Stable Mating Criteria for Human Females

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The mating criteria used by unwed females in America between 1930-1990s were examined by Buss et. al. (2001). The ranking from most to least preferred is the following:

- Emotional Stability

- Dependable Character

- Mutual Attraction

- Pleasing disposition

- Ambition, industriousness

This seems at first not particularly interesting, but it is strongly at odds with the prevailing evolutionary theories of mate selection which emphasize physical attractiveness of females and social status and financial prospects and status for males. These do belong to the list, but much higher than rank 10 for both males and females.

1   Association of Criteria to Big Five Model

The Big Five Model of McRae and Costa and others came from a different tradition of descriptive personality traits. The mnemonic is OCEAN, with O=Openness, C=Conscientiousness, E=Extraversion, A=Agreeableness, N=Neurotocism. We can now take the measured data on female mate preferences and make the natural association of (1) Emotional Stability to (negative) Neuroticism, (2) Dependable Character to Conscientiousness, (4) Pleasing disposition with Agreeableness. This association allows us to immediately merge two strains of research, the descriptive personality traits on one side, and on sexual mating psychology of humans on the other side in a *natural manner*.

The naturality here is that the Buss 2001 paper was not interested in personality traits but actual characteristics sought in mates by females. It is in this sense not contrived data.

It is purely serendipitious discovery of mine that the top five ranked desired characteristics have natural association to the big five personality trait model.

This is a tremendously fortunate discovery because there is a great deal of confusion still in our collective understanding of two separate questions.

One the one hand a natural question is what is the evolutionary explanation for effects on the big five personality traits. On the other hand the question is what are the personality traits involved in the explicit desires of females for mates. Conventional, and misguided answers to the latter had been that the main issues are sexual attractiveness and youth of females and social status and resources of the males are the major priority. In fact, neither of these appear in the top five desires. Instead, we find that personality traits of Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness are directly demanded by both females and males for desirable characteristics of mates.

2   Simple interpretation

The simple interpretation is that human females and males have instinctively developed an intuition to avoid mates who will be predatory, aggressive, and harmful in various ways to their interests and instead be friendly and open. Thus here it is not eros but rather thanatos that is driving the top choice for mating – i.e. emotional stability – in the simplest view is to avoid threats of murder if there is high neuroticism. It is known that neuroticism has the component of the fear and aggressive reactions as well as other malaises that threaten the female. It is interesting to see that these thanatos considerations also are in the male mate choices as top priorities too.

This may seem simple, but because the data come from measurements rather than speculation that emotional stability is indeed the top choice.

Let us look at the data and ranking by average of 1930s to 1990s of American women's mate preferences.

The equivalent for males is the following.

3   Paradigm Shift

Scientific theories are only valuable if they match observations; otherwise they need to be considered provisional. Here we can just look at direct observation of mate characteristics and recognize that the features targeted for modeling of human reproduction such as sexual attractiveness and social and financial prospects are well below rank 10 out of 17 and therefore are not primary driving forces determining coupling and reproduction in humans. Therefore all correct theories must necessarily reproduce this ranking. This ranking is as close to ground truth that one can find in the evolutionary psychology. This will allow us to produce sharper and more accurate theories in the future.

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10
1	Rank	Period	30	50	60	70	80	90	Avg	Surprise
2	1	Emotional stability	1	2	1	2	2	3	1.833333333	Neurotic
3	2	Dependable character	2	1	2	3	3	2	2.166666667	Moral V
4	3	Mutual Attraction	5	6	3	1	1	1	2.833333333	Romant
5	4	Pleasing disposition	4	5	4	4	4	4	4.166666667	Agreeab
6	5	Ambition, industrious	3	4	6	6	6	7	5.333333333	Charact
7	6	Desire for children	7	3	5	10	7	6	6.333333333	Family
8	7	Education, intelligence	9	14	7	5	5	5	7.5	Exp hig
9	8	Good health	6	9	10	8	9	9	8.5	Health
10	9	Similar Educational Background	12	8	9	9	10	10	9.666666667	30 perce
11	10	Sociability	11	11	13	7	8	8	9.666666667	
12	11	Refinement, neatness	8	7	8	12	12	12	9.833333333	Aristocr
13	12	Good financial prospect	13	12	12	11	11	11	11.66666667	Exp hig
14	13	Similar religious background	14	10	11	13	15	14	12.83333333	
15	14	Favorable social status	15	13	14	14	14	15	14.16666667	Exp hig
16	15	Good Looks	17	18	17	15	13	13	15.5	Exp hig
17	16	Chastity	10	15	15	18	18	17	15.5	Virtue
18	17	Similar political background	18	17	18	17	17	18	17.5	

References

ibitem David Buss et. al. Half a Century of Mate Preferences: Changes in Values, J. Family and Marriage, 63, 2001, 491–503

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