

Running Head: Effects on mate preferences

How gender, financial situation, and desired length of relationship affect  
mate preferences? The Proposal.

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How gender, financial situation, and desired length of relationship affect  
mate preferences?

The major theory which explained sex differences in mate preferences is the sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Based on evolutionary perspective, sex differences in mate preferences have developed from different reproductive constraints. In long-term relationship, women invest much more time for raising their children than men and they are weak during raising children, especially during pregnancy. Thus, women choose men who are willing to provide resources for them and their children for increasing the likelihood of survival. However, men do not have duties in carrying infants and are able to find resources during children growth. Therefore, men tend to choose women who are young and healthy for increasing reproductive success, which represent by physical attractiveness. This sex difference was revealed by comparing both sex averages of rating scales in various characteristics in both national samples (Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994) and cross-cultural samples (Buss, 1989).

Most of mate preference research methods were based on rating scales (Buss, 1989; Sprecher, et al., 1994), which some researchers suggested that rating paradigm was not congruent with actual mate selection. Li, Bailey, Kenrick, and Linsenmeier (2002) proposed purchasing-characteristic paradigm (PCP), which participants with limited mate budgets designed their ideal mate preferences. This paradigm was more similar to real life selection which people had to select mate characteristics. It was rare to find prospective mates who had every desired characteristic. This is the reason why I used this paradigm in my study. Li et al. (2002) found that PCP revealed the similar results to rating paradigm in predicting sex difference

in mate preferences in long-term relationship. However, the results of rating and PCP were not the same in more details, such as when including short-term relationship.

The sexual strategies theory explained that different expected duration of relationship changed the context of relationship and then changed expected benefits from mates. According to strategic pluralism theory (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000), women considered quality of men's genes instead, which represented by physical attractiveness. In men, the predictions in long- and short-term relationship were the same, which physical attractiveness was prominent. Therefore, the sex differences in mate preferences were found in long-term relationship, but not in short-term relationship. In PCP, Li and Kenrick (2006) found sex differences in this direction. In rating paradigm, however, Sprecher and Regan (2002) supported this direction partially. They did not find the significant interaction between sex and expected duration in relationship in mate preferences, but finding that both sexes chose mates who more physical attractiveness and less social status. Therefore, this prediction lead us to set two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* In long-term relationship, women will select mates who have more social status and less physical attractiveness than men

*Hypothesis 2:* In short-term relationship, women mate preferences were similar to men.

However, as proposed in the sexual strategies theory, the context of each person affected his or her mate preferences. For example, social status of participants affected people mate preferences. High social status people would be less serious about mates' social status. To support this prediction, Stone, Shackelford, and Buss (2008) correlated development index of each country with the mean of mate preferences of each country. They found that every indicator

of social status was negatively correlated with development index. In other words, when people gained higher social status, they would have concern about social status of mates less. In women who seek for long-term mates, the correlation between mate preferences in social status and participants' social status should be the greatest because resources were important in their children's survival. However, there was no sex difference in the correlation in Stone and colleagues (2008) study. The nonsignificant difference may come from rating methods, which people could select high level in both social status and physical attractiveness. However, when changing to PCP, people had to reduce social status of mates to physical attractiveness, which was more benefit in reproductive success, making the sex differences more obvious. This theory leads me to make the third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* Participants' social status will decrease preference in mates' social status and increase preference in physical attractiveness in women who sought for long-term mates only.

The research hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1. The graphs reveal that there is only sex difference in high participants' status in long-term mate preferences.

#### Method

There are three factors in this design: participants' social status (high or low), desired length of relationship (short-term which represent in one-night stand or long-term), and gender (male or female). Participants' social status and desired length of relationship will be manipulated within participants. Sex, which is the participants variable, will be treated as

between-subject factor. The dependent variables were mate preferences in social status and physical attractiveness.

### *Participants*

Approximate seventy undergraduates will join this study for extra credits in the research method in psychology class, which were 20 men and 50 women.

### *Material and Procedures*

Participants will answer demographic questions: sex, ethnicity, undergraduate major, marital status, and current mate status. After that, participants will answer four sheets of mate preferences questions in random order. Each sheet was the combination of levels of participants' social status and desired length of relationship factors.

Each sheet of mate preferences will separate in two parts: answer sheet and 13 stars stickers, as shown in Figure 2. Participants will spend the stars for designing ideal mate characteristics in each condition. The answer sheet will contain a table with three columns, representing mate preferences in three dimensions: physical attractiveness, social status, and warmth/trustworthiness<sup>1</sup>. These three dimensions will start at 0<sup>th</sup> percentile. The star will represent 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in each dimension. Participants have to attach all stars to their answer sheets. Participants cannot keep their stars to spend in other conditions.

### Analysis and Expected Result

I will use mixed design ANOVA: two within-participant factors (participants' social status and desired length of relationship) and a between-participant factor (sex). Dependent variables will be stars allocating to physical attractiveness and social status. I expect to find the three-way interaction in both dependent variables. As shown in Figure 1, the sex difference

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<sup>1</sup> The last dimension will be used because of avoiding perfectly negative correlate between stars spending in physical attractiveness and social status.

should be significant in only the condition of long-term relationship and high participants' social status. Therefore, the simple interaction effect will reveal in the high participants' social status group, but not in the low participants' social status group. The detail of expected results of all main and interaction effects was shown in Table 1.

### Conclusion

If the result supports the expected result, it will clarify the relationship between the sexual strategies theory and the strategic pluralism theory. That is, in general, people in both genders would like to find good genes and mates who have more reproductive success, which predicted by the strategic pluralism theory. However, when women are not confident that their resources are enough for raising their children, they will change their preference of good genes to resources, which predicted by the sexual strategies theory. In other words, not every woman would like mates who provide resources. Women would like resources when they expect that they will be short of resources in the future.

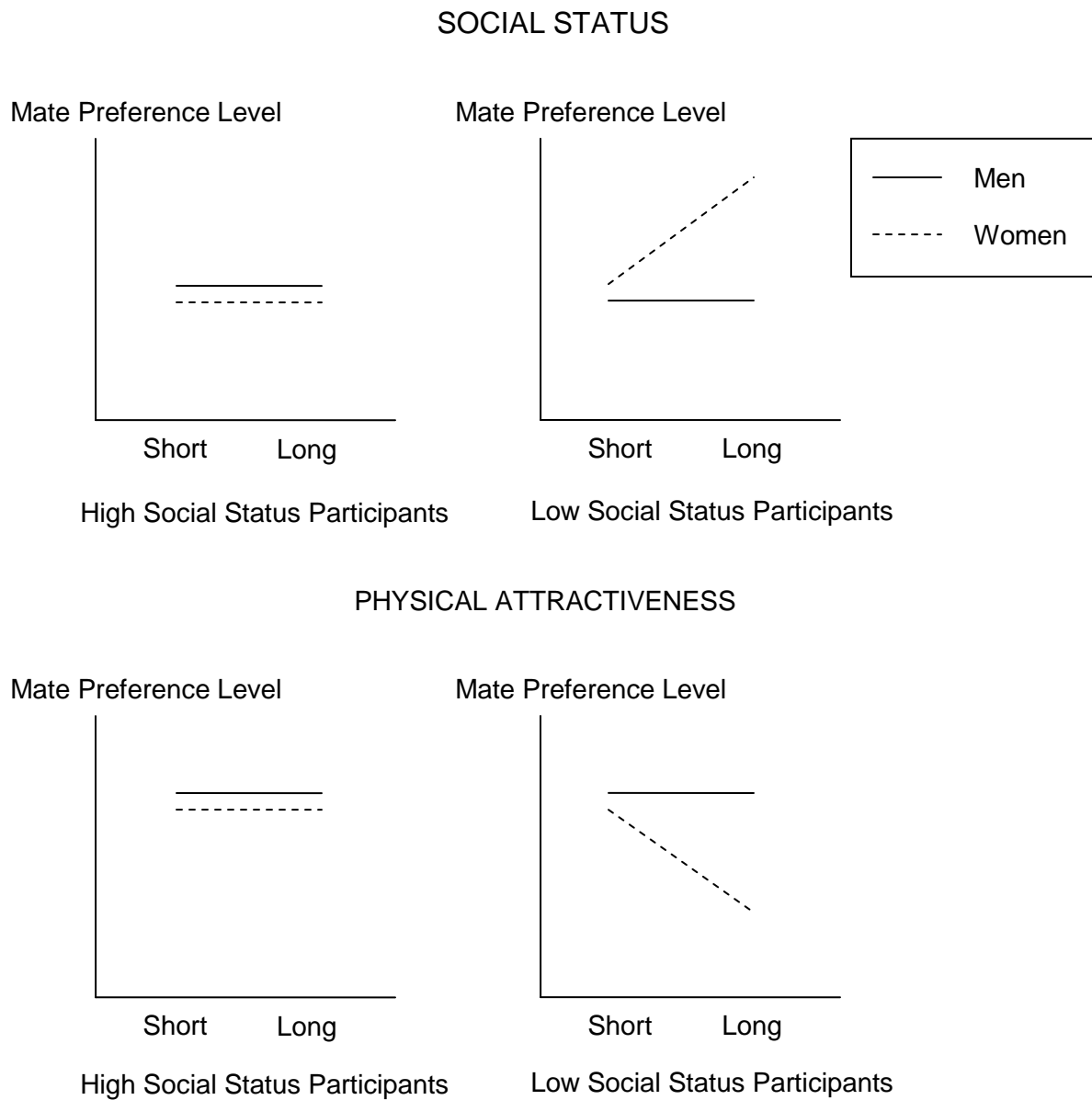
However, the result of PCP paradigm may not accurately predict real mates (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). There are a lot of factors making people not select their desired mates, such as the perceived number of opposite sexes who are available for short- or long-term relationship, the perceptions of their own desirability as other people's mates (Sprecher & Regan, 2002), or the emotional factors occurring toward other people (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008).

## References

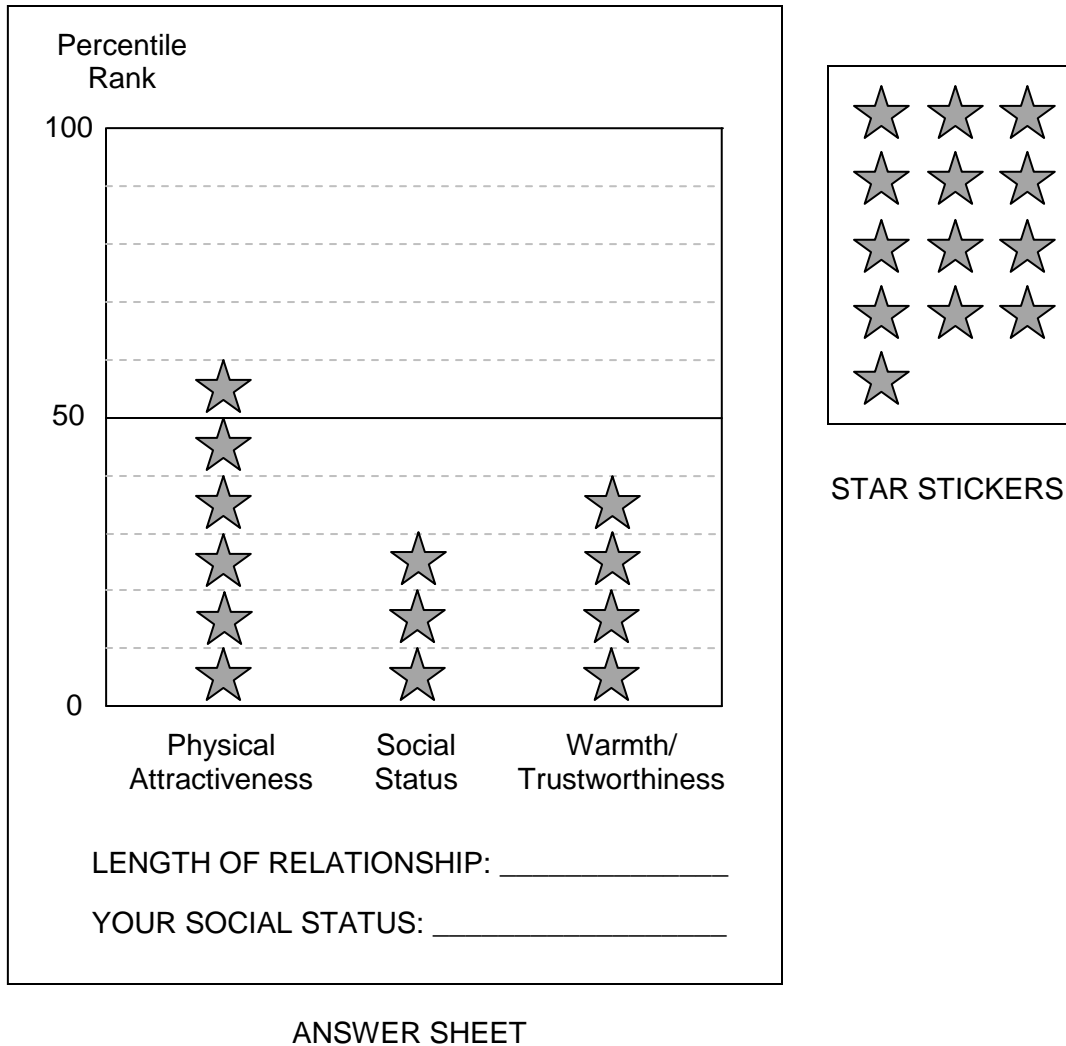
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*Figure 1.* The three hypotheses of this study are illustrated in four separate graphs. The top and bottom two graphs represent the effects of three factors toward social status and physical attractiveness, respectively. According to the graphs, the sex differences, which represent by distance between two lines in each graph, are prominent only in people who have low social status and seek for long-term relationship.



*Figure 2.* The purchasing characteristics paradigm requires participants to spend the stars for designing their ideal mates, by attaching 13 star stickers in answer sheets which divide mate characteristics into three dimensions: physical attractiveness, social status, and warmth/trustworthiness. These three dimensions start at 0<sup>th</sup> percentile. Each star represent 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on each dimension. Each participant has to answer four times, which represent the combination of participants' social status (high or low) and desired relationship length (one-night stand or long-term relationship).

Table 1

*Expected result of mixed design ANOVA which dependent variables are stars allocated to physical attractiveness and social status.*

Effect	Social Status	Physical Attractiveness
Sex × Length × PSS	Significant	Significant
Sex × Length	Significant	Significant
<i>in High PSS</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>
<i>in Low PSS</i>	<i>Significant</i>	<i>Significant</i>
Length × PSS	Significant	Significant
Sex × PSS	Significant	Significant
Sex	Significant	Significant
<i>in High PSS and Short-term</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>
<i>in High PSS and Long-term</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>
<i>in Low PSS and Short-term</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>
<i>in Low PSS and Long-term</i>	<i>Significant</i>	<i>Significant</i>
Length	Significant	Significant
PSS	Significant	Significant

Note. PSS = Participants' Social Status. Italicized contents reveal the expected results of simple

interaction effects and simple main effects when broken three-way interaction down by participants' social status and then desired length of relationship.