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Late-Life Mate Selection: Dating Patterns in an Older Age Group

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LATE-LIFE MATE SELECTION:

DATING PATTERNS IN

AN OLDER AGE GROUP

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

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This exploratory study is a description of the older dater and his/her attitudes and perceptions about dating, a comparison within the same cohort of youthful and late-life dating and mate selection, and a description of the patterns of dating in the elder years. It is a non-random collection of interviews with 38 single men and women over the age of 59 in two counties in Utah.

Older daters were found to have been married for much of their lives previous to dating. They perceived themselves to be in good health and financial condition and were fairly well-educated. They lived independently and had available and supportive family and friend relationships. They had good concepts of themselves and their ability to attract dating

partners. Little resistance was perceived from significant others or the general public to their dating.

Older people were not found to be more conservative in choosing mates than they were when they were young except in valuing romantic love, sexual attraction and interest in sex less now than during their youth. They also accepted divorce in potential partners and height differences more now than when they were young. They were less accepting now of poor financial conditions.

The primary motive for dating and for remarriage in late life was to find companionship. Monogamous dating relationships were the norm. The primary functions of dating were friendship and sharing confidences. Dating partners were met most often through mutual acquaintances or during previous marriages. Dating format and activities for the elderly were similar to those of youthful daters, except at a slower pace. (78 pages)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There has been much interest in how the process of mate selection proceeds in modern western society where the choice of who to marry is "personally" made by the individuals involved. Several theoretical models have been developed to explain the process, but these models have been specific to persons of the typical marrying age of late adolescence through young adulthood. Although less frequently, mate selection does occur in old age for single adults who have never married, have divorced, or have been widowed. It is not known whether any of the current theories of mate selection apply to the process when it occurs in late life. Additional studies of the phenomenon of mate selection in the later years are needed to test the theoretical models of mate selection as applied to this segment of society.

This research attempts to describe the elder dater and the patterns of dating in late life. It also seeks to identify the factors relevant to mate selection among the elderly as compared to youthful mate selection and to currently accepted mate selection theories.

In examining mate selection among the elderly, it is important to note that today's elderly have not

arrived at this age in the same way as yesterday's or tomorrow's elderly. As Riley (1987) emphasizes, each age cohort grows up and grows old in its own societal context. The individual life-course is interdependent with social change. As each cohort has characteristics which may be specific, comparisons in this study are made between this cohort's current and youthful mate selection rather than making comparisons with current youth.

The objectives of this study, based on exploring the phenomenon of late-life dating are as follows:

First, to compile a description or profile of single men and women engaged in heterosexual dating relationships in their later years. This includes demographic and social information, marital history, and available social support in the form of family and friends.

Second, to identify perceptions and attitudes of the elderly regarding themselves as dating partners, attitudes about their potential dating partners, their perception of the attitudes of others regarding their dating, and their feelings about future marriage.

Third, to compare dating and mate selection in late life to youthful dating and mate selection for the same cohort.

Fourth, to describe the nature of elderly dating,

including patterns, motives, functions, and obstacles. And finally, to compare what is known about late-life mate selection to existing theoretical explanations of mate selection.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a prelude to understanding mate selection in late life, it seems logical to take a look at dating and mate selection in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the decades in which today's elderly were in the business of mate selection the first time around. The social climate of their married years is then briefly reviewed, as the married role influences feelings about the subsequent single role. The variables and processes of mate selection in the elderly years are discussed and a theoretical model that addresses elderly mate selection is summarized.

Mate Selection During Dating Years of Today's Elderly

Dating, as a form of recreation and mate selection, grew out of several social changes that occurred in the 1920s. This era was marked by the emergence of a new youth subculture with greater freedom from direct parental supervision and increased importance of their peer group to young people. An unprecedented age homogeneity within this cohort of youth emerged, a group replete with its own dress, slang language, music, and dance (Fass, 1977).

New sexual mores of the time embraced sexual

fulfillment as important for both men and women and intercourse as an expression of love. The effect on dating was to orient the dating relationship toward marriage and sex. Sexual exploration without sexual consummation, or "necking" and "petting" as the terms were coined, became a common dating experience, and young people were under great peer pressure to engage in them (Fass, 1977).

In their study of Middletown youth of the 1920s, Lynd and Lynd (1929) contrasted early-evening buggy-rides of the 1890s with the exclusive boy-girl pairing of high school students in the 1920s. Parents and school officials of the Twenties became alarmed at cheek-to-cheek dancing. Movie houses were a popular recreation which gave young people new types of social liberty . Automobile-riding with friends was a major form of entertainment, offering a mobile meeting place and peer-group isolation (Fass, 1977).

The period from the twenties to the forties brought increased involvement in adolescent activities and acceptance of adolescence as a subgroup grew. A noteworthy change toward a companionship model of marriage also emerged as the child cohort of this time reached marital age. The ideal of the "companionate marriage" (Lindsey & Evans, 1925, p. 164) had an enormous impact on marital and mate selection expectations. The criteria for choosing a mate changed

from economic stability, religion, and sexual purity to personal compatability, sexual attraction, and romantic love (Fass, 1977).

With the thirties came the Great Depression and economic deprivation for a great number of America's youth and their families. There was a significant delay in the timing of marriage among those who attained marital age, but the delay was not accompanied by corresponding changes in the value of and goals associated with marriage. Home, children, and marriage had special significance to sons of deprived families. Companionship, mutual understanding, and the chance to have and rear children were valued aspects of marriage for a majority of males at this time. For women, the chance to have and rear children was an important aspect of the desire to marry, as well as obtaining a good standard of living and the understanding, love and companionship of a husband. The more deprivation, the more couples desired to marry and have children (Elder, 1974).

The 1940s and war did not change basic processes and desires in mate-selection, it accelerated them. The expansion of women's public roles did not diminish their attachment to traditional private roles. Throughout the forties more young people married than ever before and at younger ages. The domestic role for

women was glorified by the popular culture and romance remained the central criterion for mate-selection. For women, marriage and dependence on a man became the key to happiness and a central feature in their lives, even more than in the past (Hartmann, 1982).

Social Climate During First Marriage of Today's Elderly

After these new style marriages were formed, they grew over very "traditional" times. As Mintz and Kellogg (1988) state, the social climate during the years these marriages began and grew to maturity was one of high expectations for both husbands and wives. Marriage was seen as an essential ingredient for a happy life; during the Fifties fewer than one in ten Americans believed that an unmarried person could be happy. The consensus of opinion was that the family was the "center of living." Family togetherness was the national goal. Couples continued to pursue the companionate ideal of family life, including mutuality of affection, equality, and sharing. The role of the Fifties wife was to smoothly and efficiently run a household, promote her husband's career and help him rise to his capacity. His role was to protect his family and set their economic standard of living and social standing in the community.

Current Status of the Elderly

The changes that occurred from the 1920s through the 1950s helped to form the married lives of today's elderly. But more and more of these marriages are ending as couples age, divorce, or one spouse dies. The current status of the elderly in the United States is an important aspect of any attempt to understand relationships in this age group.

Due to sex differences in mortality rates, old-age is disproportionately a female experience. At current life expectancy rates, the average woman can expect to be a widow about nine years of her life (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1988). While the last years of an average woman's life are spent living alone or in an institution, the last years of the average man's life are spent with his spouse (Hagestad, 1988).

As shown in figures compiled by Aldous (1987), (a) most older men are married, (b) most women under age 65 are married, (c) most women over age 75 are widowed, and (d) the older the group, the lower the percentage of divorced (although the incidence of divorce has increased in all age groups). In addition, the never-married elderly are a decreasing minority.

Although the prevalence of widowhood is lower among men, men seem to have less peer support after the deaths of their spouses, a central support for widows.

Their wives may have been their only confidante and they are often not able to pull support from their children as women do. Further, the death of a wife is not a normative, expected event, the way the death of a husband is. It has not been "mentally rehearsed" and causes greater disruption (Berardo, 1970).

In other respects, some women suffer more than men at the loss of a spouse. For many women their whole identity is tied to their role as wife and mother, as today's elderly widows came to maturity in much more traditional times. A major factor in the amount of disengagement they experience is the degree to which their various social roles were dependent upon their husbands. Additional strains may be financial, compounded by the lack of job skills and the trained incapacity to deal with financial matters if husbands "always took care of those things." Also, it is important to realize how much of the social activity in our society among adults is couple oriented. For example, a widow is rarely invited to couple activities. And, as previously mentioned, wives' social location is often determined by being someone's wife rather than as a person in her own right (Gordon, 1978).

Remarriage in the Later Years

The answer to some of the problems for widows and widowers would appear to be remarriage. However, while two-thirds of women over age 75 are widowed, only 23% of men in that age category are single (Uhlenberg, 1980). There are currently nearly six times as many widows as widowers over the age of 65, making remarriage a strong possibility for men but a state only a minority of women can hope to achieve. Treas and VanHilst (1976) state that women also confront a "double standard of aging" whereby they are defined as sexually unattractive at an earlier age than are men. They further state that social norms ordain that men may wed brides younger than themselves, expanding the pool of eligibles for men while restricting it for women.

How often do the elderly remarry? Cleveland and Gianturco (1976) statistically measured age-specific remarriage probabilities. Over the age of 65, the probability of a white male remarrying in a given year is .02, for a white female it is .004. Among both men and women, the probability of remarriage decreases as age increases. One of the major reasons for the decrease is that marriage and death decrease the pool of potential partners as people get older. In 1970, about 60,000 senior citizens married, but these numbers

represent fewer than 3 out of 1000 older single women and 17 of 1000 older single men. Although some people marry or remarry late in life, they are atypical (Treas & VanHilst, 1976).

Elderly widows cite other reasons besides lack of opportunity for not remarrying. Widows who praise their lost mates excessively and make their lives monuments to them severely limit their abilities to love other persons and make it impossible for a new male friend to measure up to a deceased husband (Brubaker, 1983). Others are reluctant to give up the independence they enjoy living on their own. They may fear losing another loved one, don't want to care for an elderly husband who may become ill, or fear financial exploitation (Lopata, 1973).

There are other barriers to marriage for the aged. Resistance to remarriage of the elderly may come from their children who are fearful of losing part of their inheritance, or have difficulty in accepting their parents' role change. Resistance may also come from society at large, which defines such marriages as childish and unrealistic. Stereotypes about the asexuality of older people are widespread and there exists a general lack of respect for their emotional needs (Gordon, 1978).

Marriages in later years are based on different

motivations than those that occur during young adulthood such as premarital pregnancy, the desire for children, wish to escape parental domination, validation of adult heterosexuality, and pressure for conformity in the timing of life-cycle events. These pressures are not present in the late years (Bowers & Bahr, 1989).

The elderly who, in spite of all the obstacles that have been mentioned, remarry late in life do so for companionship and to prevent becoming overly dependent on adult children, according to a study done by Vinick (1978). They saw it as a viable alternative to living alone. Many had known each other prior to the deaths of their spouses. More than one half married in less than a year from the start of their relationship. They saw little actual opposition from their children when they discussed it with them before the marriage. The only negativism came from older friends who felt they were being abandoned.

Dating in Late Life

While literature discussing older remarriages is not abundant, there has been even less research on the process involved in mate selection in late life. There are no available estimates of the number of older persons who are currently dating, and since it is not

necessarily the case that dating leads to marriage, the remarriage figures do not fully describe the situation. Key studies in this area are rare. Three that are pertinent include research by Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986) who studied the relationship between dating and life satisfaction for older people, a study done by Guttmann of life events of older adults (1978), and a model comparing endogamy and homogamy between elderly and young couples produced by Dressel (1980). According to the findings of Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986), dating during the later years has the same functions and motivations as it did during the younger years: to seek a marital partner and for purposes of recreation. In old age, another motivating factor for dating is companionship. Unanticipated derivatives are prestige, especially for older women, and intimacy and self-disclosure, especially for older men. Dating partners often assume the roles of friend, confidant, lover, and caregiver for the older dater. Romantic love is a strong pre-requisite for marriage at this age, just as it was the first time around, but pragmatic concerns and companionship in the relationship take a higher priority.

Older daters meet most often through mutual friends or relatives, or had known each other when they were previously married. Data suggest that people who

are mobile, active, physically unrestrained, and "get out of the house," and those who are involved in social networks have increased chances of meeting a partner (Vinick, 1978). Successful courtship depends on health, mobility, and adequate income, resources which decline with advancing age (Treas & VanHilst, 1976).

Guttmann (1978) cited societal prejudice and ignorance about the emotional needs of the elderly and interference from the adult children of the elderly as special problems that are faced in late-life dating, along with the disproportionate ratio of women to men and decreased mobility. These are some differences between elderly and teenage dating. Elderly people are somewhat less concerned with the material aspects of relationships such as physical appearance, possessions and professional and social prestige. Finally, courtships tend to be much shorter before a marriage results because of the time limitations that are felt.

Theoretical Context

When this older cohort was choosing its mates in early adulthood, little research was being done to study mate selection. Waller (1937) was one of the first sociologists to systematically study the dating phenomenon in the United States. Although his Rating

and Dating hypothesis was not supported, his ideas are still used as a baseline for work on the topic (Clayton, 1975). Other theoretical perspectives on spouse selection developed since then include Burgess and Wallin's study of engaged couples (1953), Katz and Hill's Propinquity Model (1958), Kerckhoff and Davis' Filter Model (1962), Winch's Complementary Needs (1967) and Murstein's Stimulus-value-role model (1970).

Adams (1979) summarized and evaluated current theoretical positions on mate selection in the United States. His summarization, which included most if not all of the major theories of mate selection, was reformulated into propositional form and a model of the mate selection process was outlined. The model includes such facilitators of mate selection as early attractions, early attraction perpetuators, deeper attractions, deeper attraction perpetuators, and barriers to breakup. Inhibitors included in the model are barriers to beginning mate selection, early attraction reducers, barriers to continuation, and alternative attraction. This and other models were created to explain first-time mate selection in early adulthood, in modern times. In a cautionary statement at the end of the chapter, Adams listed age as one of the variables that would alter the functioning of the factors in the model, due to the severely reduced field

of eligibles.

In future research much of the model may be found to be relevent across the age continuum, such as the bases for and barriers to early attractions. However, deviations might be expected in other areas such as attractions or barriers to marriage itself, and the relative importance of similarity of physical attractiveness, similarity of personalities, and salient categorical homogeneity. These deviations may be based on differences in life stages and on Exchange Theory principles of getting the "best partner I can get" when evaluated by comparison level and by level of alternatives for the older entrant into the marriage market of reduced field of eligibles (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

In testing for differences in the theoretical model due to age, Dressel (1980) presents possibly the only model produced so far for mate selection among the elderly. She compares degrees of endogamy and homogamy between elderly and young couples. "Because the old are likely to experience different courtship contexts from the young, they may also differ in the degrees of endogamy and homogamy characterizing their couple relationships" (Dressel, 1980, p. 380).

While endogamy is important in young marriages for the maintenance of social status and the perpetuation

of family lineage, the concern is reversed with the marriages of elders, as patterns of inheritance become important to the couple's children.

Dressel expects three structural variables and two attitudinal variables to have an impact on older mate selection. The structural variables are (a) the imbalanced sex ratio, in which traditional barriers are crossed with increased frequency by the more numerous sex, and (b) opportunity for interaction, influenced by the degree of segregation and geographical mobility of the elder. A relevant question is whether such environments as senior centers, high-rise apartments for the elderly and retirement communities provide segregated opportunities for interaction for the old the way high schools and colleges do for the young. Thus (c) prevalence and strength of norms supporting endogamy/homogamy would be expected to directly affect the degree to which they are important in mate selection.

Dressel also expects attitudinal variables to affect mate selection in the elderly. These variables include (a) the attitude of significant others, primarily children for elders, parents for young adults, and (b) the attitude of the marrying individual. This variable is best represented by the exchange-concept, comparison level of alternatives

(Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

In comparing homogamy and endogamy in young and old, studies have shown that the young are more homogeneous in regard to age and social class (the old are less likely to marry near their own age), and both the young and the old are homogenous in regard to race, 99% marrying within their race. Both marry within close geographical proximity, but older couples select partners who live farther away when compared to the young. Both groups choose partners with previous experience or lack of experience in marriage similar to theirs, but the old do so less frequently (Dressel, 1980). Schvaneveldt and Young (1989) also found young people to be more conservative in choosing a marriage partner than those who were older. While older couples appear to be somewhat more heterogenous than younger couples, a great deal of similarity in age, background, income level, geographic propinquity, and religious preference was reported in McKain's (1972) study of elderly couples.

While these investigators have begun the needed research on mate selection in the theoretical context, it is apparent that much remains to be explored in this domain of mate selection. The current study is an attempt to contribute to this exploration.

Hypotheses

Based on the history of the current cohort of elderly and on the research on mate selection among the elderly that has emerged thus far, the following hypotheses are formed:

1. Older daters can be described as having adequate income and relatively good health.

2. Older single women have more social support from family and friends than do older single men.

3. A negative reaction to dating by the dater's friends, children, and the general public is perceived.

4. Young mate selectors are more particular in their choices of marriage partners than are older mate selectors.

Due to the unbalanced ratio of men to women in the senior years, it is also hypothesized that:

5. Women perceive more prestige from dating than do men.

6. Men have more dating partners and date more frequently than do women.

Considering the importance of marriage to this cohort, it is hypothesized that:

7. Remarriage is the primary motive for dating.

Finally, unlike youthful motives for marriage which were based around acquiring children and family

and establishing a social standing and a standard of living, it is hypothesized that:

8. The primary motive for marriage in the later years is for companionship.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Between the months of July, 1990 and June, 1991, interviews were conducted over the telephone with 38 persons, age 59 to 90, who were or had been single and had dated at least one time during the year preceding the interview. Some of the respondents (23.7%) had remarried during the preceding year. All had been previously married, therefore having been through the mate selection process at least once before.

The sample was not random. The names of respondents were obtained from personal acquaintances, solicitation through senior citizen centers, retirement homes, a senior dance club, and from various members of the Department of Family and Human Development at Utah State University. Subsequently a snowball technique was used, obtaining referrals from those persons who had been interviewed. These approaches resulted in a sample of respondents who lived in Cache County, Utah and in Utah County, Utah. All respondents were Caucasian and 97% were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). Eighteen of the 38 (47.4%) were male, 20 (52.6%) were female. The

average age was 79 for men and 73 for women.

Measures

The instrument used for this study was an interview questionnaire that consisted of three sections. The first section contained demographic data and social items for use in creating a profile or description of the older dater. These items included age, marital history, self-perception of health, SES, education, housing, availability of family, and other social support. Items had response sets for convenience in recording and quantifying answers along with "other" categories for open-ended answers. Five-point Likert-type scales ranging from (1) low to (5) high were used to measure marital satisfaction, perception of health, and perception of financial situation.

The second section assessed the daters' attitudes and perceptions of themselves as daters, of others' opinions of their dating, of potential dating partners, and of remarriage during the later years. This section again used 5-point scales, set up the same as above, and open-ended questions. Part of this section was a 15-item scale, partially derived from Schvaneveldt and Young's (1989) marital worth scale. It was used to determine which mate characteristics would not be

acceptable to the respondent in a date or marriage partner at the present time. The respondent was then asked to respond to the same set of items in the context of mate selection when he/she was young.

The third section was for the purpose of describing late-life dating patterns. Motives, functions (again on a 5-point scale), frequency of dating, number of partners, paying patterns, how partners were met, activities engaged in during dating, obstacles to dating, and the best things about dating were explored here, mostly by way of open-ended questions.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate demographic information. Analysis was done for the entire sample, by sex, and by age. Age was collapsed into three categories: those in their sixties (included with this category was the one respondent who was 59), 18% of the sample; those in their seventies, 47% of the sample; and those in their eighties (including the one respondent who was 90), 34% of the sample.

Paired-t test statistics were used to compare mean scores of mate selection now and when young for each

item in the marital worth scale to determine whether there were significant differences in the two sets of scores. T-tests were used to compare differences in means of males and females for the items (a) satisfaction with first marriage in Table 1, (b) number of companions to confide in and number of companions to spend time with in Table 4, (c) all items in Table 5, self-evaluation and perceived attitudes of others, and (d) functions of dating in Table 8.

Answers given to open-ended questions about attitudes and perceptions and some instrumental items concerning dating were rank ordered in an attempt to determine which were most commonly mentioned during the interviews. All other items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Again, age and sex were used to separate answers into subsets.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Late-life Dater

A social and demographic profile of the older dater emerged in several categories.

Marital History

All of the respondents who agreed to be interviewed had been previously married. As shown in Table 1, nearly half had been married more than once. The average number of years that each had been married is a total of all marriages for those who had married more than once. As would be expected, the number of years married increased as age increased. The range was from 19 to 62 years of marriage.

A reflection of the dramatic increase in the divorce rate during the lifetime of this cohort was apparent in the difference between first and second marriages. While 24% of first marriages ended in divorce, 41% of second marriages ended in divorce. Similarly, satisfaction with first marriages was higher than for second marriages.

Men were found to be significantly more satisfied with first marriages than were women. However, both groups' satisfaction levels dropped to the same lower

Table 1

Marital History

Marital History Items	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
% previously married more than once	45	39	50	57	39	46
Mean years previously married	46	47	44	29	48	50
[a] Mean satisfaction with first marriage	4.0	[4.5]**	[3.5]**	3.3	4.2	4.1
Mean satisfaction with second marriage	2.4	2.4	2.4	1.8	2.9	2.3
% of first marriages ending in divorce	24	22	25	57	17	15
% of second marriages ending in divorce	41	43	40	75	57	0
No. of months between end of last marriage and dating	28	12	41	20	36	21

Note. Means in brackets have been compared with each other using t-tests.

[a] Measured on 5-point scale, (1) low to (5) high

**$p < .01$

score for second marriages. A high rate of first marriages ending in death and the subsequent mourning or idealization of those marriages may be one explanation of the lower satisfaction ratings of second marriages.

The time elapsed between the end of the last marriage and beginning to date was varied, ranging from one month to 12 years, with a mean of 28 months.

Interestingly, women waited much longer to date after the end of their previous marriages than did men. The women did not indicate that, for the most part, the length of time was because of lack of opportunity. Readiness to date was a more important factor. A relationship of lower satisfaction ratings of marriage for women than men with a longer waiting period before dating is a possible explanation. It was expected that the older the dater, the less time would elapse between the end of marriage and the beginning of dating. However, the relationship between age and waiting to date in this sample appears to be curvilinear, with those in their seventies waiting longer than either those in their sixties or those in their eighties.

Another interesting statistic revealed that those whose last marriages ended in divorce began dating after a mean of 23 months while those whose last marriages ended in death waited a mean of 29 months

before dating.

Health

As was hypothesized the sample as a whole rated itself as being in relatively good health (Table 2). Health problems mentioned ranged from recovery from recent surgery to more permanent disabilities including arthritis, hearing loss, and blindness, but most had a positive attitude about their health. As would be expected, health ratings decreased as age increased.

Education

The sample as a whole was found (Table 2) to be fairly well educated. Most women, however, were formally educated only to the point of graduating from high school. Fifty percent had gone on to higher education or trade school, but none of the women in the sample had obtained higher degrees.

Housing

Also shown in Table 2, the vast majority of the elderly who were active enough to date lived alone. Those who did not were those who had remarried and lived with their spouse. A few had an adult child living with them, or lived in a retirement home.

Socioeconomic status

It was hypothesized that older daters would have

Table 2

Health, Education and Housing

Descriptive	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
[a] Mean perception of health	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.3	4.0	3.8
Education (cumulative %)						
High school graduate	84	82	85	100	83	75
> High school	54	59	50	100	39	50
College graduate	11	24	0	14	0	25
> College	8	18	0	14	0	17
Housing						
% living alone	68	72	65	43	72	77
% living with spouse	24	22	25	43	22	15
% living with others	8	7	10	14	6	8

[a] Measured on 5-point scale, (1) low to (5) high

adequate income levels. While no single score was derived for SES, three items indicated status for the sample. The perception of the respondent of his/her financial situation was indicated on a 5-point scale. As shown in Table 3, most seem to be fairly comfortable with their financial situations, their perceptions supporting the hypothesis. Actual income figures, however, showed that 31% were in the 10,000 dollars per year or lower category. Those in their sixties faired much better, presumably because many in this age group were still employed while the others were probably living on retirement income, social security benefits, and other assets they had accumulated. The sample was largely middle-class, with blue-collar workers, including farmers, construction-workers, and steel-workers comprising about half of the sample. The others were white-collar workers, including professionals, managers, and clerical workers. Occupations are those of the head of the household in the first marriage.

Family Availability

As shown in Table 4, these elders had several children living within 100 miles; most also had other family members who lived nearby. The availability of family was also indicated by the frequency with which

Table 3

Socioeconomic Status

Descriptive	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
[a] Mean perception of financial situation	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.3	3.6	4.1
% in gross income per year categories						
< $10,000	31	25	35	0	44	27
$10,000-$20,000	33	44	25	0	39	46
$20,000-$30,000	11	0	20	43	6	0
> $30,000	25	31	20	57	11	27
Career of head-of-house before retiring						
% professional/managerial	30	28	30	71	22	31
% blue-collar	70	72	70	29	78	69

[a]Measured on 5-point scale, (1) low to (5) high

Table 4

Availability of Family and Other Companions

Descriptive	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
Family						
No. of children	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.1	3.5
No. of children living (listed cumulatively)						
within 10 miles	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.3
within 50 miles	1.8	1.7	1.9	2.0	1.6	2.0
within 100 miles	2.1	1.9	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.2
% having other family members within 10 miles	58	39	75	43	72	46
% getting together with family (listed cumulatively)						
at least once a week	50	44	55	43	56	46
at least once a month	84	72	95	100	83	77
Companions other than dating partner						
% having no one to confide in	18	39	0	14	6	39
Mean no. of companions to confide in	4.3	[2.8]*	[5.6]*	3.9	5.8	2.4
% having no one to spend time with	8	16	0	0	6	15

(table continues)

Mean no. of companions to spend time with	7.4	[3.3]	[11.0]	4.8	8.0	7.8

Note. Means in brackets have been compared using t-tests.

*$p < .05$

they got together with them. Men were less likely to get together with their families than women, reinforcing the image of women as "kinkeepers" and supporting the hypothesis of older single women having more support from family than older single men. However, as Schvaneveldt believes, men may perceive more inhibition from family than would women, hence may be more restrained than women in making this type of report. "Men may be more reluctant to approach kin as an avoidance factor, where this may not be as much the case with women" (J. D. Schvaneveldt, personal communication, September 1, 1991).

As the group aged, contact of at least once a month decreased from 100% in the sixties to 77% in the eighties. It seems that the older one is, the more isolated from family one becomes. The death of family members as one grows older is a likely factor.

Availability of companions other than dating partner

The availability of non-dating companions was measured by the number of friends and confidants one had to turn to and go places with other than dating partners. It was expected that those who dated did so for such social support. However, the few who claimed they had no one to confide in were all men. Interestingly, rather than being despondent about the fact, some of these men expressed surprise that they would need to confide in someone; apparently the lack of confidants was by choice. Most respondents reported that they had a number of other people to confide in, but again, the number was significantly higher for women than for men. Most had friends or relatives to spend time with and go places with; the difference between men and women in this case was not significant.

Attitudes and Perceptions

Perception of Selves as Dating Partners

Table 5 shows the results of the ratings respondents indicated on four items using a 5-point scale. It was found that, as a whole, the elderly considered themselves somewhat attractive, with insignificant differences in this score across sexes and age groups. Sexual attractiveness was rated

Table 5

Perceptions and Attitudes

Descriptive	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
[a] Mean scores of self-evaluation						
Physical attractiveness	3.7	3.7	3.8	4.0	3.6	3.8
Sexual attractiveness	3.3	2.9*	3.7*	3.9	3.7	2.5
Personality	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.2
Chance of attracting a dating partner	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.1	3.8	4.2
[a] Mean scores of perceived attitudes of others						
Children	4.4	4.2	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.5
Friends	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.1	4.0
General public	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.7	3.1	3.5

Note. t-tests were used to compare male scores with female scores

[a] Measured on 5-point scale, (1) low to (5) high

*$p < .05$

slightly lower than the other characteristics, with men rating themselves significantly lower than women and scores decreasing with age. Personality was given the highest score and was nearly the same across sex and age subsets. Additionally, all scored themselves rather high on their chances of attracting a dating partner, which would be expected since all were dating or had been recently when the interview was conducted. Men's and women's scores were not significantly different on this variable.

Perceived Attitudes of Others

The perceived attitudes of others regarding elderly dating was measured using a 5-point scale (Table 5). It was hypothesized that the daters would perceive a negative attitude from their friends, children and the general public about their dating. However, the daters' own children were found to be surprisingly supportive. Explanations given during the interviews generally credit children with wanting their parents to be happy and not be alone; they appreciated having help in caring for their parents' emotional well-being. Many daters mentioned that their children liked the man or woman they were dating and got along with him/her very well. Some, however, said that, although their children were very happy with their

dating, they would be less happy about their parents' remarrying.

The perceived attitudes of their friends was also quite positive. Men mentioned that many of their friends were married and were therefore happy to include them as couples, and that they approved of or liked their girlfriends. Some women commented that there was some jealousy on the part of their friends if they were not also dating, and that they felt deserted. Some friends thought they were "stupid" for dating or that the men they were dating were taking advantage of them. However, the women respondents thought that their friends who were also dating approved of their dating, and would like to be dating if they weren't.

The general public was perceived as giving less approval for elderly dating, but 11% of the respondents said they didn't care whether or not there was general approval. Although a few perceived negative reactions, most did not and found the general public to only be curious if any notice was taken at all. T-tests performed on mean scores of perceived attitudes of others showed no statistically significant differences between men and women.

Attitude toward marriage

Respondents were asked what advantages and

disadvantages there would be to remarrying at this stage in their lives. Answers to these open-ended questions were rank-ordered according to the frequency of responses. In agreement with the hypothesis, the advantage of remarriage most commonly reported was companionship. The best thing about marriage would be to have someone to be with so they would not have to be alone. Having a partner, in the sense of being part of a couple for their own self-concept and for participating in activities as a couple in public and with other couples was also mentioned very frequently. As would be expected from the social climate of the marriage history of this cohort, life as part of a couple seemed to be a more comfortable lifestyle for many; as one woman put it, "When you are married, life becomes normal." A few also mentioned that being married would increase their happiness, would help them financially, and would mean they would have someone to take care of them if they became ill.

Disadvantages to remarriage were mentioned less often than advantages, but fear of their partner's poor health and having to take care of them was most often mentioned. Also cited as disadvantages were the lack of freedom they would have if they were to marry, the decrease in financial status they feared due to tax and social security laws, and the complications which might

arise from both husband and wife owning their own homes. Having to adapt to someone else's children and family was also a concern, as well as worrying about being widowed or dying. Variations in frequency of concerns mentioned showed financial worries as the most frequent answer for women and, interestingly, loss of freedom as the most frequent answer for the oldest subset of respondents.

Attitudes about Dating or Marriage Partners

Potential dating or marriage partners were rated on 15 items which might negatively affect those partners' marital worth. This was a detraction model in that the lower the score, the less desirable that trait would be in a marriage partner. The scale reads as: (1) definitely would not date or marry someone with that characteristic to (5) having that characteristic would not detract from marital worth. Table 6 shows the items listed in order of most detracting to least detracting.

Being a different race was found to be the most detrimental to marital worth, followed by absence of love for the potential partner, having been divorced many times, being in poor health and not being sexually attractive. Conversely, being divorced only once, having an unequal amount of education, not interested

Table 6

Marital Worth

Descriptive	Now Mean	Young Mean
Different race	1.79	1.58
Not in love	2.00	1.24**
Divorced many times	2.03	1.24**
In poor health	2.37	2.00
Not sexually attractive	2.44	1.65**
Poor conversationalist	2.45	2.74
Not physically attractive	2.61	2.45
Kids/parents disapprove	2.63	2.45
Different religion	2.76	2.39
Female taller than male	2.95	2.50*
Different interests	3.13	3.05
Poor financial shape	3.24	4.26**
Not interested in sex	3.24	1.68**
Much more/less education	3.61	3.92
Divorced once	3.79	2.08

Note. Means compared using paired-t tests

Measured on a 5-point scale (1) definitely would not marry to (5) would not be a detraction

*p < .05 **p < .01

in sex and being in poor financial shape were seen as detracting least from marital worth. Interestingly, being interested in sex fell far behind sexual attractiveness as a value for this age group.

Ratings of potential dating or marriage partners during the youth of the respondents, when they first looked for a marriage partner, were also provided by the respondent. Although this rating is based on memory of up to 70 years ago and is less likely to be accurate than current responses, there were some interesting findings. Being divorced many times and not being in love with the person were the most detrimental characteristic during youthful mate selection, followed by being a different race, not being sexually attractive, and not being interested in sex. On the opposite end, being in poor financial shape was found to be the least detrimental. As many respondents mentioned, "Everybody was poor then. It would have been hard to find someone in poorer financial shape than you." (Indeed, one man had to wash dishes to pay for ice cream on a date, because what he thought was the dime in his pocket turned out to be a nickel!) The next least detrimental characteristics were unequal education, having different interests, being a poor conversationalist, and the woman being taller than the man, respectively.

Expecting that younger people would be more conservative in choosing a marriage partner than those who are older, it was hypothesized that scores on items for when the respondent was young would be lower than those for the present time. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in the case of 7 of the 15 items tested (Table 6). In each of these cases except one, respondents were found to be significantly less accepting of potential marriage partners in these areas when they were young than they would be now, in their later years. The one exception in which the direction of effect was reversed was that of poor financial condition. It was shown that they are less accepting now than they were when they were young of poor financial situations.

The respondents were also asked what were the most important things they would look for in a marriage partner now and when they were young. Late-life marriage partners would be desired who were, most importantly, compatible and easy to get along with; they were looking for someone that would be enjoyable to spend time with. Spending time together was also a factor in their desire for someone with the same interests in religion and recreation. Also, most of these elders were interested in finding other elders who were attractive. Attractiveness was often defined

as being neat and clean, having good grooming habits. Stability in character and finances were also valued as desirable in mates in late life.

When asked to remember what was most important in choosing a marriage partner when they were young, some said they were not as choosey then; they just found cute girls, popular boys, or just jumped into it. This is in contrast to the hypothesis that was proposed. However, character traits such as faithfulness, dependability, high ideals, and ambition were commonly mentioned. Compatibility was also remembered as an important factor. Additionally, men frequently reported that they looked for a woman who would be a good mother and homemaker, while women remembered looking for a financially stable and hard working man.

Dating Patterns

Motives for Dating

It was hypothesized that the primary motivation for dating would be to remarry. When asked why they dated, the nearly unanimous response of those interviewed reported companionship as the most important motive in dating. Most wanted someone to talk to and be with, to help fill the sometimes endless hours. They also wanted someone to go places and do things with. "It's a lot nicer when you don't have to

go alone."

Table 7 shows that the search for a marriage partner was also a strong motive for dating and nearly half of the sample was at least somewhat interested in marriage. Men and women were fairly equally interested in marriage, but the interest decreased as age increased. The findings of this study differed from the findings of Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986) who found the primary motive for dating was to find a suitable marriage partner. In this study, companionship was found to be a more important motivation for dating than looking for a marriage partner. In sum, this hypothesis appears to be equivocal, receiving some support and some lack of support.

However, as was also shown in the Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986) study, the elderly dater is much more interested in committed relationships than playing the field. Seventy-four percent of the sample (Table 7) said they preferred dating just one person rather than many. Reasons given for the preference for monogamous relationships were that it was easier and more comfortable to date just one: "I don't have the strength and energy to date others," or "that's all I can handle." Others reported enjoying the friendship, trust, and closeness that came with a deeper relationship. The mean number of dating partners for

Table 7

Dating Patterns

Descriptive	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
% interested in monogamous relationship	74	78	70	71	67	85
% at least somewhat interested in marriage	47	44	50	86	53	17
Frequency of dates (cumulative %)						
Every day	31	31	30	29	29	33
2-3 times per week	69	69	70	57	71	75
Once per week	83	94	75	57	82	100
2-3 times per month	89	100	80	86	82	100
Once per month	89	100	80	86	82	100
Several times per year	97	100	95	86	94	100
Once a year	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of partners this year	1.6	1.6	1.7	2.3	1.8	1.0
Who pays for dates						
% who said man pays	74	81	67	100	80	50
% who said woman pays	0	0	0	0	0	0
% who said costs shared	26	19	33	0	20	50

each person in the study over the last year was low, indicating that they do tend to be engaged in monogamous relationships. And although it was hypothesized that men would have more partners than women, this was not found to be the case.

Frequency

Interesting patterns apparent in Table 7 show that the majority of daters get together at least two or three times a week, many seeing each other everyday. The hypothesis was supported that men in the study dated more frequently than women. Interestingly, the oldest group dated most frequently of all groups.

Paying

Also shown in Table 7, the man took the traditional financial responsibility for the date in the majority of all dating cases. None of the respondents reported women taking the entire financial responsibility of dating; costs were often shared, however. Interestingly, men reported sharing costs less often than women did. A dramatic increase in cost sharing is shown from 0 during the sixties age group to 50% during the eighties.

Functions of Dating

Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986) described the

functions of dating relationships as contributions to life satisfaction which are "unanticipated and many times unconscious derivatives of the dating relationship" (p. 399) and identified prestige as one of these main functions. They believed that older women, more often than older men, derived an enhanced identity and self-esteem when they dated. The competition for men that increases with age due to the demographic imbalance of men and women enhances prestige among peers to a larger extent among women than among men. It was thus hypothesized that women would gain more prestige by dating. The findings in the current study, however, (Table 8) show men gaining prestige as a function of dating to the same degree as women. Prestige for both sexes increased slightly with age.

Bulcroft and O'Connor (1986) also identified four major functional roles of dating partners as: friend, confidant, lover, and caregiver. In this case, the findings were replicated. The role of friend was found to be the most important function provided by the dating partner. These items were highly valued by all those interviewed. On other measures of friendship as a dating function, using dating to pass time pleasantly seems to be one of its major functions in later years. Shared interests, included dancing, reading, music,

Table 8

Function of Dating Partner

Function	All N=38	Male N=18	Female N=20	60's N=7	70's N=18	80's N=13
Friend						
Spend time with	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.8
Share interests with	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.8
Avoid loneliness	4.4	4.4	4.4	3.9	4.7	4.4
Emotional support	4.0	3.6	4.3	4.1	4.1	3.8
Confidante						
Confide in	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.4	3.9
Share feelings with	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.8
Lover						
Romance	3.5	3.1*	3.9*	4.4	3.6	2.8
Sexual satisfaction	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.4
Caregiver						
Get advice from	2.9	2.8	3.1	2.7	2.9	3.2
Help with household chores	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.3	3.1	2.8
Help with health concerns	2.6	2.4	2.7	1.7	2.8	2.8
Financial help	1.6	1.4	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.6
Prestige	2.7	3.2	2.4	2.7	2.6	3.0

Note. Measured on 5-point scale, (1) low to (5) high

Male and female scores compared using t-tests.

*$p < .05$

cooking, and traveling are important aspects of dating.

The role of confidant was also valued, as respondents rated highly having someone to confide in and with whom to share feelings. As mentioned earlier in this study, men were less inclined to confide in others than were women.

The roles of lover and caregiver contributed less highly to dating functions. Although romance was a somewhat highly rated function of a dating relationship, sexual satisfaction was not considered a major part of dating by this sample. Most likely, this is in part related to the conservative nature of the sample, whose religious beliefs do not include sex outside of marriage. Caregiver functions, including help with household chores, health concerns, and finances, were not found to be an important function of dating by this sample; however, help given by way of advice and, especially, emotional support were more highly rated.

T-tests showed significant differences between men and women only for the romantic function of dating, with women rating romance higher than did men. Mean scores, ranked in order of rated importance, and grouped by functions of dating roles are: Friend, 4.59, confidant, 4.42, caregiver, 2.78, prestige, 2.74, and lover, 2.53.

Meeting Partners

The most frequently mentioned method of meeting dating partners was through a mutual friend or acquaintance. The second most cited avenue to meeting partners was to date acquaintances they had known during their previous marriages. Other ways of meeting were at dances, senior citizen centers, and through work (volunteer or otherwise).

Dating Activities

The most commonly mentioned type of date by far was to have a meal together. This seemed to be not only a convenient and enjoyable activity to base a date around, but a way to have companionship while performing the daily routine of eating. Another very popular date activity was dancing. This finding obviously stems from the fact that part of the sample was obtained through the membership rolls of a dance club. It is, however, this researcher's observation that cities that have regular dance activities for it's older citizens draw many of their elderly together in active recreation and widened their circle of acquaintances and possible dating partners. This was apparent in the comparison of the two counties in which interviewing was done; one where dances are regularly held and well-attended and enjoyed by the elderly and

the other where dances are infrequent. Other types of dates that were found to be popular were traveling or just rides in the car, concerts, plays, parties in homes, movies, and church attendance.

Obstacles in Dating

The sample as a whole did not perceive a lot of obstacles in dating, but of course the entire sample was composed of daters rather than elderly who did not date. Some factors were, however, mentioned that made it difficult to date. The main obstacles were universal rather than age-related and generally involved finding someone who was compatible. A few, however, did mention factors that were especially true for this older population, mainly the lack of available men for older women and health limitations. Also mentioned were mourning for a deceased spouse and interference by children and families.

When asked what the reasons were for terminating dating relationships, the answers were extremely varied and descriptive of any age group. These included such answers as getting serious too soon, one wanting sexual intimacy sooner than the other, different personality expectations, a third person breaking up the relationship, and loss of interest.

Advantages of Dating

By far, the best thing about dating in late life was found to be the companionship it provided. Those who enjoyed dating (the majority of those interviewed) enjoyed the opportunity to be with someone, have someone to go places with, and do things together. As Schvaneveldt (J. D. Schvaneveldt, personal communication, September 1, 1991) has theorized from this study, two types of daters may be projected, (a) utility daters, who are goal-directed toward marriage and finding a marriage partner, and (b) process or activity daters, whose goal is not marriage, although they would not be opposed to marriage if it occurs. The small number of respondents who reported that they did not enjoy dating were some of those who would be classified as utility daters. They were looking for marriage partners and did not enjoy the anxiety of casual and first-time dates but dated only because it generally comes before marriage. These people felt a lot of time was wasted on dates before the right person was found.

Late-life Dating Compared to Youthful Dating

When asked how dating was different now than when they were young, the sample as a whole noted that the format of dating was found to be basically the same now

as it was in their youth, but the pace now is slower, less active and strenuous. Youthful dating was remembered as wilder, more exciting, passionate, and sexual. Much more money is spent on dates now due to two factors, having more money in this life stage than they did when they were young, and everything being more expensive now for anyone of any age who is dating.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Using a historical perspective, this research reviews the mate selection process that was prevalent during the time period when our current group of elderly was choosing their first mates. When it was in its collective youth, dating for socializing and mate selection was an important process. Marriage was expected of and desired by youth and most married to have children and a family. Marriages were typically traditional, sex-role specific, and with high expectations for togetherness.

Out of this mate selection history comes today's elderly, who, after being widowed or divorced, are often uncomfortable in their roles as singles. Desires to again use dating for socializing and mate selection are hampered for women by an increasingly imbalanced sex ratio. Remarriage rates for the elderly are low, but those who do remarry are generally successful in their new marriages.

The reduced pool of eligibles and other age considerations creates hazards for most theoretical models in mate selection when applied to the elderly. It appears that few researchers have addressed mate selection issues for the elderly. Very little is known

about dating, motivation for dating, and marital mate selection in the more mature years of the life cycle.

In an attempt to help fill some of the gaps in what is known about dating and mate selection in the later years, this study offers a description of the older dater. This study, however, was not based on a random sample. Locating enough participants for the study was difficult and the sample size is small, therefore few inferences can be made to the general population. While more research is needed on larger, more representative samples, identifying populations of this type is difficult, and a number of regional studies would be useful.

Due to the effort, good health, and economic ability it takes to actively date, hypothesis number one states that older daters would have these characteristics. This was indicated in the results. It was found that, compared to other individuals their age, older people who date perceived themseles to be in relatively good health and in comfortable financial situations. They were also found to be fairly well-educated (men more so than women).

These older daters live independently for the most part, but have available and supportive family and friend relationships. Based on other studies of older people, it was predicted, hypothesis number two, that

women would have more social support from their families and friends than do men. Results showed that women do indeed gather together with their families more often than men and have more friends and relatives with whom they can confide. Some of the comments from the men interviewed, however, indicated less value placed on sharing confidences with others. There were no significant differences in the numbers of friends and relatives to enjoy spending time with between men and women and none of them felt lacking in this area. It would seem, then, that a lack of family support and general friendship is not the motivating factor for these people seeking dating relationships.

The third hypothesis formed at the beginning of this study, based on the findings of other studies, predicted a perceived resistance to older dating from the daters children, friends, and the general public. Support rather than resistance from family and friends, however, was perceived. The general public neither resisted nor supported late-life dating, according to the perception of the sample.

In view of the reduced pool of eligibles and the effects of comparison level and level of alternatives of exchange theory, the fourth hypothesis was that older people would be less particular when it came to choosing a mate than young people. However, in

comparing late-life mate selection to youthful mate selection, more similarities than differences were found. Similarities in race, religion and interests are valued as much now as they were when the respondents were young. Good communication skills, health, and approval of significant others were also similarly important. Some differences between youthful and late-life mate selection were found to be significant. Romantic love, while still valued, is not as important to them now as it was earlier. Interest in sex and sexual attraction are also less of a consideration when choosing a mate now than when they were young. Divorcees are more accepted in late life, a practical matter considering the proportion of those divorced in the later years compared to the rarity of divorce when they were in the initial years of mate selection.

Other studies have found older daters less particular about material matters now than younger daters, and, in support of hypothesis four, this study reflects that finding in their lack of caring about relative height between the man and the woman. But it was found that physical attractiveness is as highly valued now as it was when they were young. It seems, however, that the definition of physical attractiveness may have changed, cleanliness and good grooming being a

more dominant part of attractiveness in old age. Financial considerations of a prospective mate are currently significantly more important to older daters now than when they were young.. Young adults typically have relatively little money when they marry and have a lifetime ahead of them to build their financial security. This was especially so for many of this cohort who were dating and marrying during the Great Depression. Older adults have that lifetime security at stake when they remarry. There is considerable risk in marrying someone in late life who is not in good condition economically.

The hypothesis of more liberal mate selection in old age is supported, therefore, in only a few areas and those areas are probably more life-stage-related than due to exchange theory notions in a reduced pool of eligibles.

Important functions of dating include the friendship of the dating partner and the sharing of confidences, especially for women. Both men and women gain prestige among their friends by dating, but this is not as important as other functions of dating. It was hypothesized, hypothesis number five, that due to the high numbers of older women compared to older men finding a dating partner would be more prestigious for women. However, women did not perceive more prestige

than did men.

In view of the fact that single older women outnumber single older men six to one, hypothesis six predicted that men would have more dating partners and date more frequently than women. However, monogamous relationships were found to be the norm for both men and women. Men do not have more partners than women and an even higher percentage of men than women claimed they would rather date one person than many. Men, however, date more frequently than women. Older daters in general see each other at least every few days. Interestingly, the oldest group of daters dates most frequently.

It was predicted, hypothesis seven, that remarriage was the goal of late-life dating. Finding companionship, however, was found to be the most salient motive. Seeking a marriage partner was a strong secondary one. Further research is needed to understand the differences between utility daters, those who are goal-directed toward finding a marriage partner, and process or activity daters, those whose primary goal in dating is not marriage. Variations between and among men and women in these categories would also be a valuable contribution to understanding late-life dating.

Although most were not dating primarily to find a

marriage partner, they viewed marriage as having more advantages than disadvantages. As hypothesis eight predicted, the primary motive for remarriage was for companionship. Returning to the status of being part of a couple was also an important motive.

In additional findings, a profile of the older daters who were interviewed reveals a strong history of marriage, all had been married for many years. However, a reflection of the high divorce rate in this society was also apparent. Many first marriages and even more second marriages had ended in divorce.

The older daters had good concepts of themselves as dating partners in personality, sexual attactiveness and physical attractiveness. In view of the high numbers of older women compared to older men, it would be expected that women would feel their chances of attracting a dating partner would be lower than men's, but there were no significant differences in the two groups. Possibly, women interested in dating and capable of attracting male partners are a minority of older single women in general and they find there are enough men also interested in dating.

A description of dating patterns in the elderly is offered as an exploratory look at this previously under-documented phenomenon. Dating patterns are similar for both young and old age groups in the format

of the date itself, the activities engaged in, albeit at a slower, less strenuous pace, and in the custom of the man most commonly taking financial responsibility for the date. Termination of relationships among the elderly are for the same reasons as for young daters, mainly the lack of compatability.

Dating partners are most often met through mutual acquaintances or were acquaintances during previous marriages. The most frequent dating activity is eating together. Daters also dance, travel and go to performances and parties together.

Obstacles to dating include the problem of finding a compatible mate along with the lack of available potential dates, especially for women. Health limitations and mourning are also obstacles.

Mate selection in late life is centered around finding someone who is enjoyable to spend time with. Important characteristics are compatability, similarity of interests, and companionship qualities. In youthful mate selection, mates were selected, not only for character traits, but for their assets to each other in earning a living and homemaking.

Much of Adams' (1979) model indicating important facilitators and inhibitors for mate selection for more normative age groups is applicable to late-life mate selection. Early to deep attraction may be similar in

youth and old age. Barriers to beginning attraction, however, would include the reduced field of eligibles as a barrier to beginning the process, especially for elderly women. The reduced availability of partners is a factor in the "best I can get" barrier to breakup which already exists in the model. Other barriers to breakup would include comparison of alternatives for this group, which can often be categorized as lonely and wanting to again be part of a couple. Barriers to continuation may include resistance from children, friends, or society. The perception of resistance, however, was not highly evident in this study.

As the current middle-aged population bulge reaches old age, it is expected that dating and mate selection among the elderly will take on increased importance. More research is needed to understand mate selection in this segment of society. It is concluded that this study makes a contribution to that potential understanding.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:
City:
Phone:
Date:

Section 1

1. Sex
   1 M 2 F

2. _____ Age

3. Are you currently married? (having married in the past year)
   1 Y 2 N

4. Number of years previously married _____

5. How would you rate the overall satisfaction you felt with your previous marriage(s). Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5
   1=poor 2=less than average 3=average marriage
   4=better than average 5=excellent

   1 2 3 4 5 First marriage
   1 2 3 4 5 Second marriage

6. How did your marriage(s) end?
   1 divorced 2 widowed (First marriage)
   1 divorced 2 widowed (Second marriage)

7. How much time passed after your last marriage ended before you started looking for a dating partner or considered dating?

   _____ months years

8. Compared to other people your age, how would you rate your health at the present time?
   5 Excellent
   4 Good
   3 Average
   2 Less than average
   1 Poor

9. How would you say your financial situation is now?
   5 All the money I need
   4 Enough to live comfortably
   3 Enough money to get along on
   2 Just barely scraping by
   1 Often don't have enough to make ends meet

10. Race
   1 White
   2 Black
   3 Indian
   4 Hispanic
   5 Other _____

11. Religion
   1 LDS
   2 Catholic
   3 Protestant
   4 Other _____
   5 None

12. Highest year of school completed:
   1 Less than high school completed: Grade _____
   2 High school graduate
   3 Some college
   4 College graduate
   5 Post-college

13. Current annual income (before taxes)

1 less than $5000	7 $30,000-$39,999
2 $5000-$9999	8 $40,000-$49,999
3 $10,000-$14,999	9 $50,000-$74,999
4 $15,000-$19,999	10 $70,000-$99,999
5 $20,000-$24,999	11 $100,000 or more
6 $25,000-$29,999	

14. What career or profession does/did the head of your household have?

15. Do you live alone?
   0 Y N If no, who do you live with?
   1 family members
   2 friend (same sex)
   3 friend (opposite sex) or spouse
   4 group home

16. How many living children do you have? How far away does each son or daughter live?

17. What other family members live in this county/valley?

18. How often do you get together with family?
    1 at least once a day
    2 2-3 times a week
    3 once a week
    4 2-3 times a month
    5 once a month
    6 less than once a month
    7 never

19. Do you have at least one friend or relative (other than dating partner) that you can confide in?
    N 0 Y If yes, how many? _____

20. Do you have at least one friend or relative (other than dating partner) that you enjoy spending time with?
    N 0 Y If yes, how many? _____

Section 2

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, (5 being the highest) how would you rate
    1 2 3 4 5 Your physical attractiveness?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your sex appeal?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your personality?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your chances of attracting a dating partner?

2. Using the same scale, how do you think other people who know you would rate you on the same items?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your physical attractiveness?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your sex appeal?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your personality?
    1 2 3 4 5 Your chances of attracting a dating partner?

3. Are you more interested in a relationship that is limited to one person or would you rather date many?
    1 one 2 many
    Why?

4. For each of the following characteristics, please rate how likely you would be to date or marry someone with that characteristic.
1 definitely not 2 probably not 3 maybe 4 probably 5 definitely (5= would not detract from marital worth)

WOULD YOU DATE/MARRY SOMEONE WHO IS/WAS:

Now

When Young

1	2	3	4	5	a. a different religion than you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	b. divorced once
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	c. divorced many times
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	d. whose kids/parents didn't approve
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	f. you're not in love with
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	g. not interested in sex
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	h. not sexually attractive to you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	i. in poorer health than you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	j. not physically attractive
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	k. a different race than you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	l. different interests than you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	m. not a good conversationalist
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	n. taller (male)/shorter (female)
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	o. in poorer financial shape than you
1	2	3	4	5	
1	2	3	4	5	p. had much less/more education
1	2	3	4	5	

5. Now for each of the same characteristics, please rate how likely you would have been to date or marry someone with that characteristic the first time you were looking for a mate, when you were young.

6. What are the 5 most important things you would look for in a marriage partner now?

7. What are the 5 most important things you looked for in a marriage partner when you were young?

8. How do your children feel about your dating?
   5 very happy about it
   4 somewhat happy about it
   3 don't seem to care
   2 not too happy about it
   1 very unhappy about it

   explain_____

9. How do your friends feel about your dating?
   5 very happy about it
   4 somewhat happy about it
   3 don't seem to care
   2 not too happy about it
   1 very unhappy about it

   explain_____

10. How do you think the general public feels about people your age dating?
   5 very happy about it
   4 somewhat happy about it
   3 don't seem to care
   2 not too happy about it
   1 very unhappy about it

   explain_____

11. What would be the advantages of getting married at this age?

12. What are the disadvantages of getting married at this age?

Section 3

1. What are the reasons you date?
   1 to find a marriage partner
   2 for companionship
   3 romantic reasons
   4 sexual reasons
   5 someone to confide in
   6 economic reasons
   7 religious reasons
   8 other _____

2. How interested are you in getting married again?
   5 extremely interested
   4 very interested
   3 somewhat interested
   2 not very interested
   1 extremely uninterested

3. For each of the following functions dating provides, please rate how important that function is to you.
   5 extremely important
   4 very important
   3 somewhat important
   2 not very important
   1 does not provide that function

1	2	3	4	5	a. someone to spend time with
1	2	3	4	5	b. someone to share interests with
1	2	3	4	5	c. someone to share feelings with
1	2	3	4	5	d. to avoid loneliness
1	2	3	4	5	e. someone to confide in
1	2	3	4	5	f. for romance
1	2	3	4	5	g. for sexual satisfaction
1	2	3	4	5	h. for help with household chores/cooking
1	2	3	4	5	i. for help with health concerns
1	2	3	4	5	j. for financial help
1	2	3	4	5	k. someone to give you advice
1	2	3	4	5	l. for emotional support
1	2	3	4	5	m. increases prestige among friends

4. Where do (did) you meet dating partners?

5. What kinds of things do you do on dates?

6. What are some of the things that make it hard for you or other people your age to participate in dating? (*probe)

7. How often do you date?
   1 every day
   2 2-3 times a week
   3 about once a week
   4 2-3 times a month
   5 about once a month
   6 several times a year
   7 once in the past year

8. How many dating partners have you had in the past year?

9. How long do you think it is appropriate for people your age to date a person before they marry them, if they plan on marrying?

10. How many different people should one date in this stage of life before they think about getting married?

11. For your past relationships, what were the causes of breaking up?

12. What is a typical, common cost of one date?

13. Who pays for the date?
    1 man
    2 woman
    3 split costs
    4 take turns

14. What are the best things about dating at this stage of life?

15. How is dating different now than when you were young?