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Perceptions of Self and of Ideal Mates: Similarities and Differences across the Sexes

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For 19 mating-relevant traits, single males ($N = 53$) and single females ($N = 86$) rated (a) themselves relative to their same-sex peers, (b) their perceptions of the qualities desired by members of the opposite sex in an ideal partner, and (c) the qualities desired in their own ideal romantic partner. Several themes emerged from the data. First, males' and females' judgments of what members of the opposite-sex seek were generally accurate. Second, males and females both feel that they fall short of perceived opposite-sex expectations in a few areas. Third, both males and females desire an ideal partner better than themselves, but this is especially true for females. These findings are discussed in terms of evolutionary social psychological principles.

When asked to consider the qualities that are important in long-term mates, adults' responses tend to share a great deal of similarity, regardless of cultural background or sex of respondent. Buss et al. (1990) found that, across multiple and disparate cultures, males and females both desire long-term partners who manifest mutual love, a dependable character, a pleasant disposition, and emotional stability. Generally, we want our long-term partners to be nice, honest people on whom we can depend.

While the general qualities desired in long-term mates are similar across sexes, a great deal of recent research has focused on sex differences in qualities desired in potential mates (e.g., Buss, 1994). This body of research supports the notion that males and females share a great deal regarding the qualities desired in mates, but this same body of research underscores several consistent sex differences. For instance, in a comparison of six data sets covering the time period from 1939–1996, Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, and Larsen (2001) found that, across time periods, males consistently rated physical attractiveness as more important than females. However, physical attractiveness gained in importance for both sexes across time. This pattern of findings is consistent with other research demonstrating both similarities and differences between the sexes.

Sex differences in the characteristics desired in mates have been explained by evolutionary social psychological theories. Evolutionary social psychology conceptualizes social behaviors as products of natural selection designed to increase individuals' chances of reproducing (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997; Buss, 1999). Given the ultimate emphasis on qualities that lead to successful reproduction, evolutionists often focus their research questions on factors associated with mating.

Trivers' (1972) Parental Investment Theory is often cited as a specific theory within the general framework of evolutionary psychology that is useful in explaining mating-relevant outcomes. In basic terms, Trivers' theory suggests that costs associated with parenting are of primary importance in determining whether organisms will pursue long- versus short-term mating strategies. High costs associated with parenting tend to correspond to the use of long-term strategies, such as monogamy, while low costs tend to be associated with the use of short-term strategies. While Trivers' theory is often used to understand mating patterns at the level of species, this theory may also be used to understand differential mating patterns across the sexes within a species.

Sex Differences in Mating Patterns

Trivers' (1972) theory suggests that members of the sex associated with relatively high parenting costs will utilize long-term mating strategies, while members of the sex associated with lower parenting costs will be less likely to use long-term mating strategies. Due to anatomical differences between the sexes and phenomena such as pregnancy and breastfeeding, females are required to invest considerably more in the parenting process than males. This divergence between males and females has been cited in attempts to explain sex differences in mating patterns. For instance, across a wide variety of cultures, males tend to emphasize physical attractiveness in their desires for potential mates more than females do (Buss et al., 1990). Presumably, an emphasis on physical attractiveness corresponds to a desire for a mate who is likely to be fertile and, therefore, capable of successfully reproducing. A large body of research suggests that characteristics associated with attractiveness in females are predictive of fertility (e.g., an optimal waist-to-hip ratio; Singh, 1993). Conversely, in Buss et al.'s (1990) study, females consistently preferred male partners to be slightly older than themselves. This pattern presumably suggests a desire for a partner who is likely to have achieved a relatively high level of social and career status (a manifestation of a long-term mating strategy). Sex differences in qualities desired in potential mates generally are consistent with the predictions of Parental Investment Theory. Males tend to emphasize physical attractiveness, correlates of fertility, and health in potential mates more so than females. These findings may be interpreted as representing a motive to mate with partners who are most likely to be able to successfully reproduce a male's genes. Females, on the other hand, tend to emphasize indices of long-term mating more than males, indicating a stronger desire for a partner with intelligence, financial resources, a good education, and faithfulness compared with males (Buss et al., 1990).

One basic aspect of female sexuality seems to be relatively high levels of discrimination regarding potential partners compared with males (Buss, 1994). In fact, this tendency for females to be relatively choosy in the mate selection process seems to be consistent across species in which females expend more in the mating process than males (Trivers, 1985). For instance, female fireflies are significantly better at recognizing luminescent mating signals from conspecifics compared with males (who are more likely to try to mate with members of firefly species different from their own). Pertinent to the current research, we predict that females will be more discriminating and will hold relatively high ideals for potential mates compared with males.

Desired Mate Qualities as Social Judgments

From a social psychological perspective, we can understand qualities desired in potential mates as representing a specific class of social judgments. Thus, general processes involved in social judgments, including, for instance, attributional biases (Ross & Nisbett, 1991), may play a role in how people come to report qualities they desire in mates.

However, an important feature of evolutionary social psychology pertains to domain specificity of psychological processes. For instance, in their research on responses to infidelity across the sexes, Buss, Larsen, Westen, and Semmelroth (1992) provide evidence suggesting that male sexual jealousy is qualitatively different from other kinds of emotions and that it represents a specific adaptation to specific selective pressures arising from consequences associated with internal fertilization.

This conceptualization of domain-specific psychological mechanisms has important implications for understanding social judgments. In describing a series of studies to explicate this point, Cosmides and Tooby (1992) demonstrate that logical reasoning is considerably more likely to be primed if logically identical judgments are framed in terms of violations of social contracts as opposed to being framed in other terms. Identical logic problems are much easier for people if the logic problems pertain to violations of social contracts. According to the evolutionary reasoning outlined by Cosmides and Tooby (1992), due to the importance of reciprocal altruism in the evolutionary history of our species, we evolved specialized psychological mechanisms that allow us to make particularly accurate judgments when judgments bear on our ability to detect individuals who cheat in reciprocal altruism (i.e., violate social contracts).

The work of Cosmides and Tooby (1992) suggests that general theories of social perception may not be as useful (or empirically valid) as domain-specific theories that take evolutionary considerations into account. The current reasoning suggests that judgments regarding qualities desired in potential mates may have their own unique qualities. As with judgments regarding social contract violations, judgments regarding potential mates have extraordinarily significant implications regarding individuals' fitness. The tendency to desire qualities that effectively reproduced an individual's genes would lead to more successful reproduction compared with the desire for alternative qualities. Males in our ancestral past who tended to be attracted to postmenopausal women were less likely to mate with fertile individuals and, subsequently,

were less likely to pass on genes to further generations. The evolutionary implications of such judgments underscore the importance of accuracy regarding such judgments. Based on the current reasoning, we hypothesize that males and females will generally be accurate in judging what members of the opposite-sex want in potential mates.

Self-Relevant Judgments Pertinent to Mating

In addition to making judgments about what one wants in potential long-term mates, other similar kinds of judgments must be made toward the goal of successful mating. For instance, individuals need to assess their own mating-relevant qualities. Accurately knowing one's own value as a mate may well encourage successful mating.

Some evolutionary social psychological reasoning suggests that self-relevant judgments may actually have been shaped by natural selection to be inaccurate in systematic kinds of ways. Krebs and Denton (1997) draw on literature pertaining to social-perceptual biases suggesting that overly positive self-evaluations are more adaptive than relatively accurate self-judgments (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988). These authors argue that having overly positive evaluations of oneself would encourage positive benefits such as physical fitness, happiness, and the capacity for productive work.

We hypothesize the following regarding self-judgments pertaining to mate selection. First, we hypothesize that, across the sexes, participants will generally rate themselves in ways that match their perceptions of desired mate qualities held by members of the opposite sex. Such a finding would indirectly speak to overly positive self-evaluations. Second, we predict that discrepancies between self-ratings and perceived qualities desired by members of the opposite-sex will differ across the sexes because of different concerns in mate selection.

Overview of Current Research

This research was designed to elaborate on findings pertaining to sex differences regarding qualities desired in potential long-term mates. Participants were asked to rate (a) themselves relative to their same-sex peers, (b) their perceptions of the qualities desired by members of the opposite sex in an ideal partner, and (c) the qualities desired in their own ideal romantic partner. This research tested the following hypotheses: We hypothesize (a) that individuals will generally be accurate in judging what members of the opposite-sex want in potential mates, (b) that individuals will generally rate themselves in ways that match their perceptions of what members of the opposite sex desire in a potential mate, and (c) that women will be more discriminating or choosy in describing their ideal romantic partner.

METHOD

We adapted the methodology used by Fallon and Rozin in their study of preferred body types (1985). Fallon and Rozin presented college students with drawings of male and female bodies where the weight changed along a continuum from skinny to heavy.

Students rated (1) where they believed they were on the continuum, (2) what they thought members of the opposite sex found attractive, and (3) what they found to be attractive in members of the opposite sex. We modified this technique to address personal attributes or traits that might be of interest in a romantic partner.

Participants

Participants included students at Utah Valley State College (UVSC), an institution with 24,000 students in Orem, Utah. Participants were recruited from lower-division courses in psychology and sociology during the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003. Participants completed the survey during their regularly scheduled courses. Participants were given no compensation for their participation.

Of the students willing to participate, 139 were single and heterosexual. Of those participants, 53 were male (mean age = 21.51, $SD = 2.09$) and 86 were female (mean age = 19.79, $SD = 1.89$). Students who were not single or heterosexual were not included in the analyses. Ninety-one percent of the students reported being white, non-Hispanic. Ninety-one percent of the students also reported being members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as Mormons.

Materials

The survey instrument constructed for this study asked participants to provide ratings on 19 personal attributes or traits that might be of interest in mate selection. The traits comprised a combination of attributes previously investigated in mate selection research and attributes of interest to the authors. Tables 1–7 list the 19 traits. All ratings were given on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated little of the trait or attribute (e.g., *honesty*, *weight*, *attractiveness*) and 7 indicated a great deal of the trait or attribute. Larger numbers indicate more social desirability except for *weight*, where smaller numbers indicate more social desirability.

Participants provided three sets of ratings. First, participants provided ratings on the 19 traits indicating where they believe they stand relative to their same-sex peers. Second, participants provided ratings on a second list of the 19 traits indicating what they believe members of the opposite sex are looking for in potential romantic partners. Third, participants provided ratings on a third list of the 19 traits indicating what they are looking for in potential romantic partners.

Procedure

Students who agreed to participate in the study provided informed consent. After the consent form had been filled out, participants completed the survey. After participants completed the surveys, they were debriefed regarding the purpose and hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS

All of the results reported below are based on *t* tests. Because we performed 19 *t* tests in each analysis, a Bonferroni correction was employed and all significant results were significant at the $p < .0026$ level. This level of significance allowed us to keep the probability of a Type I Error constant at the $p < .05$ level for each set of analyses ($.05/19$ *t* tests = .0026). All tests were two-tailed.

Accuracy in Judging the Desires of the Opposite Sex

We wanted to know whether single men and women are accurate in knowing what members of the opposite sex are looking for in romantic partners. For this analysis, we performed *t* tests for independent means on the 19 traits as described below. Overall, men and women were accurate in their assessment of what members of the opposite sex are looking for in romantic partners.

Men

We compared what men think women want against what women actually say they want. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There were two significant results. Both men and women rated *hardworking* highly (men, $M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.12$; women, $M = 6.45$, $SD = .64$), but men underestimated the importance of this trait for women. In addition, men and women both rated *ambition* highly (men, $M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.02$; women, $M = 6.35$, $SD = .78$), but men underestimated the importance of this trait for women.

Women

We compared what women think men want against what men actually say they want. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There were two significant results. Both men and women gave low scores to *weight* (low scores indicate being thin—men, $M = 3.45$, $SD = .95$; women $M = 2.86$, $SD = .98$), but women overestimated how skinny men want them to be. Also, both men and women rated *hygiene and cleanliness* highly (men, $M = 6.36$, $SD = .90$; women, $M = 6.78$, $SD = .52$), but women overestimated the importance of hygiene and cleanliness to men.

People View Themselves as Being Similar to an Ideal Partner

We also wanted to know how men and women think they compare to what members of the opposite sex want. For this analysis, we performed *t* tests for dependent means on the 19 traits as described below. Overall, both men and women feel that they have shortcomings compared to what they believe members of the opposite sex are looking for in a romantic partner.

TABLE 1
The Accuracy of Men's Perceptions:
What Men Think Women Want and What Women Say They Want

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Sense of Humor					
Male	53	5.70	.75	-.96	.17
Female	86	5.83	.77		
Honesty					
Male	53	6.38	.81	-2.10	.37
Female	86	6.64	.65		
Socioeconomic Status of Family					
Male	53	5.21	.95	2.97	.53
Female	84	4.77	.75		
Caring Nature					
Male	53	6.26	.90	-1.27	.22
Female	86	6.43	.64		
Educational Attainment (Planned)					
Male	53	5.74	1.09	-2.59	.46
Female	86	6.17	.88		
Weight					
Male	53	3.94	.77	-2.08	.37
Female	86	4.17	.54		
Religiosity					
Male	53	5.57	1.15	-1.86	.33
Female	86	5.97	1.27		
Forgiving					
Male	53	5.98	1.03	-2.09	.37
Female	86	6.31	.83		
Attractiveness					
Male	53	6.09	.97	2.45	.43
Female	86	5.66	1.04		
Patience					
Male	53	5.49	.93	-2.76	.48
Female	86	5.91	.82		

(continued)

Men

We compared men's self-perceptions against what they believe women are looking for in romantic partners. See Table 3 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There were four significant results. In all cases, men felt that they fall short of what women are looking for. Men rated themselves as being less *caring* than they believe women want (self-perception, $M = 5.74$, $SD = .94$; belief about what women want, $M = 6.26$, $SD = .90$). Men rated themselves as obtaining less *education* than they believe women want (self-perception, $M = 5.15$, $SD = .97$; belief about what women want, $M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.09$). Men rated themselves as being less *attractive* than they believe women

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	5.77	1.05	.48	.08
Female	86	5.69	1.03		
Hardworking					
Male	53	5.83	1.12	-4.16*	.73
Female	86	6.45	.64		
Emotional Stability					
Male	53	5.92	1.11	-1.98	.35
Female	86	6.27	.91		
Dependability					
Male	53	6.09	1.08	-.68	.12
Female	86	6.23	1.20		
Ambition					
Male	53	5.81	1.02	-3.51*	.62
Female	86	6.35	.78		
Communication and Social Skills					
Male	53	5.98	.99	-.77	.13
Female	86	6.12	1.02		
Hygiene and Cleanliness					
Male	53	6.36	1.09	-1.67	.29
Female	86	6.64	.88		
Intelligence					
Male	53	5.79	.95	-2.55	.45
Female	86	6.16	.75		
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	5.74	.88	-.13	.02
Female	86	5.76	.88		

Note: Male scores represent what the men in the study thought women wanted in a romantic partner. Female scores represent what the women in the study wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where men's perceptions were statistically different from women's preferences. *df* for all tests = n_1+n_2-2

* $p < .0026$

want (self-perception, $M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.13$; belief about what women want, $M = 6.09$, $SD = .97$). Men rated themselves as having poorer *communication and social skills* than they believe women want (self-perception, $M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.35$; belief about what women want, $M = 5.98$, $SD = .99$).

Women

We compared women's self-perceptions against what they believe men are looking for in romantic partners. See Table 4 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There

TABLE 2
The Accuracy of Women's Perceptions:
What Women Think Men Want and What Men Say They Want

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Sense of Humor					
Male	53	5.79	.79	2.53	.45
Female	86	5.38	1.00		
Honesty					
Male	53	6.36	.74	1.66	.29
Female	85	6.08	1.06		
Socioeconomic Status of Family					
Male	53	4.60	1.03	-2.64	.47
Female	84	5.05	.92		
Caring Nature					
Male	53	6.15	.95	.82	.14
Female	86	6.01	.99		
Educational Attainment (Planned)					
Male	53	5.45	1.08	1.44	.25
Female	86	5.17	1.12		
Weight					
Male	53	3.45	.95	3.49*	.61
Female	86	2.86	.98		
Religiosity					
Male	53	5.64	1.55	1.63	.29
Female	86	5.24	1.29		
Forgiving					
Male	53	5.89	.89	-2.83	.50
Female	85	6.31	.82		
Attractiveness					
Male	53	6.04	.94	-2.48	.44
Female	86	6.43	.89		
Patience					
Male	53	5.77	.87	-.56	.10
Female	86	5.86	.91		

(continued)

were seven significant results. On six of the traits women felt that they fall short of what men are looking for and on one trait they felt that they surpass what men are looking for.

First we present the shortcomings. Women rated themselves as having more *weight* (i.e., being heavier) than what they believe men want (self-perception, $M = 3.83$, $SD = .81$; belief about what men want, $M = 2.86$, $SD = .98$). Women rated themselves as being less *forgiving* than men want (self-perception, $M = 5.65$, $SD = .95$; belief about what men want, $M = 6.31$, $SD = .82$). Women rated themselves as being less *attractive* than men want (self-perception, $M = 4.87$, $SD = .92$; belief about what men want, $M =$

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	N	M	SD	t	d
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	4.70	1.05	-2.75	.48
Female	86	5.22	1.11		
Hardworking					
Male	53	5.62	1.04	.30	.05
Female	86	5.57	1.00		
Emotional Stability					
Male	53	6.15	.91	-.26	.05
Female	86	6.20	1.07		
Dependability					
Male	53	6.04	.90	-.11	.02
Female	86	6.06	1.15		
Ambition					
Male	53	5.62	1.00	.50	.09
Female	85	5.53	1.11		
Communication and Social Skills					
Male	53	5.96	.90	.25	.04
Female	86	5.92	1.05		
Hygiene and Cleanliness					
Male	53	6.36	.90	-3.50*	.62
Female	86	6.78	.52		
Intelligence					
Male	53	5.83	1.01	2.67	.47
Female	86	5.33	1.12		
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	4.70	1.07	-1.50	.26
Female	86	5.00	1.20		

Note: Male scores represent what the men in the study wanted in a romantic partner. Female scores represent what the women in the study thought men wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where women's perceptions were statistically different from men's preferences. df for all tests = $n_1 + n_2 - 2$
 * $p < .0026$

6.43, $SD = .89$). Women rated themselves as having less *patience* than men want (self-perception, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.29$; belief about what men want, $M = 5.86$, $SD = .91$). Women rated themselves as having less *emotional stability* than what men want (self-perception, $M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.14$; belief about what men want, $M = 6.20$, $SD = 1.07$). Women also rated themselves as having less *hygiene and cleanliness* than men want (self-perception, $M = 6.56$, $SD = .66$; belief about what men want, $M = 6.78$, $SD = .52$).

The one area where women felt that they exceeded what men wanted was in *religiosity*. Women felt that they were more religious than what men wanted (self-perception, $M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.38$; belief about what men want, $M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.29$).

TABLE 3
Men View Themselves as Being Similar to an Ideal Partner:
Men's Self-perceptions and Beliefs of What Women Want

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Difference</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Sense of Humor							
Self-perception	52	5.31	1.13	-.38	1.22	-2.27	0.63
Belief		5.69	.76				
Honesty							
Self-perception	53	6.00	.85	-.38	1.15	-2.39	0.66
Belief		6.38	.81				
Socioeconomic Status of Family							
Self-perception	53	4.68	1.30	-.53	1.51	-2.54	0.70
Belief		5.21	.95				
Caring Nature							
Self-perception	53	5.74	.94	-.53	1.17	-3.29*	0.91
Belief		6.26	.90				
Educational Attainment (Planned)							
Self-perception	53	5.15	.97	-.58	1.32	-3.22*	0.89
Belief		5.74	1.09				
Weight							
Self-perception	53	3.62	1.00	-.32	1.12	-2.08	0.58
Belief		3.94	.77				
Religiosity							
Self-perception	53	5.60	1.77	.04	1.68	.16	0.05
Belief		5.57	1.15				
Forgiving							
Self-perception	53	5.81	.92	-.17	1.01	-1.22	0.34
Belief		5.98	1.03				
Attractiveness							
Self-perception	53	4.98	1.13	-1.11	1.49	-5.44*	1.51
Belief		6.09	.97				
Patience							
Self-perception	53	5.00	1.29	-.49	1.34	-2.67	0.74
Belief		5.49	.93				

(continued)

People Want a Romantic Partner Better Than Themselves

We also wanted to compare how men and women rate themselves compared to what they want in a romantic partner. For this analysis, we performed *t* tests for dependent means on the 19 traits as described below. Overall, both men and women want a romantic partner who is better than themselves.

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	N	M	SD	Difference		t	d
				M	SD		
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	53	5.32	1.12	-.45	1.37	-2.41	0.67
Belief		5.77	1.05				
Hardworking							
Self-perception	53	5.47	1.20	-.36	1.40	-1.86	0.52
Belief		5.83	1.12				
Emotional Stability							
Self-perception	53	5.40	1.31	-.53	1.49	-2.58	0.72
Belief		5.92	1.11				
Dependability							
Self-perception	53	5.58	1.03	-.51	1.17	-3.17	0.88
Belief		6.09	1.08				
Ambition							
Self-perception	53	5.34	1.37	-.47	1.66	-2.07	0.57
Belief		5.81	1.02				
Communication and Social Skills							
Self-perception	53	5.28	1.35	-.70	1.59	-3.20*	0.89
Belief		5.98	.99				
Hygiene and Cleanliness							
Self-perception	53	6.06	.93	-.30	1.41	-1.56	0.43
Belief		6.36	1.09				
Intelligence							
Self-perception	53	5.74	1.06	-.06	1.29	-.32	0.09
Belief		5.79	.95				
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	53	5.38	1.10	-.36	1.24	-2.10	0.58
Belief		5.74	.88				

Note: Self-perception scores represent how the men in the study viewed themselves. Belief scores represent what the men in the study thought women wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where men's self-perceptions were statistically different from what they believe women want. df for all tests = n-1

* $p < .0026$

Men

We compared men's self-perceptions against what they are looking for in romantic partners. See Table 5 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There were seven significant results. Men are looking for a romantic partner who scores higher than themselves on five traits and lower than themselves on two traits.

First we report the traits on which men want their romantic partner to score higher. Men want a romantic partner who has a better *sense of humor* than they do

TABLE 4
 Women View Themselves as Being Similar to an Ideal Partner:
 Women's Self-perceptions and Beliefs of What Men Want

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Sense of Humor							
Self-perception	86	5.35	.88	-.03	1.23	-.26	0.06
Belief		5.38	1.00				
Honesty							
Self-perception	85	5.86	.90	-.22	1.26	-1.64	0.36
Belief		6.08	1.06				
Socioeconomic Status of Family							
Self-perception	84	4.92	.97	-.13	1.23	-.95	0.21
Belief		5.05	.92				
Caring Nature							
Self-perception	86	6.14	.98	.13	1.27	.93	0.20
Belief		6.01	.99				
Educational Attainment (Planned)							
Self-perception	85	5.42	.89	.24	1.36	1.60	0.35
Belief		5.19	1.12				
Weight							
Self-perception	86	3.83	.81	.97	1.19	7.51*	1.63
Belief		2.86	.98				
Religiosity							
Self-perception	86	5.81	1.38	.57	1.44	3.66*	0.79
Belief		5.24	1.29				
Forgiving							
Self-perception	85	5.65	.95	-.66	1.10	-5.54*	1.21
Belief		6.31	.82				
Attractiveness							
Self-perception	86	4.87	.92	-1.56	1.08	-13.38*	2.90
Belief		6.43	.89				
Patience							
Self-perception	85	4.68	1.29	-1.18	1.37	-7.90*	1.72
Belief		5.86	.91				

(continued)

(self-perception, $M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.12$; preferred in romantic partner, $M = 5.79$, $SD = .79$). Men want a romantic partner who is more *attractive* than they are (self-perception, $M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.13$; preferred in romantic partner, $M = 6.04$, $SD = .94$). Men want a romantic partner with more *patience* than they have (self-perception, $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.29$; preferred in romantic partner, $M = 5.77$, $SD = .87$). Men want a romantic partner with more *emotional stability* than they have (self-perception, $M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.31$; preferred in romantic partner, $M = 6.15$, $SD = .91$). Men want a romantic partner with better *communication and social*

TABLE 4 (Continued)

	N	M	SD	Difference		t	d
				M	SD		
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	86	5.13	1.00	-.09	1.38	-.63	0.14
Belief		5.22	1.11				
Hardworking							
Self-perception	86	5.65	.86	.08	1.32	.57	0.12
Belief		5.57	1.00				
Emotional Stability							
Self-perception	86	5.50	1.14	-.70	1.36	-4.77*	1.04
Belief		6.20	1.07				
Dependability							
Self-perception	86	5.78	.97	-.28	1.20	-2.15	0.47
Belief		6.06	1.15				
Ambition							
Self-perception	85	5.49	1.10	-.04	1.47	-.22	0.05
Belief		5.53	1.11				
Communication and Social Skills							
Self-perception	86	5.65	1.01	-.27	1.44	-1.72	0.37
Belief		5.92	1.05				
Hygiene and Cleanliness							
Self-perception	86	6.56	.66	-.22	.62	-3.30*	0.72
Belief		6.78	.52				
Intelligence							
Self-perception	86	5.41	.93	.08	1.46	.52	0.11
Belief		5.33	1.12				
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	86	5.37	.98	.37	1.34	2.58	0.56
Belief		5.00	1.20				

Note: Self-perception scores represent how the women in the study viewed themselves. Belief scores represent what the women in the study thought men wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where women's self-perceptions were statistically different from what they believe men want. *df* for all tests = *n*-1

**p* < .0026

skills than they have (self-perception, *M* = 5.28, *SD* = 1.35; preferred in romantic partner, *M* = 5.96, *SD* = .90).

There are two traits on which men are looking for a romantic partner who scores lower than they do. Men want a romantic partner who will have a lower *expected income* than they have (self-perception, *M* = 5.32, *SD* = 1.12; preferred in romantic partner, *M* = 4.70, *SD* = 1.05). Men also want a romantic partner who has a lower *status of occupation* than they have (self-perception, *M* = 5.38, *SD* = 1.10; preferred in romantic partner, *M* = 4.70, *SD* = 1.07).

TABLE 5
Men Want a Romantic Partner Better than Themselves:
Men's Self-perceptions and Preferences for a Romantic Partner

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Difference</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Sense of Humor							
Self-perception	53	5.32	1.12	-.47	.82	-4.17*	1.16
Preferred		5.79	.79				
Honesty							
Self-perception	53	6.00	.85	-.36	.98	-2.66	0.74
Preferred		6.36	.74				
Socioeconomic Status of Family							
Self-perception	53	4.68	1.30	.08	1.21	.46	0.13
Preferred		4.60	1.03				
Caring Nature							
Self-perception	53	5.74	.94	-.42	.99	-3.06	0.85
Preferred		6.15	.95				
Educational Attainment (Planned)							
Self-perception	53	5.15	.97	-.30	1.15	-1.91	0.53
Preferred		5.45	1.08				
Weight							
Self-perception	53	3.62	1.00	.17	1.16	1.07	0.30
Preferred		3.45	.95				
Religiosity							
Self-perception	53	5.60	1.77	-.04	.96	-.29	0.08
Preferred		5.64	1.55				
Forgiving							
Self-perception	53	5.81	.92	-.08	.68	-.81	0.23
Preferred		5.89	.89				
Attractiveness							
Self-perception	53	4.98	1.13	-1.06	1.26	-6.10*	1.69
Preferred		6.04	.94				
Patience							
Self-perception	53	5.00	1.29	-.77	1.31	-4.30*	1.19
Preferred		5.77	.87				

(continued)

Women

We compared women's self-perceptions against what they are looking for in romantic partners. See Table 6 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. There were 15 significant results. Women are looking for a romantic partner who scores higher than themselves on all 15 traits for which there was statistical significance. The only four traits on which women are not looking for someone better than themselves are *socio-economic status of family*, *caring nature*, *religiosity*, and *hygiene and cleanliness*.

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	N	M	SD	Difference		t	d
				M	SD		
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	53	5.32	1.12	.62	1.39	3.26*	0.90
Preferred		4.70	1.05				
Hardworking							
Self-perception	53	5.47	1.20	-.15	1.39	-.79	0.22
Preferred		5.62	1.04				
Emotional Stability							
Self-perception	53	5.40	1.31	-.75	1.25	-4.38*	1.21
Preferred		6.15	.91				
Dependability							
Self-perception	53	5.58	1.03	-.45	1.12	-2.95	0.82
Preferred		6.04	.90				
Ambition							
Self-perception	53	5.34	1.37	-.28	1.39	-1.48	0.41
Preferred		5.62	1.00				
Communication and Social Skills							
Self-perception	53	5.28	1.35	-.68	1.25	-3.95*	1.10
Preferred		5.96	.90				
Hygiene and Cleanliness							
Self-perception	53	6.06	.93	-.30	.89	-2.47	0.69
Preferred		6.36	.90				
Intelligence							
Self-perception	53	5.74	1.06	-.09	1.13	-.61	0.17
Preferred		5.83	1.01				
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	53	5.38	1.10	.68	1.01	4.87*	1.35
Preferred		4.70	1.07				

Note: Self-perception scores represent how the men in the study viewed themselves. Preferred scores represent what the men in the study wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where men's self-perceptions were statistically different from what they want in a romantic partner. df for all tests = $n-1$

* $p < .0026$

With regard to *weight*, women did want someone who scored higher than themselves. This pattern of results means that the women in our sample wanted a romantic partner heavier than they are.

Men and Women Perceive Themselves to Be about the Same

In the analysis comparing men's and women's self-perceptions against what they believe members of the opposite sex are looking for, we found that both men and

TABLE 6
Women Want a Romantic Partner Better than Themselves:
Women's Self-perceptions and Preferences for a Romantic Partner

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Difference</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Sense of Humor							
Self-perception	86	5.35	.88	-.48	.82	-5.38*	1.17
Preferred		5.83	.77				
Honesty							
Self-perception	86	5.86	.90	-.78	1.02	-7.07*	1.53
Preferred		6.64	.65				
Socioeconomic Status of Family							
Self-perception	84	4.90	.98	.13	1.05	1.14	0.25
Preferred		4.77	.75				
Caring Nature							
Self-perception	86	6.14	.98	-.29	1.02	-2.65	0.58
Preferred		6.43	.64				
Educational Attainment (Planned)							
Self-perception	85	5.42	.89	-.75	1.20	-5.77*	1.26
Preferred		6.18	.89				
Weight							
Self-perception	86	3.83	.81	-.35	.78	-4.16*	0.90
Preferred		4.17	.54				
Religiosity							
Self-perception	86	5.81	1.38	-.15	1.03	-1.36	0.29
Preferred		5.97	1.27				
Forgiving							
Self-perception	86	5.64	.94	-.67	.96	-6.49*	1.41
Preferred		6.31	.83				
Attractiveness							
Self-perception	86	4.87	.92	-.79	1.17	-6.27*	1.36
Preferred		5.66	1.04				
Patience							
Self-perception	85	4.68	1.29	-1.22	1.32	-8.53*	1.86
Preferred		5.91	.83				

(continued)

women have perceived shortcomings. Men had four shortcomings and women had six. In the analysis comparing men's and women's self-perceptions to what they want in a romantic partner, both men and women wanted someone better than themselves. Men wanted someone better on five of the traits and women wanted someone better on 15 of the traits. The results of these analyses led us to wonder if women rated themselves lower than men did.

For this analysis, we compared the self-perceptions of men and women to see if women rate themselves lower than men than rate themselves. We performed a *t* test for

TABLE 6 (Continued)

	N	M	SD	Difference		t	d
				M	SD		
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	86	5.13	1.00	-.56	1.15	-4.49*	0.97
Preferred		5.69	1.03				
Hardworking							
Self-perception	86	5.65	.86	-.80	.89	-8.34*	1.81
Preferred		6.45	.64				
Emotional Stability							
Self-perception	86	5.50	1.14	-.77	1.25	-5.68*	1.23
Preferred		6.27	.91				
Dependability							
Self-perception	86	5.78	.97	-.45	1.11	-3.78*	0.82
Preferred		6.23	1.20				
Ambition							
Self-perception	86	5.50	1.09	-.85	1.27	-6.20*	1.34
Preferred		6.35	.78				
Communication and Social Skills							
Self-perception	86	5.65	1.01	-.47	1.32	-3.28*	0.71
Preferred		6.12	1.02				
Hygiene and Cleanliness							
Self-perception	86	6.56	.66	-.08	.87	-.87	0.19
Preferred		6.64	.88				
Intelligence							
Self-perception	86	5.41	.93	-.76	.99	-7.06*	1.53
Preferred		6.16	.75				
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)							
Self-perception	86	5.37	.98	-.38	1.08	-3.31*	0.72
Preferred		5.76	.88				

Note: Self-perception scores represent how the women in the study viewed themselves. Preferred scores represent what the women in the study wanted in a romantic partner. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where women's self-perceptions were statistically different from what they want in a romantic partner. *df* for all tests = *n*-1

**p* < .0026

independent means on men's and women's self-perceptions on the 19 traits. See Table 7 for descriptive statistics and *t* test results. The only statistically significant difference was that women rate themselves higher on *hygiene and cleanliness* than men do (men, *M* = 6.06, *SD* = .93; women, *M* = 6.56, *SD* = .66). Note that overall, the men and women in our study rated themselves as being desirable on the 19 traits.

From this set of findings we can conclude that the significant results in the previous analyses were not due to women giving themselves low ratings or giving themselves ratings that are significantly different from the ratings that men gave themselves.

TABLE 7
Men and Women Have Similar Self-ratings: Men's and Women's Self-perceptions

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Sense of Humor					
Male	53	5.32	1.12	-.16	0.03
Female	86	5.35	.88		
Honesty					
Male	53	6.00	.85	.91	0.16
Female	86	5.86	.90		
Socioeconomic Status of Family					
Male	53	4.68	1.30	-1.24	0.22
Female	86	4.92	.97		
Caring Nature					
Male	53	5.74	.94	-2.39	0.42
Female	86	6.14	.98		
Educational Attainment (Planned)					
Male	53	5.15	.97	-1.69	0.30
Female	85	5.42	.89		
Weight					
Male	53	3.62	1.00	-1.30	0.23
Female	86	3.83	.81		
Religiosity					
Male	53	5.60	1.77	-.78	0.14
Female	86	5.81	1.38		
Forgiving					
Male	53	5.81	.92	1.05	0.18
Female	86	5.64	.94		
Attractiveness					
Male	53	4.98	1.13	.62	0.11
Female	86	4.87	.92		
Patience					
Male	53	5.00	1.29	1.41	0.25
Female	85	4.68	1.29		
Expected Income (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	5.32	1.12	1.05	0.18
Female	86	5.13	1.00		

(continued)

DISCUSSION

This research tested three hypotheses regarding the qualities people desire in potential mates and their perceptions of themselves as potential mates. The hypotheses were derived from the theories of evolutionary social psychology. These hypotheses suggest that the kinds of judgments involved in this study would have been shaped by natural selection to ultimately optimize individuals' fitness.

TABLE 7 (Continued)

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Hardworking					
Male	53	5.47	1.20	-1.02	0.18
Female	86	5.65	.86		
Emotional Stability					
Male	53	5.40	1.31	-.49	0.09
Female	86	5.50	1.14		
Dependability					
Male	53	5.58	1.03	-1.12	0.20
Female	86	5.78	.97		
Ambition					
Male	53	5.34	1.37	-.76	0.13
Female	86	5.50	1.09		
Communication and Social Skills					
Male	53	5.28	1.35	-1.83	0.32
Female	86	5.65	1.01		
Hygiene and Cleanliness					
Male	53	6.06	.93	-3.71*	0.65
Female	86	6.56	.66		
Intelligence					
Male	53	5.74	1.06	1.93	0.34
Female	86	5.41	.93		
Status of Occupation (When School Is Completed)					
Male	53	5.38	1.10	.03	0.01
Female	86	5.37	.98		

Note: Male scores represent how the men in the study viewed themselves. Female scores represent how the women in the study viewed themselves. All ratings were on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating little of the trait or attribute and 7 indicating a great deal of the trait or attribute. Generally, higher numbers represent more social desirability except for weight where low numbers are more socially desirable. Statistical significance denotes where men's self-perceptions and women's self-perceptions are different. *df* for all tests = $n_1 + n_2 - 2$

* $p < .0026$

Accuracy in Judging the Desires of the Opposite-Sex

While judgments pertinent to estimating desired qualities of members of the opposite sex reflect social judgments, these particular judgments are crucial for successful mating. Thus, we predicted such judgments to be generally accurate. This prediction would be consistent with work by evolutionists such as Cosmides and Tooby (1992) and Shackelford (1997) who argue that psychological processes need to be considered in terms that are specific to particular adaptive-relevant issues surrounding the history of such psychological processes in evolutionary history.

Consistent with this accuracy-based prediction, both males and females were generally accurate. Males were erroneous on only two of 19 judgments. Men underesti-

mated the importance of *hardworking* and *ambitious* to women. Interestingly, these are two of five traits related to the general concept of acquiring and providing material resources. The other three traits are *education*, *expected income*, and *status of occupation*, which were not significant.

Females were erroneous on only two of 19 judgments. Females overestimated how important *weight* (being skinny) and *hygiene and cleanliness* were to males. These are two of three traits related to the general concept of physical appearance. The other trait is *attractiveness*, which was not significant.

These four instances of bias may be understood as a sort of egocentric bias. Males tend to not care too much about their mates being ambitious and hardworking. Thus, due to their own judgments, they may demonstrate a form of social projection, and thereby, underestimate the degree to which females care about these qualities. Similarly, females care a lot about weight and hygiene. Thus, their own judgments may lead them to overestimate the degree to which males emphasize these qualities.

People View Themselves as Being Similar to an Ideal Partner

Recall that based on Krebs and Denton's (1997) evolutionary analysis of social biases we predicted that self-judgments would tend to be overly positive regarding mating relevant traits. To examine this question, participants' self-judgments were compared with what they believe members of the opposite sex want in a romantic partner. Consistent with this prediction, for a majority of the 19 items, participants did not rate themselves as significantly less socially desirable than the ideal targets. In general, when individuals' ratings did deviate significantly from this particular kind of ideal target rating, self-ratings were less socially desirable, indicating that participants judged themselves to fall short regarding such qualities.

Males' self-ratings did not differ significantly from perceived opposite-sex individuals' desired partners for 15 of 19 qualities. Males reported falling short for the following items: *education*, *attractive*, *communication skills*, and *caring*. Interestingly, males did not perceive themselves to fall short on being hardworking or ambitious, traits that they underestimated the importance of to the women in this study.

Females' self-ratings did not differ significantly from perceived opposite-sex individuals' desired partners for 13 of 19 qualities. Females reported falling short for the following items: *weight*, *forgiving*, *attractive*, *patience*, *emotional stability*, and *hygiene and cleanliness*. Interestingly, the women in our study felt that they fell short in all three areas related to physical appearance (*weight*, *attractiveness*, and *hygiene and cleanliness*). This pattern of findings is actually quite consistent with research on females' emphasis on physical attributes and how they perceive themselves on those attributes (e.g., Fallon & Rozin, 1985). Specifically, this pattern of results is consistent with research suggesting that females overestimate their own weight and believe that males' ideal romantic partners are thinner than males' ideal partners actually are. The women in our study also felt that they fell short in three areas related to the female stereotype of the nurturer/caregiver (*forgiving*, *patience*, and *emotional stability*).

Females actually self-enhanced for the dimension of religiosity. They believed that they scored higher on this dimension than is desired by males. While this finding is interesting, it may be unique to this sample. As was mentioned earlier, 91% of the participants reported being members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

People Want a Romantic Partner Better Than Themselves

In addition to examining the degree to which self-ratings differed from perceptions of members of the opposite sex's ideal ratings, we examined the degree to which self-ratings deviated from judgments of one's own ideal partner. Males reported wanting partners better than themselves on five traits: *sense of humor*, *attractiveness*, *patience*, *emotional stability*, and *communication skills*. Thus, for most items, self-ratings did not differ from ideal ratings. Interestingly, males' ideal partners were rated significantly lower than self regarding *expected income* and *status of occupation*. These findings are consistent with past research (e.g., Buss et al., 2001) suggesting that males prefer to be the breadwinners in relationships. Such a finding may stem from an evolved tactic in male psychology to attract mates by displaying ability to acquire resources. Choosing a mate with a better ability to acquire resources would likely undermine the utility of such a tactic.

Females reported wanting partners better than themselves on 15 of the 19 traits. This finding is consistent with past work suggesting that females are particularly discriminating in the mate selection process. This finding, documented across a variety of species in numerous studies (Trivers, 1985), is consistent with general evolutionary characterizations of female sexual psychology. Specifically, the tendency to be particularly choosy is clearly something that would have been selected by natural selection given the high costs of raising offspring for females and the issues associated with internal fertilization. To further explicate this point, note that this finding was not an artifact of females rating self less positively than males; such a pattern was not manifest in these data.

CONCLUSION

This research was designed to shed light on social perceptual phenomena that pertain to sex differences in qualities desired in potential mates. As in past research, males and females demonstrated a shared conceptualization of optimal qualities in a potential long-term mate. However, and also consistent with past research, consistent sex differences emerged. Generally, these sex differences were consistent with extant literature in evolutionary psychology suggesting that males emphasize qualities pertinent to short-term mating more than females whereas females emphasize long-term-relevant qualities more than males.

This study extended past research by delving into relatively involved social-perceptual areas relevant to mate selection. Generally, males and females have an accurate sense of what members of the opposite-sex desire. Further, self-judgments tend to

match ideal-partner templates more often than not, particularly for males. Lastly, both men and women desire a partner better than themselves, and this effect is especially pronounced for women. These findings, in combination, paint an interesting picture of social perception in the area of mate selection.

NOTES

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