Suggested Readings


