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Influence of Self-Reported Standards on Romantic Mate Choice

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Introduction

Past research on mate standards has generally focused on identifying people's reported standards, with the assumption that these reports accurately predict later partnering behavior. Most research hasn't looked at the predictive validity of mate standards for partner choice and those studies that have focused solely on initial attraction (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). The goal of our research was to assess unmarried individuals' previously reported (i.e., a priori) standards and investigate the conditions under which these standards predict the characteristics of the partners people choose in subsequently formed relationships.

Existing theory and research on mate selection suggests that the amount of correspondence between mate standards and mate choice might depend on several factors. We investigated the influence of these factors on mate standards and mate choice within our study. We predicted that when participants had higher ratings of...

- ❖ Mate value
- ❖ Mate availability
- ❖ Standard salience
- ❖ Marital imminence
- ❖ Relationship type

they would be more likely than people with lower ratings for each to be in a relationship where their partner more closely reflects those standards.

Method

Participants

- ❖ 79 heterosexual individuals
- ❖ 16 male, 62 female
- ❖ Age range 18 – 69 (M=30.3, SD=11.9)
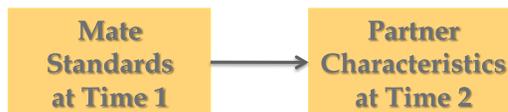- ❖ Sample included those in a new relationship at Time 2

Procedure

❖ Participants recruited from classes at universities, mailing lists from organizations, and social media websites (e.g., Facebook, Craigslist, Amazon Mechanical Turk)

❖ Participants completed an online survey then a 9 month follow-up survey:
   Wave 1: 547 unmarried participants
   Wave 2: 359 participants

❖ 79 individuals were not in a relationship at T1 and in a new relationship at T2

Measures

Mate Standards	18 items measured at Wave 1 • *sexual faithfulness, health, financial resources, physical attractiveness* etc. • indicated the minimum level they required in a potential marriage partner
Moderators	
Mate Value	18 items measured at Wave 1 • *well-educated, kind and understanding, healthy and fit body*, etc. • assessed self-reported mate value
Mate Availability	4 items measured at Wave 2 • *"In general, how available are single men/women who would make good marriage partner"*, etc. • assessed perception of available potential mates to participant
Marital Imminence	Items measured at Wave 1 and Wave 2 • *"I can't wait to get married"; "My life would be more fulfilling if I were married"*, etc. • assessed participant's current desire to get married
Standard Salience	4 items measured at Wave 1 and Wave 2 • *"I know exactly what I want in a marriage partner"*, etc. • assessed average salience of mate standards

Basic Associations

Do T1 mate standards predict T2 partner characteristics?

Mate Standards at Time 1 → **Partner Characteristics at Time 2**

Physical Attractiveness	Vitality	Status / Resources	Warmth/ Trustworthiness	Overall
β = .29**	β = .34**	β = .24+	β = .06	β = .29**

+p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01
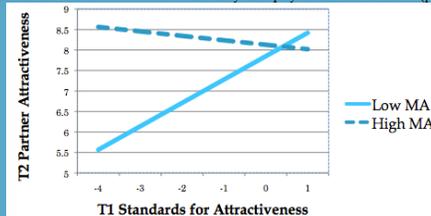Control for gender, age, ethnicity, relationship status and relationship length

❖ Our results show that people's a priori standards do indeed influence mate choice for physical attractiveness, vitality, and overall mate standards.

❖ Interestingly, people rated warmth and trustworthiness as important in the Time 1 standards, but this did not predict a warm and trustworthy partner at Time 2.
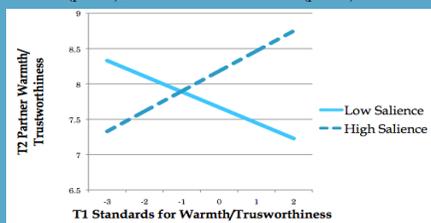
Moderation Results

❖ **Mate Availability**
Significant interaction between availability and physical attractiveness (p < .05)

Low MA
High MA

(Y-axis: T2 Partner Attractiveness; X-axis: T1 Standards for Attractiveness)

Contrary to our expectations, people with lower MA in an environment are more likely than people with higher MA to be in a relationship with someone who reflects their standards for physical attractiveness.

❖ **Standard Salience**
Significant interactions between salience and resources (p < .05), warmth and trustworthiness (p < .01), and overall mate standards (p < .05)

Low Salience
High Salience

(Y-axis: T2 Partner Warmth/ Trustworthiness; X-axis: T1 Standards for Warmth/Trustworthiness)

Similar to our expectations, people with higher standard salience are more likely than people with lower standard salience to be in a relationship with someone who reflects their standards for resources, warmth and trustworthiness, and overall standards.

Discussion

❖ Past research on speed dating and initial attraction paradigms have failed to show any link between a priori standards or ideals and later partner characteristics of a potential mate. However, we found basic associations among Time 1 mate standards and Time 2 partner characteristics on dimensions of physical attractiveness, vitality, status and resources and overall standards.

❖ People with lower mate availability were more likely to have a partner who matched their standards for physical attractiveness. However, people who had many potential mates had the opportunity to consistently be with someone who they would characterize as very physically attractive.

❖ We predicted that that people with a high standard salience will be more likely than people who have a low standard salience to be in a relationship where their partner closely matches their standards. Our hypothesis was supported under three dimensions of warmth/ truthfulness, resources/status, and overall personal characteristics.

❖ Mate standards do influence the types of mates we choose in some contexts, but not others.