GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MATE SELECTION CRITERIA AMONG MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether gender differences existed in the mate selection criteria of undergraduate students in a public university. The participants recruited in this study were 132 undergraduate students between the ages of 20 to 28 years and they were selected by purposive and random sampling. The test instrument used was a mate selection inventory made up of Sternberg’s love components, McCrae’s personality traits, David Buss’s physical traits and mate selection traits from the work of Sprecher. The Cronbach’s alpha value for this 62-item inventory was .79. The results showed significant gender differences in mate selection criteria. Males were found to prefer passion, agreeableness, symmetrical bone structure, slim waist size, good looks and youthfulness, and were more liberal about accepting people who were less educated, divorced, less successful and unemployed. Females were found to prefer a mate with a successful career, employed, educated and disliked the notion of marrying a divorcée, unemployed person, less successful and less educated than themselves.

Keywords: Mate selection, marriage, gender differences, undergraduates

Introduction

It is easy to see how people select their life-partner or the characteristics they want in the person they take from the bridal aisle to the grave. Most people meet someone in their working place and are attracted to characteristics which are similar or complementary to make them complete.

This process of mate selection has been there from the dawn of human civilization. Primitive male caveman known as ‘hunter-gatherers’ used to hunt not only for food but did compete with each other for building bigger and better quality caves and using clubs to obtain the woman of their dreams. It is interesting to note that at that time males had a set of defined traits they wanted in a mate which would ensure the survival of their ancestral lines or genes. Females with large breasts, thick lips, bigger waist to hip ratios meant greater reproductive potential. Women had the choice of selecting husbands from a wide selection of eligible mates including those who had an abundance of food, clothing or shelter. The evolutionary process of mate selection continued down across time and it was seen that males and females valued characteristics that were male defined traits and female defined traits.

Thus the important issue of how men and women choose their life-partners came into play. That is, whether there is a real gender difference due to the forces of nature