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## Partner Preferences and Selection at Pepperdine University

Katie Pietraszak

*Pepperdine University*, [Katie.Pietraszak@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Katie.Pietraszak@pepperdine.edu)

Max Mowrer

*Pepperdine University*, [Max.Mowrer@Pepperdine.edu](mailto:Max.Mowrer@Pepperdine.edu)

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## **Partner Preferences and Selection at Pepperdine University**

Katie Pietraszak and Max Mowrer

### **Abstract**

This study investigates undergraduate students' partner preferences and selection at Pepperdine University by examining the traits desired of those seeking a potential partner and the expectations one has for them. Results from the survey responses support previous research in this area and indicate males' preference for dominant feminine traits, including physical attractiveness, and females' preference for dominant masculine traits, such as high earning potential. While the majority of males and females desired a more egalitarian relationship, males were more likely to want their partners to be a follower and females were more likely to desire their partners to assume the leadership position in the relationship. The evolutionary and social structural approaches toward mate selection are useful in understanding these similarities and differences between males and females. These gender differences within relationships supported by the results of this study illustrate the conventional and traditional model that persists throughout society. Despite movement toward more egalitarian relationships in terms of division of labor, these findings show that this equality seems too idealistic. Future research of this topic is encouraged to further comprehend the motivations behind partner selection, especially at Pepperdine University.

## **Partner Preferences and Selection at Pepperdine University**

The phrases “ring by spring” and “no one dates here” could both seemingly describe the dating culture among students attending Pepperdine University. As polarized and conflicted as these phrases seem, the anecdotal perceptions of students reflect what they see in regards to these two notions: no one is dating but there is always recent news of an engagement or upcoming wedding dates. Reasons for the lack of dating vary depending on which student is asked. Some may say that the majority of men, who are mostly held responsible, are too timid in approaching women on campus. In rebuttal, others' responses indicate that dating at Pepperdine consists of and requires men to get the approval of not just one woman but of all those in her social network, from her friends and roommates to her sorority sisters. In this culture, dating

one person also means dating all of those connected to him or her, having to meet the needs of all those socially involved.

No matter the reasons, students find it difficult to obtain a partner. There are possible prominent differences between genders at Pepperdine University when seeking a partner, and as unique as Pepperdine is in relation to other universities, these characteristics may influence which traits students prefer and seek out in a potential partner. As a private, religiously affiliated university, students may value to a higher degree traits such as religiosity and community involvement. The conservative background of most students may also result in a traditional separation of genders in which masculine males are seen as leaders and feminine females are viewed as followers. Pepperdine's position and status as a liberal college among religiously affiliated schools, however, may also reflect students' preferences for equality in relationships and non-dominant, non-stereotypical traits in their partner's gender.

The goal of this study was to examine whether gender similarities and differences exist in partner preferences and selection at Pepperdine University. Through surveying students on their trait preferences and expectations in a potential partner, the data collected from the respondents would then reveal whether Pepperdine students seek traditional ideals in relationships or whether this sample displayed the modern generation's views of relationships in which they support and value equality but still hold and practice these cliché notions of gender. Previous research indicates that males are more likely to place higher importance on attractiveness and dominant feminine traits while females value the earning potential of a prospective mate along with dominant masculine traits. The evolutionary and social structural approaches to

mate selection support these findings, and as a result, it is hypothesized that the data collected from this sample of undergraduate students at Pepperdine University will also provide evidence to support these results, illustrating a preference among students for more traditional ideals within a relationship.

### *Literature Review*

Various studies explore the area of partner preferences and selection with regards to the similarities and differences between males and females. In the article "Mate Selection Preferences: Gender Differences Examined in a National Sample," Susan Sprecher, Quintin Sullivan, and Elaine Hatfield extend research on gender differences in mate selection by analyzing data collected from single adults in a national probability sample, the National Survey of Families and Households (1994). In accordance with the evolutionary theory and sociocultural perspective, previous research examines the desire for three partner attributes: physical attractiveness, youth, and earning potential and related socioeconomic characteristics. The evidence suggested from multiple studies as well as the results obtained from this study point to men valuing physical attractiveness and youth to a greater degree than women, and women valuing earning potential to a greater degree than men (Sprecher et al. 1994). What distinguishes these authors' research from previous studies is that it is conducted with a national probability sample rather than small, non-representative samples. Also, this study takes into account different socioeconomic groups in the national sample and examines whether the magnitude of the gender differences in mate selection preferences depends on age and race. The gender differences found in this study were consistent with those of previous research:

Men were more willing than women to marry someone younger by 5 years, someone who was not likely to hold a steady job, someone who earned less, and someone who had less education. Women were more willing than men to marry someone who was not good-looking, someone older by 5 years, someone who earned more than they, and someone who had more education. (Sprecher et al. 1994: 1078)

These results existed regardless of age, but the various socioeconomic groups differed slightly in the magnitude of gender difference for some preferences. Whether these different mate selection preferences change or shift as a result of increased egalitarian sexual relationships is unknown and a matter of future research.

Raymond Fisman, Sheena Iyengar, Emir Kamenica, and Itamar Simonson also examine mate selection preferences in the form of dating behavior. In their article “Gender Differences in Mate Selection: Evidence from a Speed Dating Experiment,” the authors employ an experimental Speed Dating market in which subjects meet a number of potential mates and have the opportunity to accept or reject each partner, and if there is a mutual acceptance and both persons desire a future meeting, contact information in the form of email addresses were exchanged (2006). This design allows for the direct observation of individual preferences and the “Yes” and “No” decisions for each partner. The study focuses on three key characteristics: attractiveness, intelligence, and ambition. Evidence shows that there is a clear difference in the attribute weights on attractiveness and intelligence. It is found that “men put more weight on physical attractiveness than females do, while females put more weight on intelligence” (Fisman et al. 2006: 683). When considering the influence of subjects’ own attributes on the demand for particular partners, men do not value women’s intelligence or ambition when it exceeds their own, and a man is less likely to select a woman whom he perceives to be more ambitious than he is. Also, women prefer partners from more

affluent neighborhoods and exhibit a strong preference for partners of their own race, while men do not (Fisman et al. 2006). This research on preferences for a romantic partner is useful but can be further examined and extended. Focusing on long term outcomes and relationship information and incorporating uncertainty and learning, which are relevant in the longer run, are important steps for building upon the current literature concerning behavior within dating decisions.

Research from Howard Russock samples personal advertisements for those seeking mates, accounting separately for gender and sexual orientation (2011). By sampling personal advertisements, various mate preferences and valued characteristics emerged. The gendered differences found between heterosexual males and females resulted in females offering attractiveness more often and seeking more resources while males were more likely to offer commitment and seek younger mates. Specifically, “heterosexual males sought physical attractiveness significantly more than heterosexual females did and heterosexual females sought resources significantly more than heterosexual males did” (Russock 2011: 318). For homosexual males, seeking attractiveness was valued greater than homosexual females and both heterosexual males and females. This particular finding may result from and can be explained by heterosexual males reacting to the strategies of females. Overall, in this study, homosexual males “behaved as if they remained functionally linked to the ultimate functions of mate choice” in heterosexual males while homosexual females “did not mimic” heterosexual female behavior and “exhibited no functional link between ultimate procreation and proximate mate preferences” (Russock 2011: 321).

The research regarding mate selection processes, including strategies to evaluate potential mates and criteria that men and women seek in a mate, reveal a recurring pattern of sexual differentiation within human mate selection behaviors. According to Elizabeth Shoemake, this research has developed under, and is explained by, two main theoretical approaches or perspectives: evolutionary and social structural. The evolutionary approach proposes that “men and women have evolved sex-specific cognitive mechanisms from primeval environments that cause them to differ psychologically” (Shoemake 2007: 35). Men and women thereby are predisposed to behave and make decisions in a differential manner. This perspective is grounded in evolutionary theory and the basic principles of Darwin. These principles state that animals struggle for existence, and in that struggle, the process of natural selection will cause more desirable traits to replace those that are less adaptive for survival (Shoemake 2007). Therefore, historical mate selection behaviors were successful in that they have led to the continued existence and prosperity of the human species. This “survival of the fittest” perspective continues to influence current mate choices. On the other end of the spectrum, the second theoretical perspective, the social structural, posits that mate selection strategies result from the “contrasting social positions that men and women have historically occupied within society” rather than evolved psychological dispositions (Shoemake 2007: 35). According to this theoretical framework, human mate selection strategies are primarily based on attempts to maximize resources in an environment constrained by society’s prescribed gender roles and expectations and also division of labor. For example, women are delegated roles that have less power and less access to resources, so in order to gain power, women

seek out these characteristics in potential mates. In turn, a marketable exchange is made in which women offer commodities that they do have access to, such as physical beauty, in exchange for more favorable traits in their mate (Shoemaker 2007). There has been some debate as to which approach retains greater validity, and it is suggested that development of an integrative model, a combination of the evolutionary and social structural approaches, will be especially beneficial.

“The balance of power in most marriages reflects the ideology of separate spheres in the conventional marital contract” (Tichenor 2005: 415). In “Thinking about Gender and Power in Marriage,” Veronica Tichenor explores how rights and obligations are divided along gender lines, which construct men as breadwinners and women as mothers and homemakers. Men are “entitled and encouraged to perform as ‘ideal workers’ in the market place, unencumbered by the demands of family life,” while women are “marginalized in the workplace by their domestic responsibilities,” limiting their options and opportunities at work (Tichenor 2005: 415). Not only does the conventional marital contract divide responsibilities between spouses, but it also reinforces men’s power within marriage because the responsibilities and tasks of husbands and wives are valued differently. Historically, men wield power based on their greater incomes they earn and the standard of living their families enjoy as a result of this income. Women, then, are expected to defer to their husbands’ authority because their caring or unpaid work, in comparison to men’s status of breadwinning, is accorded lesser value. Men and women are seen to get more ‘credit,’ both inside and outside of the marriage, for engaging in activities that are consistent with conventional gender identities (Tichenor 2005). Women’s participation in the labor force does little to alter



the division of domestic labor. In marital relationships in which wives are major breadwinners, husbands do not compensate for their wives' high earnings by taking on more household labor. According to Tichenor (2005):

Their wives' earnings disrupt a balance of power that feels culturally right, and either these men attempt to restore that balance by asserting their right as men to their wives' domestic labor, or wives take on more household work voluntarily to avoid further assaulting their husbands' masculinity. Couples engage in 'gender display' or 'deviance neutralization' to restore a sense that spouses are meeting their conventional obligations. (P. 419)

This demonstrates that men's power in marriage does not come from their income or role as primary breadwinner. Rather, gender, regarded as a separate structure, shapes the balance of power within marriage.

Louise Roth further explores the role of power as illustrated in the gender inequality on Wall Street. From the initial entrance of women as professionals on Wall Street in the 1970's, women continue to experience gender discrimination. According to Roth, "obstacles for women remain entrenched, even after past legislative actions have removed the most blatant displays of gender bias (2006: 367). Wall Street remains a male-dominated environment, and the fact remains that women who are equal to their male counterparts continue to make less money. Women are disproportionately funneled into groups with lower revenue potential, and women continue to fight the cultural assumptions that portray them as being less competent (Roth 2006). It is interesting to note that women in the workplace are forced into stereotyped roles, demanding that they represent all women while also meeting the standards set by the male majority, and this poses a problem in that the encouraged stereotypical feminine behaviors are often devalued even if they improve performance. Occupations become gender typed, meaning that the gender role becomes part of the work role. "Work in

female-dominated jobs is then structured to take advantage of women's stereotyped traits while not rewarding them as skills" (Roth 2006: 372). Women are continuously blocked by the glass ceiling, and this could, in turn, affect their selection and preferences in a potential partner.

Children's fairy tales also serve as gendered scripts that legitimize and support the dominant gender system. In "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales," Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz focus on the prominent message represented in many children's fairy tales: the feminine beauty ideal. The feminine beauty ideal can be described as the "socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain" (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003: 185). While many women willingly engage in beauty rituals and perceive being beautiful as empowering rather than oppressive, women who seek or gain power through their attractiveness are often those who are most dependent on men's resources (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003). There is frequent mention of characters' physical appearance in fairy tales, but according to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, women's beauty is highlighted more than men's attractiveness, and there is a clear link between beauty and goodness and between ugliness and evil. While beauty is often rewarded in fairy tales, lack of beauty is likely to be punished. The focus on and glorification of feminine beauty in children's fairy tales may represent a means by which inequality is reproduced. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz explain that "women may 'voluntarily' withdraw from or never pursue activities or occupations they fear will make them appear 'unattractive.' The competition women may feel toward other women over physical

appearance may limit their ability to mobilize as a group” (2003: 191). The feminine beauty ideal may persist through children’s fairy tales, but these and other forms of media should not be viewed as simple gender scripts. Much research supports traditional ideals in intimate relationships, but an ever-changing society could, in fact, challenge these notions in pursuit of more egalitarian relations.

### *Research Method*

In order to measure the similarities and differences in partner selection along the lines of gender, a survey was created and distributed among undergraduate students at Pepperdine University’s Seaver College. The sample consisted of both males and females, ranging from the freshman to the senior class. A non-probability and availability sampling method was utilized because the chance of every undergraduate student being selected to participate in this research study was not an equal or known chance, and the sample was based primarily on students known personally, distributing the survey via email and online social networking sites, such as Facebook. The original sampling goal was 80 to 100 students, and this goal was exceeded, collecting 111 responses from students. Unfortunately, the sample of undergraduate students is not representative because over half of the respondents, around fifty-six percent, are from the senior class and approximately seventy percent are female (see Figure 3). Our results, then, are limited to Pepperdine University’s Seaver College and may not be generalized to the greater population, but certain patterns revealed through the survey results may reinforce the evidence from previous studies.

In order to gauge the gender similarities and differences in partner selection, various questions were asked regarding the traits students most prefer in a partner and the expectations of one's future or current partner in a relationship. The surveyed students disclosed information regarding their relationship status and dating experience and expectations while attending Pepperdine University. Questions regarding the amount of power in a relationship were asked, with students either preferring a more egalitarian relationship or one in which his or her partner was the leader or the follower. Respondents were also required to rank on a Likert scale the importance of certain traits, some more stereotypically male or female, in an ideal future partner, including assertive, attractive, confident, independent, caring, and sensitive. Because Pepperdine is a Christian university and also prides itself on volunteerism and community service, students were asked to rank the importance of their future partner's religiosity and involvement in community service as well. Lastly, participants were presented with a condition or situation, such as the partner being taller, and asked whether it would "make" or "break" a relationship. With the variety of questions asked within the survey, the responses collected offered insight as to which traits students preferred and the resulting similarities and differences revealed across gender.

After reviewing literature and previous studies pertaining to this topic, a number of hypotheses were formulated. First, it was predicted that males would place higher importance on attractiveness and would prefer their partners to possess stereotypical or dominant feminine traits, and females would also prefer dominant masculine traits in a partner. It was also thought that religiosity and community involvement would rank higher in importance since Pepperdine University values both of these characteristics.

Second, it was expected that both males and females would continue to adhere to gender roles in regards to the “make it” or “break it” questions. For females, a partner not having a car, being non-religious, never paying for dates, and being shorter would most likely “break” a relationship. On the other hand, males would “break” a relationship if their partner was taller and always earned more income. Lastly, it was presumed that most students would be expecting to find a partner while attending Pepperdine University and as a result, would also be displeased with the current dating scene.

### *Results*

The majority of the students surveyed, around 68%, are single (see Figure 1), but more females than expected are single and more males than expected are in a relationship. A little over half of students have dated while attending Pepperdine University, but a large percentage has not dated. Before coming to Pepperdine, the majority of students, male and female, “somewhat” expected to find a partner, and since majority of students, who happen to be female, are single, it is expected that the majority, over 60%, are also “not” pleased with the dating scene at Pepperdine. While this seems to be the case according to the data collected, it is interesting to note that more females than expected are either “not” pleased or only “somewhat” pleased and more males than expected are “more” or “very” pleased with the dating scene (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). This may be explained by the demographics of Pepperdine University’s Seaver College because approximately two-thirds of undergraduate students are female, allowing males more options and opportunities to date and constraining females’ position within the dating scene.

Also, as students' class increased, their degree of displeasure with the dating scene also increased, with only 11 out of 84 upperclassmen being pleased. Those students who entered Pepperdine expecting to find a partner were more likely to not be pleased, and contrastingly, those not expecting to find a partner were more pleased. As can be expected, students who either are single or have not dated at Pepperdine were significantly more likely to not be pleased. What was unexpected, however, were the results that indicated that those who had no expectations of finding a partner are more likely to be in a relationship, and those students with at least some expectations are more likely to be single. Approximately 83% of students who had expectations entering Pepperdine are single and less than half of them have dated while at Pepperdine, and 80% of those single students are either juniors or seniors. The amount of time for a relationship to be considered serious also varies across gender. The majority of males considered three to six months enough time for a relationship to be regarded as serious while six to twelve months was preferred for females.

When asked whether students would prefer their partner to be the leader, lead equally, or be the follower in the relationship, majority of the students surveyed chose an egalitarian relationship. However, more females than expected would rather have their partner be the leader and more males than expected preferred their partner to be the follower, with absolutely no males desiring their partner to be the leader in the relationship (see figures 4.1 and 4.2). When factoring in females' preferred traits in their partner, dominant masculine traits (strong, independent, and productive) were associated with wanting their partner to be the leader while males' preferred subordinate female traits (outspoken, intelligent, and self-reliant) seemed to match with

wanting a more egalitarian relationship. In ranking the importance of certain traits or characteristics in an ideal partner, the data collected revealed a few significant gender differences. The majority of both males and females considered confidence, independence, and sensitivity to be “more” or “very” important in an ideal partner, and while majority of males and females deemed a caring partner as being “very” important, a greater percentage of females than males indicated this as so. The noteworthy gender differences can be observed in relation to the importance of assertiveness and attractiveness. For females, assertiveness was considered “more” to “very” important while males showed this trait to be only “somewhat” important in a partner. Also, females rated attractiveness to be “more” important, but males, on the other hand, found an attractive partner to be “very” important. If female students were seeking subordinate masculine traits (caring, honest, and listener) in a potential partner, then they were more than likely to value assertiveness as “more” important, and those seeking dominate masculine traits often indicated assertiveness as being “very” important (see Figure 5.1 and 5.2). Similar results are found in regards to the importance of independence within a potential partner, with a significant difference seen between those seeking subordinate masculine traits and subordinate feminine traits. For female students who prefer subordinate masculine traits, an independent partner was valued as “somewhat” important, and all male respondents seeking subordinate feminine traits (see Figure 6.1 and 6.2) in a potential partner valued attractiveness as either “more” or “very” important, with a majority indicating attractiveness as “very” important. Although not exactly statistically significant, it is interesting to note that males at Pepperdine were more self-confident in approaching a potential partner than

females, and in regards to the degree of openness in being asked out, males and females answered similarly and were about equal in their responses.

Students were asked whether a relationship would “make it” or “break it” depending on certain factors or situations, and significant gender differences were observed from the data collected. If a student’s potential partner was older, 100% of females would make the relationship work while a few males would break the relationship. For females, the majority would break a relationship off if their partners were shorter while the overwhelming majority of males would consider the relationship to “make it.” On the other end of the spectrum, if a potential partner was taller, that would be a deal breaker for the majority of males while females consider a taller partner to be preferred. For a partner who never pays for dates, approximately 80% of those who would “break it” are female and about 80% of those who would “make it” are male. Similarly, females are more comfortable with a partner who would always earn more income, while majority of those who would break off this type relationship were male. Notably, of those who would “make it” if their partner never pays for dates, about 94% of students responded with attractiveness as either being “more” or “very” important. For those characteristics that are somewhat particular to Pepperdine University, both males and females considered religiosity and involvement in community service to be “more” or “very” important in a potential partner (see Figures 7 and 8), but more females than males place high importance on community service and more females than males would break off a relationship if their partner was non-religious. There were consistent responses between the importance of a partner’s religiosity and a possible non-religious partner. For those in which religiosity was of higher importance, 62 out of 72



respondents would “break” the relationship if the potential partner was non-religious, and of those students who indicated a partner’s religiosity as not important, majority would make the relationship work if his or her partner was non-religious.

### *Discussion*

Previous research on mate selection has found that men value physical attractiveness and youth to a greater degree than women while women place greater importance on earning potential and intelligence, as demonstrated through the studies of Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield; Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, and Simonson; and Russock. The data collected from the survey respondents also reinforce these findings. While physical attractiveness was important for both males and females, males were more likely to rate this trait as “very” important. In regards to earning potential and other socioeconomic characteristics, female respondents more often than not would “break” a relationship if their partner never paid for dates. Also, majority of females’ relationships would “make it” if their partner always earned more income. These results support the hypothesis postulated before research was conducted and before responses were collected from students. The high importance of physical attractiveness for men and the greater value of earning potential for women can be further explained by the evolutionary and social structural theories proposed through Shoemaker’s previous research.

According to the evolutionary perspective, males and females are predisposed to behave and make decisions in a differential manner, selecting traits in a mate that would continue the existence and prosperity of the human species. Much evidence is available to support a relationship between human biological heritage and mate

selection practices in relation to physical attractiveness. Analysis of the relationship of symmetry, averageness, and sexual dimorphism to facial attractiveness suggests that each of these facial characteristics may be considered ideally attractive because they are related to judgments of physical health. This “good-genes” approach is based on the idea that “not only have humans evolved to select for physically attractive features, such as symmetry and averageness, but that the attractive features themselves have evolved to represent freedom from parasites and infectious disease (Shoemaker 2007:37). Males expect and prefer their partners to possess and maintain physical attractiveness, and this trait is given very high importance especially when female partners exude stereotypically “subordinate” feminine traits, such as being outspoken, intelligent, and self-reliant. An evolutionary perspective offers a partial explanation for male’s preference of physical attractiveness, but a social structural approach is useful for interpreting this common patterns found in previous studies along with the results from this study.

The feminine beauty ideal, or the value of physical attractiveness for females to maintain, is perpetuated throughout society in various forms of literature and media, including children’s fairy tales. From a young age, girls continually receive the message that attractiveness is one of their most important assets, and many women who seek to gain power through their attractiveness are often most dependent on men’s resources (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003: 185). According to the social structural perspective of mate selection, males and females occupy contrasting social positions and are constrained by various gender roles and expectations within society. “In society, women are delegated to have roles that have less power and less access to

resources. In order to gain power and access to resources, women seek out these characteristics in potential mates” (Shoemaker 2007: 36). Women, therefore, value characteristics such as earning potential in a prospective mate as a result of the constraining forces in society that place women in a position in which it is difficult to obtain financial security, for example. Gender socialization is also important in understanding the responses obtained by males and females within the sample. “Men and women exhibit gender specific preferences for certain mate criteria because of sex role socialization” (Shoemaker 2007: 38). Men and women are taught how to “do” gender from a young age, fulfilling the roles specifically demonstrated as being appropriately masculine and feminine. Male and female students at Pepperdine University have illustrated this notion of sex role socialization through their responses. Males were more likely to be self-confident when approaching a potential partner, they tended to choose a relationship in which their partner was more of a follower, and would “break” the relationship if their partner was taller and always earned more income and would make it work if their partner never paid for dates or happened to be shorter. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to prefer a partner who took on the role of the leader in the relationship and would “break” a relationship if their partner was shorter and never paid for dates but would be comfortable if they were taller, older, and would always earn more income. These results demonstrate the socialization of certain cultural trait preferences in which the male is portrayed more so as the initiator and “breadwinner” of the relationship while females are more dependent on their partner’s resources.

The constraining forces in society, then, place women in a subordinate position in relation to men, and this position within society can affect the traits that females tend to seek in a potential partner. Roth demonstrates this idea using the example of women and their role as professionals on Wall Street. In general, occupations are biased and divided in terms of gender, with women obtaining jobs that are often undervalued in relation to those that men typically hold. Even those women who obtain the highest-paying jobs on Wall Street experience gender discrimination. “The glass ceiling blocking their promotions was more obvious, as was their clear underpayment relative to their male peers—this despite superior performance (Roth 2006: 366). Women are restricted in terms of their position in the workforce, and this influences the traits they prefer and seek in a partner. Because females in the workforce will continuously experience job discrimination and wage inequality, it is important for their potential partner to possess a high earning potential, and as the results conclude, female students at Pepperdine University are already aware of this pattern in society and take into strong consideration the financial and economic prosperity of a partner.

The continued discrimination of women in the workforce reinforces the conventional marital contract concerning the power dynamics within marriages. “According to this unwritten contract, these rights and obligations are divided along gender lines, which construct men as breadwinners and women as mothers and homemakers” (Tichenor 2005: 415). Whether engaged in paid labor or not, women are marginalized in the workplace by their domestic responsibilities. Thus, their opportunities for promotion and higher pay are often limited. For example, some managers believed that “investments in women’s careers were a waste of resources

because they would eventually leave the labor force” due to family and domestic duties (Roth 2006: 369). Women also receive less social approval than do men for engaging in paid work as a result of supposedly neglecting domestic responsibilities. Husbands and wives could think of themselves as “co-providers with a joint responsibility to meet the financial obligations of the family,” but research suggests that spouses are often “more comfortable with a certain level of conventional gender asymmetry in their relationships,” often collaborating to maintain some gender specialization (Tichenor 2005: 417). Undergraduate students at Pepperdine University seem to be caught in this “gender force field.” Many prefer to lead equally within a relationship, but results show that they still adhere to the gendered norms of society, preferring the dominant masculine and dominant feminine traits in a potential partner. Students’ ideal relationship follows a more egalitarian model, but in actuality, their preferences indicate more conventional and traditional practices in partner preference and selection.

### *Conclusion*

In accordance with previous research and literature concerning partner selection, the data collected in this study reveals gendered patterns in which males tend to value physical attractiveness to a higher degree and prefer dominant feminine traits while females place high importance on the earning potential of a future partner and are more likely to desire dominant masculine traits, such as strength and independence, in a potential partner. These resulting gender differences can be explained by the evolutionary perspective on mate selection, which highlights the predisposition of males and females to behave in a differential manner, and the social structural approach, which emphasizes distinctive gender roles and expectations along with the division of

labor and socialization of behavior. Dating at Pepperdine University continues to remain remarkably low, with an estimated minority of 47% who have dated, and even when removing first year and sophomore students, only about 54% of students have dated. As this data demonstrates, it is not due to a lack of expectations or, presumably, a lack of self-confidence in approaching a potential partner or openness to being asked out by a potential partner. Regardless of the reasons, the majority of the undergraduate students at Pepperdine University are not pleased with the dating scene, so the question to consider is whether or not the students at this university display the desired traits that males and females prefer and provide them with these traits they are seeking in a potential partner while also meeting the expectations in which they hold of a potential relationship. While some results confirmed movements away from traditional relational views in specific areas, these preferences can be undermined by areas in which traditional preferences were increased, almost as a type of compensation. Seeking “subordinate” traits in females, including being outspoken and self-reliant, is seemingly increasing, yet in return, greater importance is placed on “dominant” feminine traits such as physical attractiveness. On the surface, there may be more of a demand for equality, yet there is a continued movement toward further gender inequality. The retention of traditional power structures in relationships persists despite the occasional emergence of patterns resembling a more egalitarian relationship model. In this sense, obtaining equality in power requires those without power, who tend to be mostly female, to perform the subordinate role to a higher degree while also accepting more responsibilities within the relationship and within society. Gender inequality endures,

and it is important to challenge the conventional notions of gender in order to produce the ideal of equality within relationships that so many prefer.

### *Future Research*

There are many opportunities for further research in the area of dating and partner preferences and selection. The evaluation of partner preferences at Pepperdine University through this study illustrates what students look for in a potential partner as well as the expectations from his or her potential partner, but there are other avenues of research concerning dating and intimate relationships at Pepperdine that have yet to be explored and examined. Additional research could continue the investigation of partner expectations by gathering students' expectations of both short-term and long-term relationships. In terms of long-term relationships, future studies can delve into students' thoughts and perspectives on marriage, what age students prefer to get married, and what type of power distribution would be expected between household labor and income distribution. Particular to this setting, it would also be interesting to see whether students attending Pepperdine would prefer to get married in the Stauffer Chapel and would prefer their partner to be a fellow Pepperdine student or alumnus. Fraternities and sororities are also popular organizations in which many students participate in at Pepperdine, so another question to consider concerns how these sororities and fraternities fit into the dating scene and dating experience. Future research can look at whether more or less dating occurs within or outside of these networks, also examining whether these networks tend to date mostly with other members at the exclusion of non-members and investigating whether students perceive this potential division in terms of dating.

Furthermore, in regards to relationships in general, by looking at media portrayals and images, it would be of interest to observe which type of relationship students would most and least likely resemble. Do the home structures, or the relationships of students' parents and family members, also influence the kind of relationship they are more likely to pursue? Would students tend to model their relationships after those of their close friends and family? For those students who are homosexual, are the traits in which they prefer in a mate similar or different to those of their heterosexual counterparts? Where do homosexual students turn for a functional and successful relationship model, and does Pepperdine University provide a place of community for these students? For those students who are already in a relationship, it would be fascinating to investigate the details as to where they met and how long they have been together. If dating rates are consistently shown to be low at Pepperdine University, then how did those who are currently in a relationship "beat the odds." Do factors such as going abroad have significant effects on dating at Pepperdine? These questions and more, along with the continuation of gender-based topics and comparisons of differences in opinion between males and females, can guide future research in this area.



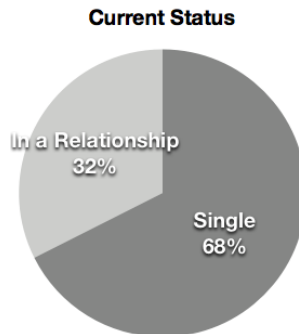
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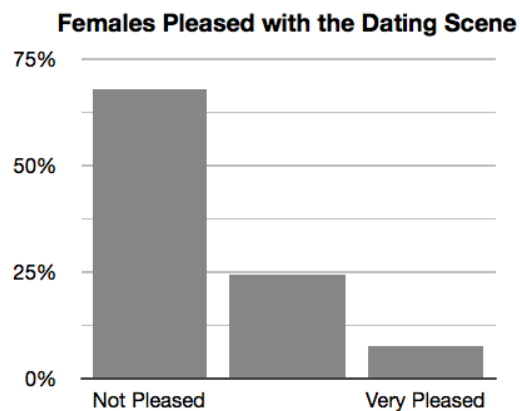
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## Appendix A: Figures

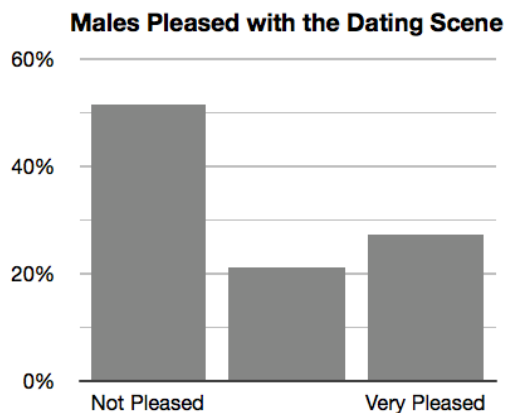
**Figure 1:** Illustrates the current relationship status of undergraduate students at Pepperdine University.



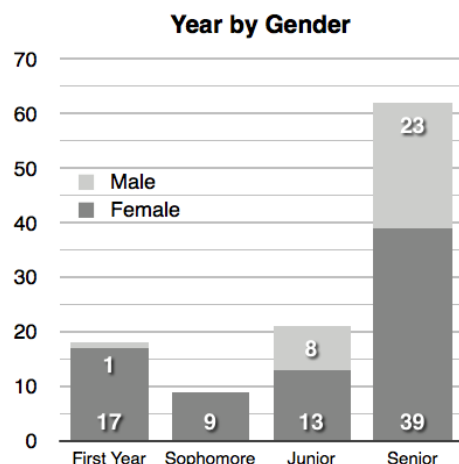
**Figure 2.1:** Illustrates the extent to which female students are pleased or displeased with the dating scene at Pepperdine University.



**Figure 2.2:** Illustrates the extent to which male students are pleased or displeased with the dating scene at Pepperdine University.

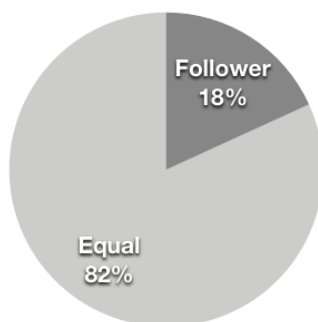


**Figure 3:** Illustrates the demographics of the sample, breaking down class year by gender.



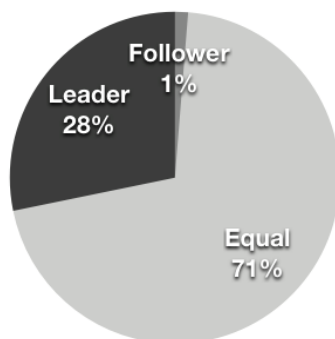
**Figure 4.1:** Illustrates males' preferences for a relationship in which his partner is the leader, the follower, or leads equally.

**Males Want Partner to be the...**

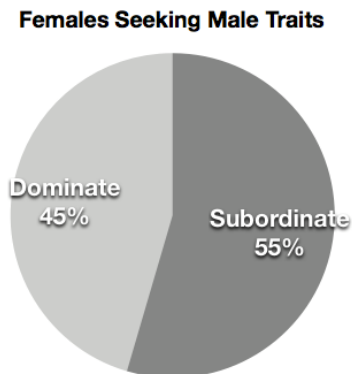


**Figure 4.2:** Illustrates females' preferences for a relationship in which her partner is the leader, the follower, or leads equally.

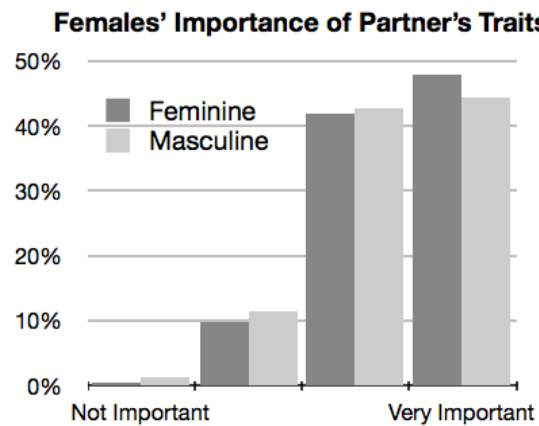
**Females Want Partner to be the...**



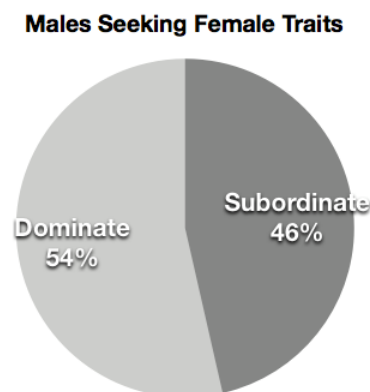
**Figure 5.1:** Illustrates the degree to which females seek either dominant masculine traits or subordinate masculine traits in a partner.



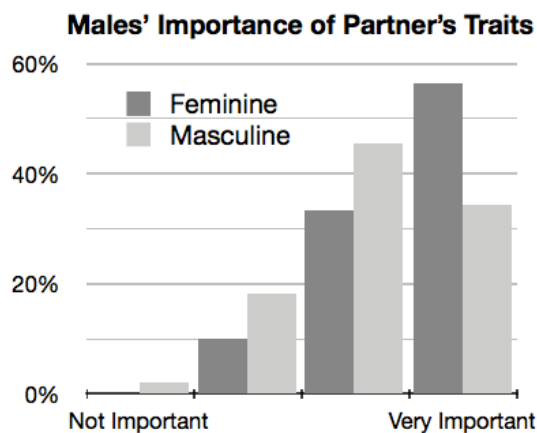
**Figure 5.2:** Illustrates the degree of importance females place on a potential partner's dominant masculine traits or subordinate masculine (feminine) traits.



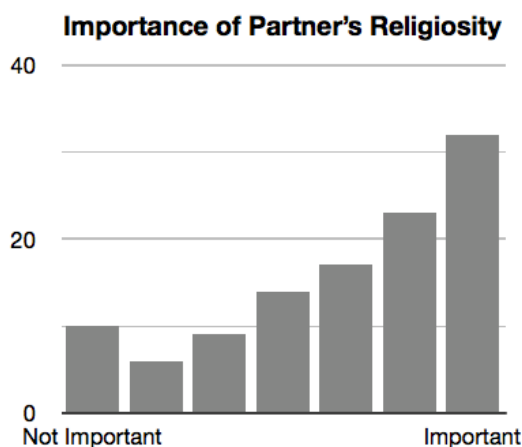
**Figure 6.1:** Illustrates the degree to which males seek either dominant feminine traits or subordinate feminine traits in a partner.



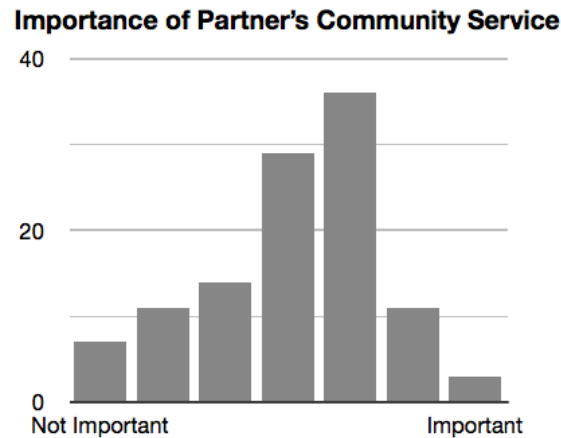
**Figure 6.2:** Illustrates the degree of importance males place on a potential partner's dominant feminine traits (masculine) or subordinate feminine traits.



**Figure 7:** Illustrates the degree of importance placed on a potential partner's religiosity



**Figure 8:** Illustrates the degree of importance placed on a potential partner's involvement in community service.



### Appendix B: Survey Sample

#### Relationships at Pepperdine

Please answer these questions honestly; your answers are anonymous.

##### 1. Year

- a. First Year
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. Other

##### 2. Gender

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Other

##### 3. Current Relationship Status

- a. Single
- b. In a relationship
- c. Other

##### 4. Have you dated while at Pepperdine?

- a. Yes
- b. No

##### 5. Before you came to Pepperdine did you expect to find a partner?

- a. Yes, absolutely
- b. Yes, somewhat
- c. No
- d. Other

6. While in a relationship you would like your partner to...

- a. Be the leader
- b. Be the follower
- c. Lead equally

7. What do you consider the minimum time needed for a relationship to be considered 'serious'?

- a. 3 months or less
- b. Between 3 to 6 months
- c. Between 6 months to 1 year
- d. 1 year or more

8. How self-confident are you in approaching a potential partner?

Not confident   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very Confident

9. How open are you to being asked out by a potential partner?

Not confident   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very Confident

10. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Assertive

Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

11. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Attractiveness

Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

12. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Confident

Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

13. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Independent

Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

14. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Caring



Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

15. How important is this trait when selecting a partner? Sensitive

Not important   1   2   3   4   Very Important

16. How important is your partner's involvement in community service?

Not Important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Important

17. How important is your partner's religiosity?

Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Important

18. Have you thought about marriage while being at Pepperdine?

- a. Yes, absolutely
- b. Yes, somewhat
- c. No

19. Your ideal partner has which of the following traits? (If they're a male)

- a. Strong, Independent, Productive
- b. Caring, Honest, Listener
- c. Not seeking a male

20. Your ideal partner has which of the following traits (If they're a female)

- a. Attractive, Timid, Nurturing
- b. outspoken, Intelligent, Self-Reliant
- c. Not seeking a female

21. Are you pleased with the dating scene at Pepperdine?

Not Pleased   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very Pleased

### **Make It or Break It?**

If your potential partner...

- Does not have a car

- a. Make it
- b. Break it

- Is older than you

- a. Make it
  - b. Break it
- Is non-religious
  - a. Make it
  - b. Break it
- Never pays for dates
  - a. Make it
  - b. Break it
- Is shorter than you
  - a. Make it
  - b. Break it
- Is taller than you
  - a. Make it
  - b. Break it
- Will always earn more income than you
  - a. Make it
  - b. Break it