

# Team publishes research on attractiveness and mating

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Chapman University has published research on what people find "desirable" and "essential" in a long-term partner based on two of the largest national studies of mate preferences ever conducted. This research supports the long-held belief that people with desirable traits have a stronger "bargaining hand" and can be more selective when choosing romantic partners, but it also challenges other commonly held

mating beliefs. The studies examined how heterosexual mate preferences differed according to a person's gender, age, personal income, education and appearance satisfaction.

"We looked at the extent to which attractiveness and resources are 'desirable' versus 'essential' to [men](#) and [women](#) when they are looking for a long-term partner," said David Frederick, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at Chapman University and a co-author on the study. "We've known for a long time that men care more about attractiveness in a long term partner, and women care more about resources. In two national datasets, we found that gender was by far the strongest predictor of what people want in a long-term mate: it was more important than age, income, education, or confidence in appearance. We found that although men have stronger preferences for a 'good looking' and 'slender' partner, men and women care equally about having a partner who is specifically attractive to them. Wealthier men and people who were more confident in their appearance had stronger preferences for a good-looking partner, and older men and women placed less importance on looks and income traits when seeking a long-term partner," continued Dr. Frederick. The study took a "mating market" approach which is defined as heterosexual individuals compete with others of the same gender to make "bids" to members of the other gender for the purposes of securing a romantic partner. People with desirable traits are in a position to be more selective about what they look for in mate. The mating market metaphor can be extended to include a distinction between partner "necessities" (what people find essential in a partner) and partner "luxuries" (what people would prefer to have in a partner, but could live without).

Here are some of the findings broken down by category:

Gender Differences: Specifically, the study revealed that men and women differed in the percentage indicating:

- it was 'desirable/essential' that their potential partner was good-looking (M 92 percent vs. W 84 percent),
- had a slender body (M 80 percent vs. W 58 percent),
- had a steady income (M 74 percent vs. W 97 percent),
- and made/will make a lot of money (M 47 percent vs. W 69 percent).

There were also gender differences in whether it was 'very important/a must have' that their partner made at least as much money as they do (M 24 percent vs. W 46 percent) and had a successful career (M 33 percent vs. W 61 percent), but not in whether their partner was physically attractive to them (M 40 percent vs. W 42 percent).

Confidence in Physical Attractiveness: People who reported greater satisfaction with their own appearance did not have stronger preferences for a partner who is physically attractive to them, but they did report stronger preferences for partners who are good looking and slender - this was true for both men and women.

Income: People with higher incomes had stronger preferences for partners who are good looking - and this was true for both men and women. Men with higher incomes showed stronger preferences for women with slender bodies. Wealthier women had stronger preferences for men who had a steady income or made lots of money.

Education: Men with more education had stronger preferences for female partners who are good looking and slender; however for both men and women, education level was not related to preferences for steady income or making a lot of money.

Age: Older people - both men and women - had weaker preferences for a [partner](#) they find physically attractive, who make as much money as they do, and who has a successful career.

A total of nearly 28,000 heterosexual participants ages 18 to 75 years completed the surveys.

**More information:** The paper appears in the journal, *Personality and Individual Differences*: [authors.elsevier.com/a/1RgxNheKdP~mM](https://authors.elsevier.com/a/1RgxNheKdP~mM)

Provided by Chapman University

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