

What Women Want

We are walking archives of ancestral wisdom.

—Helena Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock*

WHAT WOMEN ACTUALLY WANT in a mate has puzzled male scientists and other men for centuries, for good reason. It is not androcentric to propose that women's preferences in a partner are more complex and enigmatic than the mate preferences of either sex of any other species. Discovering the evolutionary roots of women's desires requires going far back in time, before humans evolved as a species, before primates emerged from their mammalian ancestors, back to the origins of sexual reproduction itself.

One reason women exert choice about mates stems from the most basic fact of reproductive biology—the definition of sex. It is a remarkable circumstance that what defines biological sex is simply the size of the sex cells. Males are defined as the ones with the small sex cells, females as the ones with the large sex cells. The large female gametes remain reasonably stationary and come loaded with nutrients. The small male gametes are endowed with mobility and swimming speed.¹ Along with differences in the size and mobility of sex cells comes a difference between the sexes in quantity. Men, for example, produce millions of sperm, which are replenished at a rate of roughly twelve million per hour, while women produce a fixed and unreplenishable lifetime supply of approximately four hundred ova.

Women's greater initial investment does not end with the egg. Fertilization and gestation, key components of human parental investment, occur internally within women. One act of sexual intercourse, which requires minimal male investment, can produce an obligatory and energy-consuming nine-month investment by the woman that forecloses other mating opportunities. Women then bear the exclusive burden of

lactation, an investment that may last as long as three or four years.

No biological law of the animal world dictates that women invest more than men. Indeed, among some species, such as the Mormon cricket, pipefish seahorse, and Panamanian poison arrow frog, males invest more.² The male Mormon cricket produces through great effort a large spermatophore that is loaded with nutrients. Females compete with each other for access to the males that hold the largest spermatophores. Among these so-called sex-role reversed species, it is the males who are more discriminating about mating. Among all four thousand species of mammals, including the more than two hundred species of primates, however, females bear the burden of internal fertilization, gestation, and lactation.

The great initial parental investment of women makes them a valuable, but limited, resource.³ Gestating, bearing, nursing, nurturing, and protecting a child are exceptional reproductive resources that cannot be allocated indiscriminately. Nor can one woman dispense them to many men.

Those who hold valuable resources do not give them away cheaply or unselectively. Because women in our evolutionary past risked enormous investment as a consequence of having sex, evolution favored women who were highly selective about their mates. Ancestral women suffered severe costs if they were indiscriminate—they experienced lower reproductive success, and fewer of their children survived to reproductive age. A man in human evolutionary history could walk away from a casual coupling having lost only a few hours of time. His reproductive success was not seriously compromised. A woman in evolutionary history could also walk away from a casual encounter, but if she got pregnant as a result, she bore the costs of that decision for months, years, and even decades afterward.

Modern birth control technology has altered these costs. In today's industrial nations, women can have short-term dalliances with less fear of pregnancy. But human sexual psychology evolved over millions of years to cope with ancestral adaptive problems. We still possess this underlying sexual psychology, even though our environment has changed.

Components of Desire

Consider the case of an ancestral woman who is trying to decide between two men, one of whom shows great generosity with his resources to her and one of whom is stingy. Other things being equal, the generous man is more valuable to her than the stingy man. The generous man may share his meat from the hunt, aiding her survival.

He may sacrifice his time, energy, and resources for the benefit of the children, furthering the woman's reproductive success. In these respects, the generous man has higher value as a mate than the stingy man. If, over evolutionary time, generosity in men provided these benefits repeatedly and the cues to a man's generosity were observable and reliable, then selection would favor the evolution of a preference for generosity in a mate.

Now consider a more complicated and realistic case in which men vary not just in their generosity but also in a bewildering variety of ways that are significant to the choice of a mate. Men vary in their physical prowess, athletic skill, ambition, industriousness, kindness, empathy, emotional stability, intelligence, social skills, sense of humor, kin network, and position in the status hierarchy. Men also differ in the costs they impose on a mating relationship: some come with children, bad debts, a quick temper, a selfish disposition, and a tendency to be promiscuous. In addition, men differ in hundreds of ways that may be irrelevant to women. Some men have navels turned in, others have navels turned out. A strong preference for a particular navel shape would be unlikely to evolve unless male navel differences were somehow adaptively relevant to ancestral women. From among the thousands of ways in which men differ, selection over hundreds of thousands of years focused women's preferences laser-like on the most adaptively valuable characteristics.

The qualities people prefer, however, are not static characteristics. Because characteristics change, mate seekers must gauge the future potential of a prospective partner. A young medical student who lacks resources now might have excellent future promise. Or a man might be very ambitious but have already reached his peak. Another man might have children from a previous marriage, but because they are about to leave the nest, they will not drain his resources. Gauging a man's mating value requires looking beyond his current position and evaluating his potential.

Evolution has favored women who prefer men who possess attributes that confer benefits and who dislike men who possess attributes that impose costs. Each separate attribute constitutes one component of a man's value to a woman as a mate. Each of her preferences tracks one component.

Preferences that favor particular components, however, do not completely solve the problem of choosing a mate. Women face further adaptive hurdles. First, a woman must evaluate her unique circumstances and personal needs. The same man might differ in value for different women. A man's willingness to do a lot of direct child care, for example, might be more valuable to a woman who does not have kin around to help her than to a woman whose mother, sisters, aunts, and uncles eagerly participate. The dangers of choosing a man with a volatile tem-

per may be greater for a woman who is an only child than for a woman with four strapping brothers around to protect her. The value of potential mates, in short, depends on the individualized, personalized, and contextualized perspective of the person doing the choosing.

In selecting a mate, women must identify and correctly evaluate the cues that signal whether a man indeed possesses a particular resource. The assessment problem becomes especially acute in areas where men are apt to deceive women, such as pretending to have higher status than they do or feigning greater commitment than they are willing to give.

Finally, women face the problem of integrating their knowledge about a prospective mate. Suppose that one man is generous but emotionally unstable. Another man is emotionally stable but stingy. Which man should a woman choose? Choosing a mate calls upon psychological mechanisms that make it possible to evaluate the relevant attributes and give each its appropriate weight in the whole. Some attributes are granted more weight than others in the final decision about whether to choose or reject a particular man. One of these heavily weighted components is the man's resources.

Economic Capacity

The evolution of the female preference for males who offer resources may be the most ancient and pervasive basis for female choice in the animal kingdom. Consider the gray shrike, a bird that lives in the Negev Desert of Israel.⁴ Just before the start of the breeding season, male shrikes begin amassing caches of edible prey, such as snails, and other useful objects, such as feathers and pieces of cloth, in numbers ranging from 90 to 120. They impale these items on thorns and other pointed projections within their territory. Females look over the available males and prefer to mate with those having the largest caches. When the biologist Reuven Yosef arbitrarily removed portions of some males' caches and added edible objects to others, females shifted to the males with the larger bounties. Females avoided entirely males without resources, consigning them to bachelorhood. Wherever females show a mating preference, the male's resources are often the key criterion.

Among humans, the evolution of women's preference for a permanent mate with resources would have required three preconditions. First, resources would have had to be accruable, defensible, and controllable by men during human evolutionary history. Second, men would have had to differ from each other in their holdings and their willingness to invest those holdings in a woman and her children—if all

men possessed the same resources and showed an equal willingness to commit them, there would be no need for women to develop the preference for them. Constants do not count in mating decisions. And third, the advantages of being with one man would have to outweigh the advantages of being with several men.

Among humans, these conditions are easily met. Territory and tools, to name just two resources, are acquired, defended, monopolized, and controlled by men worldwide. Men vary tremendously in the quantity of resources they command—from the poverty of the street bum to the riches of Trumps and Rockefellers. Men also differ widely in how willing they are to invest their time and resources in long-term mateships. Some men are cads, preferring to mate with many women while investing little in each. Other men are dads, channeling all of their resources to one woman and her children.⁵

Women over human evolutionary history could often garner far more resources for their children through a single spouse than through several temporary sex partners. Men provide their wives and children with resources to an extent that is unprecedented among primates. Among most other primate species, for example, females must rely solely on their own efforts to acquire food, because males usually do not share food with their mates.⁶ Men, in contrast, provide food, find shelter, and defend territory. Men protect children. They tutor them in the art of hunting, the craft of war, the strategies of social influence. They transfer status, aiding offspring in forming reciprocal alliances later in life. Such benefits are unlikely to be secured by a woman from a temporary sex partner. Not all potential husbands can confer all of these benefits, but over thousands of generations, when some men were able to provide some of these benefits, women gained a powerful advantage by preferring them as mates.

So the stage was set for women to evolve a preference for men with resources. But women needed cues to signal a man's possession of those resources. These cues might be indirect, such as personality characteristics that signaled a man's upward mobility. They might be physical, such as a man's athletic ability or health. They might include reputational information, such as the esteem in which a man was held by his peers. Economic resources, however, provide the most direct cue.

Women's current mate preferences provide a window for viewing our mating past, just as our fears of snakes and heights provide a window for viewing ancestral hazards. Evidence from dozens of studies documents that modern American women indeed value economic resources in mates substantially more than men do. In a study conducted in 1939, for example, American men and women rated eighteen characteristics for

their relative desirability in a mate or marriage partner, ranging from irrelevant to indispensable. Women did not view good financial prospects as absolutely indispensable, but they did rate them as important. Men rated them as merely desirable but not very important. Women in 1939 valued good financial prospects in a mate about twice as highly as men, and this finding was replicated in 1956 and again in 1967.⁷

The sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s failed to change this sex difference. In an attempt to replicate the studies from earlier decades, I surveyed 1,491 Americans in the mid-1980s using the same questionnaire. Women and men from Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and California rated eighteen personal characteristics for their value in a marriage partner. As in the previous decades, women still value good financial prospects in a mate roughly twice as much as men do.⁸

The premium that women place on economic resources has been revealed in many contexts. The psychologist Douglas Kenrick and his colleagues devised a useful method for revealing how much people value different attributes in a marriage partner; they asked men and women to indicate the "minimum percentiles" of each characteristic that they would find acceptable.⁹ The percentile concept was explained with such examples as: "A person at the 50th percentile would be above 50% of the other people on earning capacity, and below 49% of the people on this dimension." American college women indicate that their minimum acceptable percentile for a husband on earning capacity is the 70th percentile, or above 70 percent of all other men, whereas men's minimum acceptable percentile for a wife's earning capacity is only the 40th.

Personal ads in newspapers and magazines confirm that women who are actually in the marriage market desire financial resources. A study of 1,111 personal ads found that female advertisers seek financial resources roughly eleven times as often as male advertisers do.¹⁰ In short, sex differences in a preference for resources are not limited to college students and are not bound by the method of inquiry.

Nor are these female preferences restricted to America, or to Western societies, or to capitalist countries. The international study on choosing a mate conducted by my colleagues and me documented the universality of women's preferences. For over five years from 1984 to 1989, in thirty-seven cultures on six continents and five islands, we investigated populations that varied on many demographic and cultural characteristics. The participants came from nations that practice polygyny, such as Nigeria and Zambia, as well as nations that are more monogamous, such as Spain and Canada. The countries included those in which living together is as common as marriage, such as Sweden and Finland, as well as countries in which living together without

marriage is frowned upon, such as Bulgaria and Greece. In all, the study sampled 10,047 individuals.¹¹

Male and female participants in the study rated the importance of eighteen characteristics in a potential mate or marriage partner, on a scale from unimportant to indispensable. Women across all continents, all political systems (including socialism and communism), all racial groups, all religious groups, and all systems of mating (from intense polygyny to presumptive monogamy) place more value than men on good financial prospects. Overall, women value financial resources about 100 percent more than men do, or roughly twice as much. There are some cultural variations. Women from Nigeria, Zambia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Taiwan, Colombia, and Venezuela value good financial prospects a bit more than women from South Africa (Zulus), the Netherlands, and Finland. In Japan, for example, women value good financial prospects roughly 150 percent more than men do, whereas women from the Netherlands deem financial prospects only 36 percent more important than their male counterparts do, or less than women from any other country. Nonetheless, the sex difference remained invariant—women worldwide desire financial resources in a marriage partner more than men.

These findings provide the first extensive cross-cultural evidence supporting the evolutionary basis for the psychology of human mating. Because ancestral women faced the tremendous burdens of internal fertilization, a nine-month gestation, and lactation, they would have benefited tremendously by selecting mates who possessed resources. These preferences helped our ancestral mothers solve the adaptive problems of survival and reproduction.

Social Status

Traditional hunter-gatherer societies, which are our closest guide to what ancestral conditions were probably like, suggest that ancestral men had clearly defined status hierarchies, with resources flowing freely to those at the top and trickling slowly to those at the bottom.¹² Traditional tribes today, such as the Tiwi, an aboriginal group residing on two small islands off the coast of Northern Australia; the Yanomamö of Venezuela; the Ache of Paraguay; and the !Kung tribe of Botswana, are replete with people described as “head men” and “big men” who wield great power and enjoy the resource privileges of prestige. Therefore, an ancestral man’s social status would provide a powerful cue to his possession of resources.

Henry Kissinger once remarked that power is the most potent aphrodisiac. Women desire men who command a high position in society because social status is a universal cue to the control of resources. Along with status come better food, more abundant territory, and superior health care. Greater social status bestows on children social opportunities missed by the children of lower-ranked males. For male children worldwide, access to more mates and better quality mates typically accompanies families of higher social status. In one study of 186 societies ranging from the Mbuti Pygmies of Africa to the Aleut Eskimos, high-status men invariably had greater wealth, better nourishment for children, and more wives.¹³

Women in the United States do not hesitate to express a preference for mates who have high social status or a high-status profession, qualities that are viewed as only slightly less important than good financial prospects.¹⁴ Using a rating scale from irrelevant or unimportant to indispensable, American women from Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and California rate social status as between important and indispensable, whereas men rate it as merely desirable but not very important. In one study of 5,000 college students, women list status, prestige, rank, position, power, standing, station, and high place as important considerably more frequently than men do.¹⁵

David Schmitt and I conducted a study of temporary and permanent mating in order to discover which characteristics people especially value in potential spouses, as contrasted with potential sex partners. Participants were female and male college students from the University of Michigan, a population for which both casual and marital mating issues are highly relevant. Several hundred individuals rated sixty-seven characteristics for their desirability or undesirability in the short or long term. Women judge the likelihood of success in a profession and the possession of a promising career to be highly desirable in a spouse. Significantly, these cues to future status are seen by women as more desirable in spouses than in casual sex partners.

American women also place great value on education and professional degrees in mates—characteristics that are strongly linked with social status. The same study found that women rate lack of education as highly undesirable in a potential husband. The cliché that women prefer to marry doctors, lawyers, professors, and other professionals seems to correspond with reality. Women shun men who are easily dominated by other men or who fail to command the respect of the group.

Women's desire for status shows up in everyday occurrences. A colleague overheard a conversation among four women at a restaurant. They were all complaining that there were no eligible men around. Yet

these women were surrounded by male waiters, none of whom was wearing a wedding ring. Waiters, who do not have a high-status occupation, were apparently not even considered by these women. What they meant was not that there were no eligible men, but that there were no eligible men of acceptable social status.

Women on the mating market look for "eligible" men. The word *eligible* is a euphemism for "not having his resources already committed elsewhere." The frequency with which the word appears in the combination "eligible bachelor" reveals the mating desires of women. When women append an adverb to this phrase, it becomes "most eligible bachelor," referring not to the man's eligibility but rather to his social status and the magnitude of his resources. It is a euphemism for the highest-status, most resource-laden unattached man around.

The importance that women grant to social status in mates is not limited to America or even to capitalist countries. In the vast majority of the thirty-seven cultures included in the international study on choosing a mate, women value social status more than men in a prospective mate—in both communist and socialist countries, among blacks and orientals, among Catholics and Jews, in the tropics and the northern climes.¹⁶ For example, in Taiwan, women value status 63 percent more than men; in Zambia, women value it 30 percent more; in West Germany, women value it 38 percent more; and in Brazil, women value it 40 percent more.

Because hierarchies are universal features among human groups and resources tend to accumulate to those who rise in the hierarchy, women solve the adaptive problem of acquiring resources in part by preferring men who are high in status. Social status gives a woman a strong indicator of the ability of a man to invest in her and her children. The contemporary evidence across many cultures supports the evolutionary prediction that women key onto this cue to the acquisition of resources. Women worldwide prefer to marry up. Those women in our evolutionary past who failed to marry up tended to be less able to provide for themselves and their children.

Age

The age of a man also provides an important cue to his access to resources. Just as young male baboons must mature before they can enter the upper ranks in the baboon social hierarchy, human adolescents and young men rarely command the respect, status, or position of more mature older men. This tendency reaches an extreme among the Tiwi tribe, a gerontocracy in which the very old men wield most of the

power and prestige and control the mating system through complex networks of alliances. Even in American culture, status and wealth tend to accumulate with increasing age.

In all thirty-seven cultures included in the international study on choosing a mate, women prefer men who are older than they are.¹⁷ Averaged over all cultures, women prefer men who are roughly three and a half years older. The smallest preferred age difference is seen in French Canadian women, who seek husbands who are not quite two years older, and the largest is found among Iranian women, who seek husbands who are more than five years older. The worldwide average age difference between actual brides and grooms is three years, suggesting that women's marriage decisions often match their mating preferences.

To understand why women value older mates, we must turn to the things that change with age. One of the most consistent changes is access to resources. In contemporary Western societies, income generally increases with age.¹⁸ American men who are thirty years old, for example, make fourteen thousand dollars more than men who are twenty; men who are forty make seven thousand dollars more than men who are thirty. These trends are not limited to the Western world. Among traditional nonmodernized societies, older men have more social status. Among the Tiwi tribe, men are typically at least thirty years of age before they acquire enough social status to acquire a first wife.¹⁹ Rarely does a Tiwi man under the age of forty attain enough status to acquire more than one wife. Older age, resources, and status are coupled across cultures.

In traditional societies, part of this linkage may be related to physical strength and hunting prowess. Physical strength increases in men as they get older, peaking in their late twenties and early thirties. Although there have been no systematic studies of the relationship between age and hunting ability, anthropologists believe that ability may peak when a man is in his thirties, at which point his slight decline in physical prowess is more than compensated for by his increased knowledge, patience, skill, and wisdom.²⁰ So women's preference for older men may stem from our hunter-gatherer ancestors, for whom the resources derived from hunting were critical to survival.

Women may prefer older men for reasons other than tangible resources. Older men are likely to be more mature, more stable, and more reliable in their provisioning. Within the United States, for example, men become somewhat more emotionally stable, more conscientious, and more dependable as they grow older, at least up through the age of thirty.²¹ In a study of women's mate preferences, one woman noted that "older men [are] better looking because you [can] talk to them about serious concerns; younger men [are] silly and not very seri-

ous about life."²² The status potential of men becomes clearer with increasing age. Women who prefer older men are in a better position to gauge how high they are likely to rise.

Twenty-year-old women in all thirty-seven cultures in the international study typically prefer to marry men only a few years older, not substantially older, in spite of the fact that men's financial resources generally do not peak until their forties or fifties. One reason that young women are not drawn to substantially older men may be that older men have a higher risk of dying and hence are less likely to be around to continue contributing to the provisioning and protection of children. Furthermore, the potential incompatibility created by a large age discrepancy may lead to strife, thus increasing the odds of divorce. For these reasons, young women may be drawn more to men a few years older who have considerable promise, rather than to substantially older men who already have attained a higher position but have a less certain future.

Not all women, however, select older men. Some select younger men. A study of a small Chinese village found that women who were seventeen or eighteen sometimes married "men" who were only fourteen or fifteen. The contexts in which this occurred, however, were highly circumscribed in that all the "men" were already wealthy, came from a high-status family, and had secure expectations through inheritance.²³ Apparently the preference for slightly older men can be overridden when the man possesses other powerful cues to status and resources and when his resource expectations are guaranteed.

Other exceptions occur when women mate with substantially younger men. Many of these cases occur not because of strong preferences by women for younger men but rather because both older women and younger men lack bargaining power on the mating market. Older women often cannot secure the attentions of high-status men and so must settle for younger men, who themselves have not acquired much status or value as mates. Among the Tiwi, for example, a young man's first wife is typically an older woman—sometimes older by decades—because older women are all he is able to secure with his relatively low status.

Still other exceptions occur among women who already have high status and plentiful resources of their own and then take up with much younger men. Cher and Joan Collins are striking celebrity examples; they became involved with men who were two decades younger. But these cases are rare, because most women with resources prefer to mate with men at least as rich in resources as they are, and preferably more so.²⁴ Women may mate temporarily with a younger man, but typically they seek an older man when they decide to settle down in mar-

riage. Neither Cher's nor Joan Collins's romance with a younger man proved to be stable over time.

All these cues—economic resources, social status, and older age—add up to one thing: the ability of a man to acquire and control resources that women can use for themselves and for their children. A long history of evolution by selection has fashioned the way in which women look at men as success objects. But the possession of resources is not enough. Women also need men who possess traits that are likely to lead to the sustained acquisition of resources over time.

In cultures where people marry young, often the economic capacity of a man cannot be evaluated directly but must be deduced indirectly. Indeed, in hunter-gatherer groups that lack a cash economy, the target of selection cannot be financial resources per se. Among the Tiwi tribe, for example, young men are scrutinized carefully by both women and older men to evaluate which ones are "comers," destined to acquire status and resources, and which are likely to remain in the slow lane, based in part on their personality. The young men are evaluated for their promise, the key signs being good hunting skills, good fighting skills, and especially a strong proclivity to ascend the hierarchy of tribal power and influence. Women in all cultures, past and present, can select men for their apparent ability to accrue future resources, based on certain personality characteristics. And women who value the personality characteristics likely to lead to status and sustained resource acquisition are far better off than women who ignore these vital characterological cues.

Ambition and Industriousness

Liisa Kyl-Heku and I conducted a study of getting ahead in everyday life. Our goal was to identify the tactics that people use to elevate their position within hierarchies in the workplace and in social settings. We asked eighty-four individuals from California and Michigan to think about people whom they knew well, then to write down the acts they had observed these people using to get ahead in status or dominance hierarchies. Using various statistical procedures, we discovered twenty-six distinct tactics, including deception, social networking, sexual favors, education, and industriousness. The industriousness tactic included actions such as putting in extra time and effort at work, managing time efficiently, prioritizing goals, and working hard to impress others. We then asked 212 individuals who were in their middle to late twenties to indicate which tactics they use to get ahead. Separately, we asked their spouses to indicate which tactics their partners use to get

ahead. Next, we correlated this information with their past income and promotions and with their anticipated income and promotions to see which tactics for getting ahead were most successfully linked with actual measures of getting ahead.

Among all the tactics, sheer hard work proved to be one of the best predictors of past and anticipated income and promotions. Those who said that they worked hard, and whose spouses agreed that they worked hard, achieved higher levels of education, higher annual salaries, and anticipated greater salaries and promotions than those who failed to work hard. Industrious and ambitious men secure a higher occupational status than lazy, unmotivated men do.²⁵

American women seem to be aware of this connection, because they indicate a desire for men who show the characteristics linked with getting ahead. In the 1950s, for example, 5,000 undergraduates were asked to list characteristics they desired in a potential mate. Women far more often than men desire mates who enjoy their work, show career orientation, demonstrate industriousness, and display ambition.²⁶ The 852 single American women and 100 married American women in the international study on choosing a mate unanimously rate ambition and industriousness as important or indispensable. Women in the study of temporary and permanent mating regard men who lack ambition as extremely undesirable, whereas men view the lack of ambition in a wife as neither desirable nor undesirable. Women are likely to discontinue a long-term relationship with a man if he loses his job, lacks career goals, or shows a lazy streak.²⁷

Women's preference for men who show ambition and industry is not limited to the United States or to Western society. Women in the overwhelming majority of cultures value ambition and industry more than men do, typically rating it as between important and indispensable. In Taiwan, for example, women rate ambition and industriousness as 26 percent more important than men do; women from Bulgaria rate it as 29 percent more important; and women from Brazil rate it as 30 percent more important.

This cross-cultural and cross-time evidence supports the key evolutionary expectation that women have evolved a preference for men who show signs of the ability to acquire resources and a disdain for men who lack ambition. This preference helped ancestral women to solve the critical adaptive problem of obtaining reliable resources. It helped them to gauge the likelihood of obtaining future resources from a man when direct and easily observable signs of current resources were absent. Even if directly observable resources were present, a man's ambition and industriousness provided a guarantee of the continuation of those resources. Hard work and ambition, however, are not the only available cues to potential

resources. Two others, dependability and stability, provide further information about how steady or erratic such resources will be.

Dependability and Stability

Among the eighteen characteristics rated in the worldwide study on choosing a mate, the second and third most highly valued characteristics, after love, are a dependable character and emotional stability or maturity. In twenty-one out of thirty-seven cultures, men and women have the same preference for dependability in a partner. Of the sixteen cultures where there is a sex difference, women in fifteen of the cultures value dependability more than men. Averaged across all thirty-seven cultures, women rate dependable character 2.69 where a 3.00 signifies indispensable; men rate it nearly as important, with an average of 2.50. In the case of emotional stability or maturity, the sexes differ more. Women in twenty-three cultures value this quality significantly more than men do; in the remaining fourteen cultures, men and women value emotional stability equally. Averaging across all cultures, women give this quality a 2.68, whereas men give it a 2.47. In all cultures, in effect, women place a tremendous value on these characteristics, judging them to be anywhere from important to indispensable in a potential spouse.

These characteristics may possess such a great value worldwide because they are reliable signals that resources will be provided consistently over time. Undependable people, in contrast, provide erratically and inflict heavy costs on their mates. In a study of newlyweds, my colleagues and I contacted 104 couples at random from the public records of all marriages that had been licensed in a large county in Michigan during a six-month period. These couples completed a six-hour battery of personality tests and self-evaluations of their marital relationship, and evaluations of their spouse's character, and they were each interviewed by both a male and a female interviewer. Among these tests was a instrument that asked the participants to indicate which among 147 possible costs their partner had inflicted on them over the past year. Emotionally unstable men—as defined by themselves, their spouses, and their interviewers—are especially costly to women. First, they tend to be self-centered and monopolize shared resources. Furthermore, they tend to be possessive, monopolizing much of the time of their wives. They show higher than average sexual jealousy, becoming enraged when their wives even talk with someone else. They show dependency, insisting that their mates provide for all of their needs. They tend to be abusive both verbally and physically. They display inconsiderateness, such as by failing to

show up on time. And they are moodier than their more stable counterparts, often crying for no apparent reason. They have more affairs than average, which suggests a further diversion of time and resources.²⁸ All of these costs indicate that such spouses will absorb their partner's time and resources, divert their own time and resources elsewhere, and fail to channel resources consistently over time. Dependability and stability are personal qualities that signal increased likelihood that a woman's resources will not be drained by the man.

The unpredictable aspects of emotionally unstable men inflict additional costs by impeding solutions to critical adaptive problems. The erratic supply of resources can wreak havoc with accomplishing the goals required for survival and reproduction. Meat that is suddenly not available because an undependable mate decided at the last minute to take a nap rather than to go on the hunt is a resource that was counted on but not delivered. Its absence creates problems for nourishment and sustenance. Resources prove most beneficial when they are predictable. Erratically provided resources may even go to waste when the needs they were intended to meet are met through other, more costly means. Resources that are supplied predictably can be more efficiently allocated to the many adaptive hurdles that must be overcome in everyday life.

Emotional stability and dependability are broad categories. In order to identify with more precision the meaning of these global traits, Michael Botwin and I asked 140 persons to name specific examples of emotionally stable and unstable behavior. Some behavior that reflects emotional stability involves resiliency, such as not complaining or showing consideration for others in a trying situation. Other emotionally stable behavior relates to work, such as staying home to finish work when everyone else is going out or putting all one's energy into a job rather than expressing anxiety about it. This kind of behavior signals an ability to work steadily, to rely on personal resources to cope with stresses and setbacks, and to expend personal resources for the benefit of others even under adverse conditions.

These acts contrast markedly with the behavior of people who are emotionally unstable. Unstable behavior reflects an inability to command personal resources, such as worrying over something that one can do nothing about, breaking down when a problem arises, or getting upset about the work that needs to be done instead of doing it. This behavior signals inefficiency in working, difficulty in handling stress, a proclivity to inflict costs on others, and a lack of personal reserve to channel benefits to others.

Women place a premium on dependability and emotional stability to avoid incurring these costs and to reap the benefits that a mate can pro-

vide to them consistently over time. In human ancestral times, women who chose stable, dependable men had a greater likelihood of ensuring the man's ability to acquire and maintain resources for use by them and their children. Women who made these wise choices avoided many of the costs inflicted by undependable and unstable men.

Intelligence

Dependability, emotional stability, industriousness, and ambition are not the only personal qualities that signal the acquisition and steadiness of resources. The ephemeral quality of intelligence provides another important cue. No one knows for sure what intelligence tests measure, but there is clear evidence of what high scorers can do. Intelligence is a good predictor of the possession of economic resources within the United States.²⁹ People who test high go to better schools, get more years of education, and ultimately get higher paying jobs. Even within particular professions, such as construction and carpentry, intelligence predicts who will advance more rapidly to positions of power and who will command higher incomes. In tribal societies, the head men or leaders are almost invariably among the more intelligent members of the group.³⁰

If intelligence has been a reliable predictor of economic resources over human evolutionary history, then women could have evolved a preference for this quality in a potential marriage partner. The international study on choosing a mate found that women indeed rate education and intelligence fifth out of eighteen desirable characteristics. Ranked in a smaller list of thirteen desirable characteristics, intelligence emerges in second place worldwide. Women value intelligence more than men in ten out of the thirty-seven cultures. Estonian women, for example, rank intelligence third out of thirteen desired characteristics, whereas Estonian men rank it fifth. Norwegian women value it second, whereas Norwegian men rank it fourth. In the remaining twenty-seven cultures, however, both sexes place the same high premium on intelligence.

The quality of intelligence signals many potential benefits. These are likely to include good parenting skills, capacity for cultural knowledge, and adeptness at parenting.³¹ In addition, intelligence is linked with oral fluency, ability to influence other members of a group, prescience in forecasting danger, and judgment in applying health remedies. Beyond these specific qualities, intelligence conveys the ability to solve problems. Women who select more intelligent mates are more likely to become the beneficiaries of all of these critical resources.

To identify some of the actions that intelligent people perform, Mike

Botwin and I asked 140 men and women to think of the most intelligent people they knew and to describe five actions that reflect their intelligence. All these actions imply benefits that will flow to someone fortunate enough to choose an intelligent person as a mate. Intelligent people tend to have a wide perspective and to see an issue from all points of view, suggesting better judgment and decision making. They communicate messages well to other people and are sensitive to signs of how others are feeling, suggesting good social skills. They know where to go to solve problems, implying good judgment. Intelligent people manage money well, suggesting that resources will not be lost or frittered away. They accomplish tasks they have never before attempted with few mistakes, suggesting an efficiency in problem solving and allocating time. By selecting an intelligent mate, women increase their chances of receiving all these benefits.

Contrast these benefits with the costs imposed by the behavior of less intelligent people. Their behavior includes failing to pick up subtle hints from others, missing a joke that everyone else gets, and saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, all of which suggest a lack of social adeptness. Less intelligent people repeat mistakes, suggesting that they have less ability to learn from experience. They also fail to follow simple verbal instructions, fail to grasp explanations, and argue when they are obviously wrong. This behavior implies that unintelligent mates are poor problem solvers, unreliable workers, and social liabilities. All these costs are incurred by those who choose less intelligent partners.

Ancestral women who preferred intelligent mates would have raised their odds of securing social, material, and economic resources for themselves and for their children. Since intelligence is moderately heritable, these favorable qualities would have been passed on genetically to their sons and daughters, providing an added benefit. Modern women across all cultures display these preferences.

A mate who is too discrepant from oneself in intelligence, however, is less desirable than a mate who is matched for intelligence. A person of average intelligence typically does not desire a brilliant mate, for example. Similarity, therefore, is critical for successful mating.

Compatibility

Successful long-term mating requires a sustained cooperative alliance with another person for mutually beneficial goals. Relationships riddled with conflict impede the attainment of those goals. Compatibility between mates entails a complex mesh between two different

kinds of characteristics. One kind involves complementary traits, or a mate's possession of resources and skills that differ from one's own, in a kind of division of labor between the sexes. Both persons benefit through this specialization and division.

The other kinds of traits crucial to compatibility with a mate, however, are those that are most likely to mesh cooperatively with one's own particular personal characteristics and thus are most similar to one's own. Discrepancies between the values, interests, and personalities of the members of a couple produce strife and conflict. The psychologist Zick Rubin and his colleagues studied 202 dating couples over several years to see which ones stayed together and which broke up.³² They found that couples who were mismatched in these regards tend to break up more readily than their matched counterparts. The 103 couples who broke up had more dissimilar values on sex roles, attitudes toward sex among acquaintances, romanticism, and religious beliefs than did the 99 couples who stayed together.

One solution to the problem of compatibility is thus to search for the similar in a mate. Both in the United States and worldwide, men and women who are similar to each other on a wide variety of characteristics tend to get married. The tendency for like people to mate shows up most obviously in the areas of values, intelligence, and group membership.³³ People seek mates with similar political and social values, such as their views on abortion or capital punishment, for which couples are correlated +.50. Mismatches on these values are likely to lead to conflict. People also desire mates who are similar in race, ethnicity, and religion. Couples desire and marry mates of similar intelligence, on which spouses correlate +.40. In addition, similarity matters in personality characteristics such as extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, which show correlations between spouses of +.25. People like mates who share their inclination toward parties if they are extraverted and toward quiet evenings at home if they are introverted. People who are characteristically open to experience prefer mates who share their interest in fine wines, art, literature, and exotic foods. Conscientious people prefer mates who share their interest in paying bills on time and saving for the future. Less conscientious people prefer mates who share their interest in living for the moment.

The similarity in compatible couples is in part a byproduct of the fact that people tend to marry others who are in close proximity, and those who are nearby tend to be similar to oneself. Similarity of intelligence in modern marriages, for example, may be an incidental outcome of the fact that people of similar intelligence tend to go to the same educational institutions. The incidental outcome explanation, however, cannot

account for the widespread preference that people express for mates who are similar.³⁴ In a study conducted on dating couples in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I measured the personalities and intelligence levels of 108 individuals who were involved in a dating relationship. Separately, they completed a questionnaire that asked for their preferences in an ideal mate for the same qualities. The study found that women express a preference for mates who are similar to themselves in many respects, including boldness, dominance, and activeness; warmth, agreeableness, and kindness; responsibility, conscientiousness, and industriousness; and especially intelligence, perceptiveness, and creativity. Those who judge themselves to be low in these personality traits express a desire for mates who are also low in them.

The search for a similar other provides an elegant solution to the adaptive problem of creating compatibility within the couple so that their interests are maximally aligned in the pursuit of mutual goals. Consider a woman who is an extravert and loves wild parties and who is married to an introvert who prefers quiet evenings at home. Although they may decide to go their separate ways evening after evening, the mismatch causes strife. Couples in which both members are introverted or both are extraverted are not at loggerheads about mutually pursued activities. The marriage of a Democrat and a Republican or an abortion rights advocate with an abortion opponent can make for interesting discussions, but the ensuing conflict wastes valuable energy because their goals are incompatible and their efforts cancel each other out.

Perhaps more important, matched couples maximize the smooth coordination of their efforts when pursuing mutual goals such as child rearing, maintaining kin alliances, and social networking. A couple at odds over how to rear their child wastes valuable energy and also confuses the child, who receives contradictory messages. The search for similarity prevents couples from incurring these costs.

Another adaptive benefit to seeking similarity comes from securing a good bargain and avoiding wasteful mating effort, given what a person's mating assets are on the marriage market. Because personality characteristics such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and intelligence are all highly desirable on the mating market, those who possess more of them can command more of them in a mate.³⁵ Those who lack these valuable personal assets can command less and so must limit their search to those with assets that are similar to their own. By seeking similarity, individuals avoid wasting time and money courting people who are out of their reach. Competing for a mate who exceeds one's own value entails the risk of eventual abandonment by the partner whose mating options are more expansive. Dissimilar rela-

tionships tend to break up because the more desirable partner can strike a better bargain elsewhere.

The search for similarity thus solves several adaptive problems simultaneously. It maximizes the value one can command on the mating market, leads to the coordination of efforts, reduces conflict within the couple, avoids the costs of mutually incompatible goals, maximizes the likelihood of achieving success, and reduces the risk of later abandonment or dissolution of the relationship.

Resources, personality, intelligence, and similarity provide important information about the benefits a potential partner can bestow. Physical characteristics of a potential mate provide additional adaptively significant information. These, too, have joined the array of preferences that women hold.

Size and Strength

When the great basketball player Magic Johnson revealed that he had slept with thousands of women, he inadvertently revealed women's preference for mates who display physical and athletic prowess. The numbers may be shocking, but the preference is not. Physical characteristics, such as athleticism, size, and strength, convey important information that women use in making a mating decision.

The importance of physical characteristics in the female choice of a mate is prevalent throughout the animal world. In the species called the gladiator frog, males are responsible for creating nests and defending the eggs.³⁶ In the majority of courtships, a stationary male is deliberately bumped by a female who is considering him. She strikes him with great force, sometimes enough to rock him back or even scare him away. If the male moves too much or bolts from the nest, the female hastily leaves to examine alternative mates. Most females mate with males who do not move or who move minimally when bumped. Only rarely does a female reject a male who remains firmly planted after being bumped. Bumping helps a female frog to decide how successful the male will be at defending her clutch. The bump test reveals the male's physical ability to perform the function of protection.

Women sometimes face physical domination by larger, stronger men, which can lead to injury and sexual domination by preventing them from exercising choice. Such domination undoubtedly occurred regularly during ancestral times. Indeed, studies of many nonhuman primate groups reveal that male physical and sexual domination of females has been a recurrent part of our primate heritage. The primatologist Bar-

bara Smuts lived among baboons in the savanna plains of Africa while studying their mating patterns. She found that females frequently form enduring "special friendships" with males who offer physical protection to themselves and their infants. In return, these females grant their "friends" preferential sexual access during times of estrus. In essence, female baboons exchange sex for protection.

Analogously, one benefit to women of permanent mating is the physical protection a man can offer. A man's size, strength, and physical prowess are cues to solutions to the problem of protection. The evidence shows that women's preferences in a mate embody these cues. In the study of temporary and permanent mating, American women rated the desirability or undesirability of a series of physical traits. Women judge short men to be undesirable as a permanent mate.³⁷ In contrast, they find it very desirable for a potential permanent mate to be tall, physically strong, and athletic. Another group of American women consistently indicates a preference for men of average or greater than average height, roughly five feet and eleven inches, as their ideal marriage partner. Tall men are consistently seen as more desirable dates and mates than men who are short or of average height.³⁸ Furthermore, the two studies of personal ads described earlier revealed that, among women who mention height, 80 percent want a man who is six feet or taller. Perhaps even more telling is the finding that ads placed by taller men receive more responses from women than those placed by shorter men. Tall men date more often than short men and have a larger pool of potential mates. Women solve the problem of protection from aggressive men at least in part by preferring a mate who has the size, strength, and physical prowess to protect them.

Tall men tend to have a higher status in nearly all cultures. "Big men" in hunter-gatherer societies—men high in status—are literally big men physically.³⁹ In Western cultures, tall men make more money, advance in their professions more rapidly, and receive more and earlier promotions. Few American presidents have been less than six feet tall. Politicians are keenly aware of voters' preference. Following the televised presidential debate in 1988, George Bush made a point of standing very close to his shorter competitor, Michael Dukakis, in a strategy of highlighting their disparity in size. As the evolutionary psychologist Bruce Ellis notes:

Height constitutes a reliable cue to dominance in social interactions . . . shorter policemen are likely to be assaulted more than taller policemen . . . suggesting that the latter command more fear and respect from adversaries . . . taller men are more sought after in women's personal

advertisements, receive more responses to their own personal advertisements, and tend to have prettier girlfriends than do shorter men.⁴⁰

This preference for taller men is not limited to Western cultures. Among the Mehinaku tribe of the Brazilian Amazon, the anthropologist Thomas Gregor notes the importance of men's wrestling skills as an arena where size differences become acute:

A heavily muscled, imposingly built man is likely to accumulate many girlfriends, while a small man, deprecatingly referred to as a *peritsi*, fares badly. The mere fact of height creates a measurable advantage. . . . A powerful wrestler, say the villagers, is frightening . . . he commands fear and respect. To the women, he is "beautiful" (*awitsiri*), in demand as a paramour and husband. Triumphant in politics as well as in love, the champion wrestler embodies the highest qualities of manliness. Not so fortunate the vanquished! A chronic loser, no matter what his virtues, is regarded as a fool. As he wrestles, the men shout mock advice. . . . The women are less audible as they watch the matches from their doorways, but they too have their sarcastic jokes. None of them is proud of having a loser as a husband or lover.⁴¹

Barbara Smuts believes that during human evolutionary history physical protection was one of the most important things a man could offer a woman. The presence of aggressive men who tried to dominate women physically and to circumvent their sexual choices may have been an important influence on women's mate selection in ancestral times. Given the alarming incidence of sexual coercion and rape in many cultures, a mate's protection value may well remain relevant to mate selection in modern environments. Many women simply do not feel safe on the streets, and a strong, tall, athletic mate acts as a deterrent for sexually aggressive men.

Attributes such as size, strength, and athletic prowess are not the only physical attributes that signal high mating value. Another physical quality critical for survival is good health.

Good Health

Women worldwide prefer mates who are healthy.⁴² In all thirty-seven cultures included in the international study on choosing a mate, women judge good health to be anywhere from important to indispensable in a marriage partner. In another study on American women, poor physical conditions, ranging from bad grooming habits to a venereal disease, are

regarded as extremely undesirable characteristics in a mate. The biologists Clelland Ford and Frank Beach found that signs of ill health, such as open sores, lesions, and unusual pallor, are universally regarded as unattractive.⁴³

In humans, good health may be signaled by behavior as well as by physical appearance. A lively mood, high energy level, and sprightly gait, for example, may be attractive precisely because they are calorically costly and can be displayed only by people brimming with good health.

The tremendous importance we place on good health is not unique to our species. Some animals display large, loud, and gaudy traits that are costly and yet signal great health and vitality. Consider the bright, flamboyant, ostentatious plumage of the peacock. It is as if the peacock is saying: "Look at me; I'm so fit that I can carry these large, cumbersome feathers, and yet still I'm thriving." The mystery of the peacock's tail, which seems so contrary to utilitarian survival, is finally on the verge of being solved. The biologists William D. Hamilton and Marlena Zuk propose that the brilliant plumage serves as a signal that the peacock carries a light load of parasites, since peacocks who carry more than the average number of parasites have duller plumage.⁴⁴ The burdensome plumage provides a cue to health and robustness. Peahens prefer the brilliant plumage because it provides clues to the male's health.

In ancestral times, four bad consequences were likely to follow if a woman selected a mate who was unhealthy or disease-prone. First, she put herself and her family at risk of being contaminated by the disease. Second, her mate was less able to perform essential functions and provide crucial benefits to her and her children, such as food, protection, health care, and child rearing. Third, her mate was at increased risk of dying, prematurely cutting off the flow of resources and forcing her to incur the costs of searching for a new mate and courting all over again. And fourth, if health is partly heritable, she would risk passing on genes for poor health to her children. A preference for healthy mates solves the problem of mate survival and ensures that resources are likely to be delivered over the long run.

Love and Commitment

A man's possession of such assets as health, status, and resources, however, still does not guarantee his willingness to commit them to a particular woman and her children. Indeed, some men show a tremendous reluctance to marry, preferring to play the field and to seek a series of temporary sex partners. Women deride men for this hesitancy, calling them "commitment dodgers," "commitment phobics," "para-

noid about commitment," and "fearful of the M word."⁴⁵ And women's anger is reasonable. Given the tremendous costs women incur because of sex, pregnancy, and childbirth, it is reasonable for them to require commitment from a man in return.

The weight women attach to commitment is revealed in the following true story (the names are changed). Mark and Susan had been going out with each other for two years and had been living together for six months. He was a well-off forty-two-year-old professional, she a medical student of twenty-eight. Susan pressed for a decision about marriage—they were in love, and she wanted to have children within a few years. But Mark balked. He had been married before; if he ever married again, he wanted to be absolutely sure it would be for good. As Susan continued to press for a decision, Mark raised the possibility of a prenuptial agreement. She resisted, feeling that this violated the spirit of marriage. Finally they agreed that by a date four months in the future he would have decided one way or another. The date came and went, and still Mark could not make a decision. Susan told him that she was leaving him, moved out, and started dating another man. Mark panicked. He called her up and begged her to come back, saying that he had changed his mind and would marry her. He promised a new car. He promised that there would be no prenuptial agreement. But it was too late. Mark's failure to commit was too strong a negative signal to Susan. It dealt the final blow to their relationship. She was gone forever.

Women past and present face the adaptive problem of choosing men who not only have the necessary resources but also show a willingness to commit those resources to them and their children. This problem may be more difficult than it seems at first. Although resources can often be directly observed, commitment cannot be. Instead, gauging commitment requires looking for cues that signal the likelihood of fidelity in the channeling of resources. Love is one of the most important cues to commitment.

Feelings and acts of love are not recent products of particular Western views. Love is universal. Thoughts, emotions, and actions of love are experienced by people in all cultures worldwide—from the Zulu in the southern tip of Africa to the Eskimos in the north of Alaska. In a survey of 168 diverse cultures from around the world, the anthropologist William Jankowiak found strong evidence for the presence of romantic love in nearly 90 percent of them. For the remaining 10 percent, the anthropological records were too sketchy to definitely verify the presence of love. When the sociologist Sue Sprecher and her colleagues interviewed 1,667 men and women in Russia, Japan, and the

United States, they found that 61 percent of the Russian men and 73 percent of the Russian women were currently in love. Comparable figures for the Japanese were 41 percent of the men and 63 percent of the women. Among Americans, 53 percent of the men and 63 percent of the women acknowledged being in love. Clearly, love is not a phenomenon limited to Western cultures.⁴⁶

To identify precisely what love is and how it is linked to commitment, I initiated a study of acts of love.⁴⁷ First, I asked fifty women and fifty men from the University of California and the University of Michigan to think of people they knew who were currently in love and to describe actions performed by those people that reflect or exemplify their love. A different group of forty college men and women evaluated each of the 115 acts named for how typical it was of love in their estimation. Acts of commitment top the women's and men's lists, being viewed as most central to love. Such acts include giving up romantic relations with others, talking of marriage, and expressing a desire to have children with the person. When performed by a man, these acts of love signal the intention to commit resources to one woman and her children.

Commitment, however, has many facets. One major component of commitment is fidelity, exemplified by the act of remaining faithful to a partner when they are separated. Fidelity signals the exclusive commitment of sexual resources to a single partner. Another aspect of commitment is the channeling of resources to the loved one, such as buying her an expensive gift or ring. Acts such as this signal a serious intention to commit economic resources to a long-term relationship. Emotional support is yet another facet of commitment, revealed by such behavior as being available in times of trouble and listening to the partner's problems. Commitment entails a channeling of time, energy, and effort to the partner's needs at the expense of fulfilling one's own personal goals. Acts of reproduction also represent a direct commitment to one's partner's genes. All these acts, which are viewed as central to love, signal the commitment of sexual, economic, emotional, and genetic resources to one person.

Since love is a worldwide phenomenon, and since a primary function of acts of love is to signal commitment of reproductively-relevant resources, then women should place a premium on love in the process of choosing a mate. To find out, Sue Sprecher and her colleagues asked American, Russian, and Japanese students whether they would marry someone who had all the qualities they desired in a mate if they were not in love with that person.⁴⁸ Fully 89 percent of American women and 82 percent of Japanese women say they would still require love for marriage, even if all other important qualities are present.

Among Russians, only 59 percent of women will not marry someone with whom they are not in love, no matter how many desirable qualities that person has. Although a clear majority of Russian women require love, the lower threshold may reflect the tremendous difficulty Russian women have in finding a mate because of the severe shortage of men and especially men capable of investing resources. These variations reveal the effects of cultural context on mating. Nonetheless, the majority of women in all three cultures see love as an indispensable ingredient in marriage.

Direct studies of preferences in a mate confirm the centrality of love. In a study of 162 Texas women college students, out of one hundred characteristics examined, the quality of being loving is the most strongly desired in a potential husband.⁴⁹ The international study on choosing a mate confirmed the importance of love across cultures. Among eighteen possible characteristics, mutual attraction or love proved to be the most highly valued in a potential mate by both sexes, being rated a 2.87 by women and 2.81 by men. Nearly all women and men from the tribal enclaves of South Africa to the bustling streets of Brazilian cities give love the top rating, indicating that it is indispensable for marriage. Women place a premium on love in order to secure the commitment of men's economic, emotional, and sexual resources.

Two additional personal characteristics, kindness and sincerity, are critical to securing long-term commitment. In one study of 800 personal advertisements, sincerity was the single most frequently listed characteristic sought by women.⁵⁰ Another analysis of 1,111 personal advertisements again showed that sincerity is the quality most frequently sought by women—indeed, women advertisers seek sincerity nearly four times as often as men advertisers.⁵¹ Sincerity in personal advertisements is a code word for commitment, used by women to screen out men seeking casual sex without any commitment.

People worldwide depend on kindness from their mates. As shown by the international study on choosing a mate, women have a strong preference for mates who are kind and understanding. In thirty-two out of the thirty-seven cultures, in fact, sexes are identical in valuing kindness as one of the three most important qualities out of a possible thirteen in a mate. Only in Japan and Taiwan do men give greater emphasis than women to kindness. And only in Nigeria, Israel, and France do women give greater emphasis than men to kindness. In no culture, for either sex, however, is kindness in a mate ranked lower than third out of thirteen.

Kindness is an enduring personality characteristic that has many components, but at the core of all of them is the commitment of resources. The trait signals an empathy toward children, a willingness to put a mate's

needs before one's own, and a willingness to channel energy and effort toward a mate's goals rather than exclusively and selfishly to one's own goals.⁵² Kindness, in other words, signals the ability and willingness of a potential mate to commit energy and resources selflessly to a partner.

The lack of kindness signals selfishness, an inability or unwillingness to commit, and a high likelihood that costs will be inflicted on a spouse. The study of newlyweds, for example, identified unkind men on the basis of their self-assessment, their wives' assessment, and the judgment of male and female interviewers, and then examined the wives' complaints about these husbands. Women married to unkind men complain that their spouses abuse them both verbally and physically by hitting, slapping, or spitting at them. Unkind men tend to be condescending, putting down their wife's opinions as stupid or inferior. They are selfish, monopolizing shared resources. They are inconsiderate, failing to do any housework. They are neglectful, failing to show up as promised. Finally, they have more extramarital affairs, suggesting that these men are unable or unwilling to commit to a monogamous relationship.⁵³ Unkind men look out for themselves, and have trouble committing to anything much beyond that.

Because sex is one of the most valuable reproductive resources women can offer, they have evolved psychological mechanisms that cause them to resist giving it away indiscriminately. Requiring love, sincerity, and kindness is a way of securing a commitment of resources commensurate with the value of the resource that women give to men. Requiring love and kindness helps women to solve the critical adaptive mating problem of securing the commitment of resources from a man that can aid in the survival and reproduction of her offspring.

When Women Have Power

A different explanation has been offered for the preferences of women for men with resources, based on the so-called structural powerlessness of women.⁵⁴ According to this view, because women are typically excluded from power and access to resources, which are largely controlled by men, women seek mates who have power, status, and earning capacity. Women try to marry upward in socioeconomic status to gain access to resources. Men do not value economic resources in a mate as much as women do because they already have control over these resources and because women have no resources anyway.

The society of Bakweri, from Cameroon in West Africa, casts doubt on this theory by illustrating what happens when women have real

power. Bakweri women hold greater personal and economic power because they have more resources and are in scarcer supply than men.⁵⁵ Women secure resources through their own labors on plantations, but also from casual sex, which is a lucrative source of income. There are roughly 236 men for every 100 women, an imbalance that results from the continual influx of men from other areas of the country to work on the plantations. Because of the extreme imbalance in numbers of the sexes, women have considerable latitude to exercise their choice in a mate. Women thus have more money than men and more potential mates to choose from. Yet Bakweri women persist in preferring to have a mate with resources. Wives often complain about receiving insufficient support from their husbands. Indeed, lack of sufficient economic provisioning is the most frequently cited divorce complaint of women. Bakweri women change husbands if they find a man who can offer them more money and pay a larger bride price. When women are in a position to fulfill their evolved preference for a man with resources, they do so. Having the dominant control of economic resources does not circumvent this key mate preference.

Professionally and economically successful women in the United States also value resources in men. The newlywed study identified women who were financially successful, measured by their salary and income, and contrasted their preferences in a mate with those of women with lower salaries and income. The financially successful women often made more than \$50,000 a year, and a few made more than \$100,000. These women were well educated, tended to have professional degrees, and had high self-esteem. As the study showed, successful women place an even greater value than less successful women on mates who have professional degrees, high social status, and greater intelligence, as well as desiring mates who are tall, independent, and self-confident. Perhaps most tellingly, these women express an even stronger preference for high-earning men than do women who are less financially successful. In a separate study the psychologists Michael Wiederman and Elizabeth Allgeier found that college women who expect to earn the most after college place more importance on the financial prospects of a potential husband than do women who expect to earn less. Professionally successful women, such as medical students and law students, also assign great importance to a mate's earning capacity.⁵⁶ Furthermore, men low in financial resources and status do not value economic resources in a mate any more than financially successful men do.⁵⁷ Taken together, these results not only fail to support the structural powerlessness hypothesis but directly contradict it.

Structural powerlessness has an element of truth in that men in most cultures do control resources and exclude women from power. But the theory cannot explain the fact that men strive to exclude other men from power at least as much as women, that the origins of the male control of resources remain unexplained, that women have not evolved bigger, stronger bodies to acquire resources directly, and that men's preferences in a mate remain entirely mysterious. Evolutionary psychology accounts for this constellation of findings. Men strive to control resources and to exclude other men from resources to fulfill women's mating preferences. In human evolutionary history, men who failed to accumulate resources failed to attract mates. Men's larger bodies and more powerful status drives are due, at least in part, to the preferences that women have expressed over the past few million years.

Women's Many Preferences

We now have the outlines of an answer to the enigma of what women want. Women are judicious, prudent, and discerning about the men they consent to mate with because they have so many valuable reproductive resources to offer. Those with valuable resources rarely give them away indiscriminately. The costs in reproductive currency of failing to exercise choice were too great for ancestral women, who would have risked beatings, food deprivation, disease, abuse of children, and abandonment. The benefits of choice in nourishment, protection, and paternal investment for children were abundant.

Permanent mates may bring with them a treasure trove of resources. Selecting a long-term mate who has the relevant resources is clearly an extraordinarily complex endeavor. It involves at least a dozen distinctive preferences, each corresponding to a resource that helps women to solve critical adaptive problems.

That women seek resources in a permanent mate may be obvious. But because resources cannot always be directly discerned, women's mating preferences are keyed to other qualities that signal the likely possession, or future acquisition, of resources. Indeed, women may be less influenced by money per se than by qualities that lead to resources, such as ambition, status, intelligence, and age. Women scrutinize these personal qualities carefully because they reveal a man's potential.

Potential, however, is not enough. Because many men with a high resource potential are themselves discriminating and are at times content with casual sex, women are faced with the problem of commitment. Seeking love and sincerity are two solutions to the commitment

problem. Sincerity signals that the man is capable of commitment. Acts of love signal that he has in fact committed to a particular woman.

To have the love and commitment of a man who could be easily downed by other men in the physical arena, however, would have been a problematic asset for ancestral women. Women mated to small, weak men lacking in physical prowess would have risked damage from other men and loss of the couple's joint resources. Tall, strong, athletic men offered ancestral women protection. In this way, their resources and commitment could be secured against incursion. Women who selected men in part for their strength and prowess were more likely to be successful at surviving and reproducing.

Resources, commitment, and protection do a woman little good if her husband becomes diseased or dies or if the couple is so mismatched that they fail to function as an effective team. The premium that women place on a man's health ensures that husbands will be capable of providing these benefits over the long haul. And the premium that women place on similarity of interests and traits with their mate helps to ensure the convergence of mutually pursued goals. These multiple facets of current women's mating preferences thus correspond perfectly with the multiple facets of adaptive problems that were faced by our women ancestors thousands of years ago.

Ancestral men, however, were confronted with a different set of adaptive problems. So we must now shift perspective to gaze at ancestral women as potential mates through the eyes of our male forebears.

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