

1-1-2003

The desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate

Nelse M Ostlund

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds>

Repository Citation

Ostlund, Nelse M, "The desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate" (2003). *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations*. 1613.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/geym-u6ja>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

THE DESIRE FOR SOCIO-CULTURAL
SIMILARITY IN A MATE

by

Nelse M. Ostlund

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2000

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Psychology
Department of Psychology
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2003

UMI Number: 1418390

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 1418390

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346



Thesis Approval
The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 3, 2003

The Thesis prepared by

Nelse M Ostlund


Entitled

THE DESIRE FOR SOCIO CULTURAL SIMILARITY IN A MATE


is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

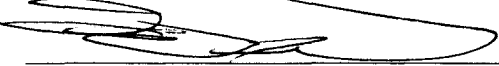
Master of Arts in Psychology


Examination Committee Chair


Dean of the Graduate College


Examination Committee Member


Examination Committee Member


Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

The Desire for Socio-cultural Similarity in a Mate

By

Nelse M. Ostlund, B.A.

Dr. Murray Millar, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Various socio-cultural domains were investigated for the influence they may have on mating decisions. 102 male and 114 female university students were presented “potential dates” from a mock Internet dating service. Potential dates were described in terms of their ethnicity, music interest, education, leisure interest, occupation, religious affiliation, political affiliation, language, socio-economic status, and style of dress. Potential dates’ socio-cultural traits were determined randomly according to a computer program. For each of these domains, information was gathered regarding the level of similarity between participant and potential date. After reviewing all traits, participants rated the potential date in terms of how desirable he/she was as a romantic partner. Ratings of similarity were used to predict desirability judgments. A multiple regression analysis revealed that socio-cultural similarity was a substantial predictor of desirability. In particular, similar music interest was the

best predictor of desirability, followed by dress style, education, and political affiliation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	
The Physical Domain	4
The Psychological Domain	7
The Socio-cultural Domain.....	10
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	
Overview	15
Stimulus Materials.....	16
Participants	17
Procedure	17
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS	
Impact of Order	23
Desireability as a Function of Socio-cultural Similarity.....	26
Courtship Behavior	27
Gender	28
Commitment Interest.....	29
Physical Attractiveness	32
Emotion.....	32
Familiarity	33
Pride	34
Normative Pressures	36
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION	
General Findings.....	39
The Desire for Similarity.....	40
Socio-cultural Predictors	42
The Role of Gender	51
The Role of Commitment Interest	54
The Role of Emotions	55
Social Networks	58

Limitations of this Study	61
APPENDIX INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	66
REFERENCES	69
VITA.....	79

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Socio-cultural Traits by Domain used to Describe Potential Dates ..	19
Table 2	Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Similarity Predicting Desirability	27
Table 3	Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Similarity Predicting Desirability - Separate Analysis for Males and Females	30
Table 4	Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Pride Predicting Desirability	36
Table 5	Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Normative Pressure Predicting Desirability	38

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express deep gratitude to the Thesis Examination Committee: Chairperson, Dr. Murray Millar, Committee Members, Dr. Michael Hall, Dr. Gretchen Kambe, and Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. David Biesecker for their wisdom, patience, enthusiasm, and friendship. Special thanks are extended to Murray Millar for allowing enough creative freedom to grow, for instilling a dose of pragmatic insight that I was previously lacking, and for always pointing me in the right direction.

I also wish to express deep gratitude to my parents, Terry and Janie Ostlund, for their unwavering faith and heart-felt support during all those stages leading up to the finalization of this document. My father has paved an honorable path that has always served as my moral compass and my mother is the best listener in the world, period.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Do similar people gravitate toward one another? Ask your neighbor and they will probably tell you that “birds of a feather flock together”. Ask your average psychologist or sociologist and they will say the same, except in more technically strenuous terms. For instance, describing the principle of homophily, it has been said that “contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The role of similarity has been studied in various domains. For instance, researchers have studied whether spouses are similar in physical beauty, attitudes, personality, intelligence, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, profession, and political beliefs for instance. It is obvious that people tend to “flock-together” along many physical, psychological, and socio-cultural domains.

Assortative mating is often used to refer to spouse correlations – any non-random mating that occurs in which mates tend to be similar to one another along some dimension. Assortative mating can be seen as an outcome with many possible causes. One possible cause of assortative mating is homotypic preferences. *Homotypic preferences* are preferences for similar types (Kalick & Hamilton, 1986). While other factors have been proposed that could explain

assortative mating – such as proximity effects and shared social environments – this study is singularly focused on identifying homotypic preferences. In particular, this study is designed to address the nature of homotypic preferences for socio-cultural traits.

Researchers have documented that assortative mating occurs for many socio-cultural dimensions (Buss, 1985). Dating and married couples tend to be matched in socio-economic status (Fu & Heaton, 2000), education (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996; Nagoshi & Johnson, 1994; Nagoshi, Johnson, & Ahern, 1987), leisure interests (Houts et al., 1996), and profession (Nagoshi et al., 1987).

Some researchers have tested for the presence of homotypic preferences as a means of explaining some of these spouse similarities. Researchers have found homotypic preferences for religious affiliation (Rai & Rathore, 1988), education (Knox, Zusman, & Nieves, 1997), leisure interests (Brislin & Lewis, 1968), ethnicity (Chiasson, Charbonneau, & Proulx, 1996; Liu, Campbell, & Condie, 1995), attire (Hensley, 1981), and music tastes (Zillmann & Bhatia, 1989). Despite the extensive list of traits that have been implicated in a similarity-attraction relationship, no single study has investigated the relative preferential importance of all, or even most, of these individual traits by manipulating them collectively.

At present, there is no estimate of the overall importance of socio-cultural similarity when seeking a mate. Also, by studying traits independently or in small sets, psychologists have been unable to adequately estimate the *relative*

importance of each of these traits. We also do not know whether these proposed homotypic preferences are additive or not. Perhaps these preferences interact in such a way that information about one dimension (e.g. religion) makes information about another redundant (e.g., ethnicity). The present study will attempt to address some of these questions by looking at a number of socio-cultural dimensions – all at once. Included within this study are measures of similarity regarding education, ethnicity, favorite style of music, language, leisure interests, occupation, religious affiliation, political affiliation, socio-economic status, and style of dress. The primary question being, does similarity along these dimensions predict the desirability of a potential date?

Before delving further into the literature regarding socio-cultural factors, a general overview of similarity research in other domains will be covered. That is, in addition to the relevant socio-cultural research, findings from studies with regard to physical attractiveness, personality, attitudes, and intelligence will be discussed. Discussion will be broken into three parts, 1) the physical domain, 2) the psychological domain, and 3) the socio-cultural domain.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Physical Domain

Studies of dating behavior have consistently found that persons desire physical beauty in a mate (Brislin & Lewis, 1968; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottmann, 1966). Some of these same researchers suggest that humans also have a significant preference for others who are matched (i.e. similar) in physical attractiveness (Walster et al., 1966). Feingold (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of seventeen studies that measured the within-couple correlation of physical attractiveness (e.g., Feingold, 1981; Murstein & Christy, 1976; Price & Vandenberg, 1979; White, 1980). Feingold (1988) found that the average correlation for physical attractiveness is approximately .39. It seems apparent that mates are matched in physical attractiveness.

Couples tend to be matched in physical attractiveness, but why? The matching hypothesis (Brislin & Lewis, 1968; Walster et al., 1966) is one attempt at an answer. This hypothesis has its origins in level of aspiration theory (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears, 1944). Level of aspiration theory states that realistic social choices are not only influenced by the desirability of the choice alternative, but also influenced by the probability of obtaining the goal

(Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971). Using the same reasoning, the matching hypothesis states that desire is influenced by the probability of the target's approval in response to a romantic advance. Desires are moderated when the odds of approval are low. In other words, "I don't want her as much because I could never get her". Berscheid and colleagues (1971) investigated this hypothesis and found support for the matching hypothesis in both studies that were conducted. Other studies have also found evidence consistent with a preference for matching (Folkes, 1982; Stroebe et al., 1971).

Despite evidence consistent with the matching hypothesis, some inconsistencies have emerged. First, some researchers have failed to find homotypic preferences (Huston, 1973; Walster, 1970). But more importantly, some underlying assumptions of the matching hypothesis have been disconfirmed. First, the matching hypothesis is based upon the idea that persons estimate the probability of obtaining an attractive date – and that this perceptual estimate moderates the preference for an attractive date. In other words, perceptions of possible success or failure should affect the desire for an attractive mate. As the probability of failure increases, desire should decrease. Studies have failed to find support for this hypothesis. For instance, Berscheid et al. (1971) manipulated the perceived possibility of rejection, predicting that this would moderate the preference for an attractive mate. To their surprise, the rejection manipulation had no effect in either of two experiments.

Also, high self-esteem should increase the perceived probability of obtaining a mate, and thus increase the preference for attractive dates. Yet,

both Huston (1973) and Walster (1970) found that self-esteem had no effect on the preference for attractive dates. The state of affairs remains: "I still want him, even though I could never have him".

Although a small preference for matching may exist, the preference for sheer attractiveness is far more influential and pervasive (Stroebe et al., 1971; Walster et al., 1966). Yet, studies have consistently found assortative mating for physical attractiveness (Feingold, 1988). So, all persons tend to desire the most attractive of persons, but tend to be matched in attractiveness when they actually pair-up. A competitive marketplace model for mating (Feingold, 1988; Fu & Heaton, 2000; Gangestad, 1993; Kalick & Hamilton, 1986; White, 1980) could potentially make sense of all this. To use an analogy, although most would like the mansion on the top of the hill, only a few have the capital to afford it. Just because we do not have the capital to afford it does not mean that the desire for a mansion goes away. Similarly, not everyone can "afford" the most desirable of mates - more desirable mates can attract others of greater mate value and probably will. The desire for an attractive mate does not go away. Rather, we make the practical decision to court the most attractive mate that will accept our advances.

The marketplace model suggests that relationship pairs should be matched in "market value", a concept related to the concept of "equity" (Feingold, 1981). According to these models, if mate value were wholly determined by physical attractiveness, people would be unwilling to mate with someone less attractive, and unable to mate with someone more attractive. As

a result, every couple would be perfectly matched in attractiveness – the within-couple correlation would approach 1.0. The fact that the correlation is considerably lower than 1.0 suggests the obvious: one's mate value is determined by factors other than just physical attractiveness.

The Psychological Domain

As with physical attractiveness, those who are similar in thought and behavior tend to gravitate toward one another. Numerous research articles have addressed the issue of psychological similarity and its effects on attraction. In particular, the effects of attitude similarity on attraction have been studied extensively (see AhYun, 2002; Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Sunnafrank, 1992; White & Hatcher, 1984 for reviews). Study in the effect of attitude similarity on attraction began with a classic set of experiments conducted by Byrne and his colleagues (e.g., Byrne, 1961; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Byrne, Nelson, & Reeves, 1966; Byrne, London, & Griffitt, 1968). What we can draw from these studies and others (e.g., Drigotas, 1993; Rai & Rathore, 1988; Singh & Tan, 1992), is that attitude similarity is a reliable predictor of initial attraction. That is, people tend to have homotypic preferences for attitudes. One explanation for these homotypic preferences is based upon inferred evaluation – we assume that similar people will evaluate us positively and therefore we prefer their company (Condon & Crano, 1988).

Social psychologists studying attitudes have also been interested in the variable effects of similarity vs. dissimilarity. Evidence suggests that the

negative effect of dissimilarity is stronger than the positive effect of similarity (Singh & Ho, 2000; Singh & Tan, 1992). This supports the similarity/dissimilarity asymmetry hypothesis (Singh & Ho, 2000) – which suggests that the tendency to gravitate toward similar others is not as powerful as the tendency to avoid the company of persons with contrasting attitudes (Sunnafrank, 1992). Interestingly, the asymmetrical influence of similarity vs. dissimilarity has only become an issue within the domain of attitude research. This reflects the progress that has been made in this arena of similarity research. Within other domains of research, the role of similarity has been given much less attention, and therefore, the issue of asymmetrical effects has not even become an issue.

In contrast to research regarding attitudes, much less literature has been published on the topic of homotypic preferences for *personality*. This may be because homotypic preferences for attitudes are much stronger than those for personality. Singh (1973) found that manipulating personality similarity had a significant effect on attraction, however, manipulating attitude similarity had a much stronger effect. Other research confirms that homotypic preferences for personality is at most, moderately important (Burgess & Wallin, 1944). Lum and Curran (1975) manipulated extroversion and neuroticism in potential mates and measured subjects' attraction toward them. Females preferred males who were similar, but only in extroversion, while males showed no preferences for personality similarity in females. Another study found that exposure to a person with a similar personality can serve as positive reinforcement, but similarity did

not have an effect on attraction (Suman & Sethi, 1985). Nakazato, Inoue, and Tanaka (1975) manipulated extroversion similarity and found no measurable effects on attraction. Another researcher found a preference for dissimilar personalities rather than similar personalities (Nakamura, 1984). In sum, homotypic preferences for personality appear to be unpredictable and weak, as evidenced by these contradictory results.

It has also been suggested that we share homotypic preferences for intelligence. A number of researchers, largely from a behavioral genetic perspective, have addressed the issue of assortative mating for intelligence (e.g., (Nagoshi et al., 1987; Reynolds, Baker, & Pedersen, 1996; Tambs, Sundet, & Berg, 1993). Behavioral geneticists are largely interested in the relative contributions of genes and environment to behavioral phenomenon. Understandably, one behavioral phenomenon of interest to these researchers is assortative mating for intelligence. Some have posed the question, is it due to genetically determined homotypic preferences or is it due to the shared effects that an environment can have on a group? To investigate the genetic component of assortative mating, researchers have typically used twins to infer the relative contributions of genes and environment. By comparing the spouses of twins, and conducting sophisticated statistical analysis on the data, some suggest that it becomes possible to estimate the relative importance of genes vs. environment. Most researchers believe that the evidence suggests that assortative mating for intelligence is largely due to shared environments, with little genetic component (Nagoshi et al., 1987; Reynolds et al., 1996; Tambs et

al., 1993). Others suggest that a genetic preference for similar environments could explain assortative mating rates for intelligence (Reynolds, Baker, & Pedersen, 2000). Specifically, Reynolds and colleagues (2000) propose that a preference for similar educational environments may explain assortative mating for intelligence. Clearly, as research in attitudes, personality, and intelligence shows, the role of homotypic preferences varies dramatically across the various psychological domains of interest.

The Socio-cultural Domain

One of the first studies to address socio-cultural similarity in a mate was carried out by Burgess and Wallin (1943). The attempt was made to estimate the level of assortative mating for 51 social characteristics broadly categorized under the headings of religious affiliation, cultural background, and social participation. Apparently, assortative mating was occurring in 45 out of the 51 social characteristics they measured. The most notable spouse correlation was religious affiliation ($C = .54$). More recent studies have replicated this finding (Kalmijn & Flap, 2001; Sakai & Johnson, 1997). Other domains include socio-economic status (Fu & Heaton, 2000), education (Houts et al., 1996; Nagoshi & Johnson, 1994; Nagoshi et al., 1987), leisure interests (Houts et al., 1996), and profession (Nagoshi et al., 1987). Because of the correlational nature of these studies, we do not know why it is that married couples are similar in these regards. One explanation is that homotypic preferences are responsible. Evidence for homotypic preferences has been found for religious affiliation

(Rai & Rathore, 1988), socio-economic status (Stretch & Figley, 1980; Townsend & Levy, 1990), education (Knox et al., 1997), leisure interests (Brislin & Lewis, 1968), profession (Brislin & Lewis, 1968), ethnicity (Chiasson et al., 1996; Liu et al., 1995), attire (Hensley, 1981), music tastes (Zillmann & Bhatia, 1989), and political affiliation (Rai & Rathore, 1988).

Surprisingly, while many have focused their attention toward one socio-cultural factor or another and its effects on attraction, no single study has attempted to measure the collective effects of all of these socio-cultural variables at one time. Most often, socio-cultural factors are considered in isolation from other socio-cultural factors or only considered in pairs. No study has attempted to address the collective effects of socio-cultural factors on attraction. Under real world conditions, upon meeting a potential mate, persons have access to a broad range of socio-cultural information. It seems reasonable to assume that these traits interact with each other, such that the presence of one trait may influence the effects of other traits. Therefore, the results of studies that isolate these traits in the laboratory may be misleading because they do not take into account the likely interaction between traits that occurs outside of the laboratory. Therefore, the present study will expose persons to a potential mate described by a battery of socio-cultural traits. Then, the study will measure the effects these traits have on 1) ratings of desirability and 2) mate seeking behavior toward the potential mate. Again, the goal of this study is to estimate the *overall* desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate,

while simultaneously measuring the *relative* importance of various socio-cultural factors.

Another issue that this study will attempt to address is the possible moderating role of commitment. It is likely that homotypic preferences become more important as relationships become more serious. Keller and Young (1996) found that married couples were more similar in psychological traits compared to dating couples. This suggests that when determining mate value, persons looking for a long-term relationship may be sensitive to a different set of traits than persons looking for a short-term relationship (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Stewart, Stinnett, & Rosenfeld, 2000).

Evolutionary pressures may be partly responsible for the difference in preferences between short-term and long-term mating situations. In short-term and more casual mating situations, a mate's contribution to potential offspring is often limited to the contribution of that person's genes. As a result of this evolutionary pressure, humans following a short-term strategy have likely become sensitive to traits that advertise a potential mate's genetic fitness – such as physical attractiveness and cognitive health. Socio-cultural traits are not as important under these conditions.

On the other hand, a long-term mate contributes much more than genetic material. Among other things, a long-term mate contributes his or her own socio-cultural setting (i.e. social network) to the relationship. Persons following a long-term mating strategy may prefer a mate with similar socio-cultural traits because similarity implies that each of their social networks will be compatible.

Further, social network pressures to mate within the group may facilitate these homotypic preferences. Because social networks may play an integral role in the mate decision process, questions will be included to explore this avenue.

Further, it is expected that gender will moderate the effect of socio-cultural similarity on attraction and mate seeking behavior. Specifically, the prediction is that similarity is more important to females than to males. Gender differences in mating preferences have been well documented. For instance, many studies suggest that males are more sensitive to the reproductive value (e.g. physical attractiveness, youth) of potential mates while females are more sensitive to the resource acquisition ability (e.g. dominance, industriousness, wealth, etc.) of potential mates (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Stewart et al., 2000). Females' sensitivity to socially important variables may not be limited to resource acquisition ability, but may also include variables reflecting the characteristics of one's social identity within a larger social network.

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the possible mediating role of emotions in the relationship between similarity and desirability. That is, it seems likely that impressions of socio-cultural similarity trigger positive emotions, which influence decisions about the desirability of a particular mate. Therefore, questions regarding emotions are included in the study.

In sum, this study is an attempt to 1) estimate the collective and relative importance of socio-cultural factors in mating, 2) test the hypotheses that gender and commitment interest moderate the relationship between similarity and desirability, 3) test the hypothesis that emotions mediate the relationship

between similarity and desirability, and 4) explore the possible role of social networks in the mate decision process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Overview

Participants evaluated three potential dates from a mock Internet dating service. First, each of the potential dates was assigned a random set of traits from each of the ten socio-cultural dimensions (e.g. Education: University, Ethnicity: Chinese, Favorite Style of Music: Rap & Hip Hop, Primary Language: Chinese & Secondary Language: English, Leisure Interests: Roams the Internet, Occupation: Entertainer, Religious Affiliation: Catholic, Political Affiliation: Democrat, Socio-economic Status: Privilege & Upper Class, and Dress Style: Casual). Second, these traits were displayed to the participant one at a time. As far as the participants were concerned, these were “real” traits describing the socio-cultural characteristics of the potential date. Then for each trait, participants indicated the degree to which he or she possessed the trait. This served as our measure of similarity for the different socio-cultural dimensions. Finally, participants rated the romantic desirability of the potential date and were given the option of initiating communication with the potential date by submitting an e-mail address. Except for being assigned a distinct set of socio-cultural traits, this procedure was repeated for each of the three potential dates. In terms of experimental conditions, participants were assigned

potential dates interested in either a casual or serious relationship. Further, participants were assigned potential dates that were either high or average in terms of physical attractiveness. With gender being considered, the basic design of the study was a 2 (commitment interest) x 2 (physical attractiveness) x 2 (gender) factorial design.

Stimulus Materials

Twelve photographs were used in the study. The set included equal numbers of 6 males and 6 females. Also, the set was equally divided between 4 Asians, 4 Latinos, and 4 Germans. Essentially, with physical attractiveness taken into account, there was an average and highly physically attractive male and female representative within each ethnicity. These photographs were identified from a larger set of 60 photographs gathered from real Internet dating services. This larger set began with equal numbers of males and females as well as equal numbers of representatives from each of the three ethnicities. Then, a survey was conducted to identify the 12 pictures that would be used in the main study.

64 male and 60 female undergraduates rated the physical attractiveness of the pictures. For each of the pictures, participants were asked "How physically attractive is this person?" Responses varied on a dichotomous scale between "extremely unattractive" (0) to "extremely attractive" (6), with a midpoint of "average" (3). Physical attractiveness scores were used to identify the average and high physically attractive male and female representative within

each ethnicity. That is, one picture of average physical attractiveness and one of high physical attractiveness was chosen for each gender for each ethnicity.

Participants

102 Male and 114 female introductory psychology students with a mean age of 21 from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas participated in the experiment. The sample included 19 Asians, 23 Asian Americans, 7 Europeans, 100 white Americans, 1 African, 15 African Americans, 6 Hispanics, 17 Hispanic Americans, and 28 others. Participation was on a voluntary basis and course credit was offered. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two *physical attractiveness* conditions and one of two *commitment interest* conditions. Stimulus materials were presented by microcomputers with up to five persons participating in each experimental session. Participants were fully debriefed after each session and informed of the deception stemming from the "Internet dating service" cover story.

Procedures

Upon arrival, participants were asked to read a consent form, and sign it if they agree to the conditions. Participants knew they would be asked to evaluate other individuals, be asked questions about themselves, and be asked to indicate similarities between themselves and other persons. Meanwhile, presented on the computer screen in front of them was the fabricated cover story. It said that participants would be evaluating potential dates that

volunteered for this study. The potential dates were from a real Internet dating service currently under the researcher's control. It was stressed that participants would be given the opportunity to contact these potential dates if they so wished. Finally, participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to gain knowledge that can be used to improve the design of dating services on the Internet.

Next, with help from the experimenter, participants were asked to work through a short practice trial to become familiar with the interface. Then, they were asked to continue the rest of the study on their own, first indicating their sexual orientation so that the computer could present only those potential dates that were appropriate given their particular orientation. Then, the program randomly assigned a set of ten traits from each of the ten socio-cultural domains to the first potential date. First, one of the ten domains was randomly chosen. Then, one of the three traits from that domain was randomly chosen and assigned to the potential date. For each potential date, one trait from each of the ten domains was chosen in this manner. On the computer screen one photograph was displayed and one trait was presented to the participant in a box labeled "descriptive trait". For example, "Occupation: Entertainment industry" might appear (see Table 1 for the list of traits and their respective domains). Each trait was replaced by the next. For instance, "Religious affiliation: Protestant" may appear next, replacing the previous trait.

Participants were asked a number of questions regarding each trait presented. All responses were made on 7-point scales unless otherwise stated.

TABLE 1.

Socio-cultural Traits by Domain used to Describe
Potential Dates

Domain	Trait
Ethnicity	Chinese Latino German
Favorite style of music	Pop, Dance Hip Hop, Rap Indie, Punk
Higher education	None Community College University
Leisure interests	Hang-out at Coffee Houses Athletic Activities Roaming the Internet
Occupation	Department Store Clerk Entertainment Industry Restaurant Server
Religious affiliation	Protestant Catholic Agnostic (none)
Political affiliation	Republican Democrat Independent
Primary language	Chinese Spanish German
Socio-economic background	Privileged, Upper Class White collar, Middle Class Blue collar, Working Class
Style of dress	Sophisticated Casual Freaky

First, the participant was asked “the degree to which YOU possess this trait –”.

Responses varied between “I do not possess this trait” (0) to “extreme possession” (6) with a midpoint of “moderate possession” (3). This question

served as the primary measure of similarity. Next, “Do you know OTHER PEOPLE who possess this trait?” Responses were made by putting a check in the appropriate boxes next to “some of my FAMILY possess this trait”, “some of my FRIENDS possess this trait”, “some PEOPLE I WORK WITH possess this trait”, or “None”. Next, participants were asked, “People who are close to you would say ‘this trait is a source of PRIDE’”.

Responses varied on a dichotomous scale between “I strongly disagree” (0) to “I strongly agree” (6) with a midpoint of “neither” (3). Finally, participants were asked, “according to the people who are close to you, should you SEEK OR AVOID dates that possess this trait?” Responses varied on a dichotomous scale between “strongly avoid” (0) to “strongly seek” (6), with a midpoint of “neither” (3). After answering these questions, a new trait replaced the previous trait, and the same questions were asked. Participants answered these questions for each of the potential date’s ten traits.

Next, all ten traits become visible, and were listed in the order in which they were presented. Below the list of traits, the participant was asked, “Using the traits above, form a mental impression of this person. Imagine yourself in a romantic situation with this person. In this imaginary setting, describe your feelings for him/her”. Responses were made along three dichotomous scales representing *comfort/discomfort*, *attraction/aversion*, and *harmony/discord* with endpoints of “considerable discomfort” (0) to “considerable comfort” (6), “considerable aversion” (0) to “considerable attraction” (6), and “considerable discord” (0) to “considerable harmony” (6) – all with midpoints of “neither” (3).

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two *commitment interest* conditions. In one condition, the participant was informed that the potential date was interested in forming a casual relationship. In the other condition, “serious” replaced the word “casual”. Under this statement, participants were given the opportunity to forward their e-mail address to the potential date. Either the participant typed in their e-mail address (1) or they did not (0). During the last stage of each potential date’s evaluation, the participant was asked “Considering EVERYTHING you know about this person, how desirable is he/she as a romantic partner?” Responses varied on a dichotomous scale between “extremely undesirable” (0) to “extremely desirable” (6), with a midpoint of “neither” (3). Second, they were asked, “How desirable are the PHYSICAL qualities of this particular person?” Responses varied on an identical scale as that of the previous question. This was followed by the question “How desirable are the NON_PHYSICAL qualities of this particular person?” Here as well, responses varied on an identical scale.

At this point a new potential date, with photograph, was presented to the participant. From the remaining twenty traits, a new set of traits was randomly assigned to the second potential date. Regarding this potential date, the participant was to respond to the same questions as before. Essentially, for each of the three potential dates the same sequence of questions were asked. The only difference being the pictures and the sets of traits used to describe them. Each potential date was assigned a completely distinct set of traits. Therefore, all thirty possible traits were used in the description of these three

potential dates. Finally, age, ethnicity, and information regarding the status of any current relationship was collected; the participant was debriefed, and thanked for their time.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Impact of Order

A test was conducted to investigate order effects regarding the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd potential dates. Order of potential date may have had an impact on the relationship between socio-cultural similarity and desirability. For instance, socio-cultural similarity may become more or less important as the experiment progressed from the 1st potential date to the last. If so, then it may be necessary to block the results into groups based upon order of presentation, and analyze the three evaluations separately.

If similarity became more or less important as a function of the order of presentation, then this would be indicated by a significant *similarity x order* interaction. A non-significant *similarity x order* interaction would suggest that the importance of similarity remained constant. In order to test for an interaction in multiple regression, the standard procedure is to use moderated multiple regression (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). This involves using hierarchical multiple regression to analyze a product-term variable. First, the two variable of interest are multiplied to create a product-term variable – the product-term “contains” the interaction. In this case, a product-term was created by multiplying a participant’s similarity ratings (from 0 to 6) with the order in the

sequence in which the judgment was made (from 1 to 3). Because there were ten similarity measures corresponding with the ten socio-cultural dimensions, this procedure produced ten product terms for each participant. The problem with product-terms is that, while they contain the interaction, they also contain information regarding the main effects of both variables. Therefore, if one were to conduct a multiple regression analysis using the product-term variable without first controlling for the main effects, one would not be able to tell whether significance indicates a significant interaction or a significant main effect from one or both of the primary variables. Therefore, in order to isolate the interaction within the similarity x order product-term, the main effects of similarity and order must be controlled.

A standard procedure for controlling variables in multiple regression is to enter the variables in steps, referred to as hierarchical multiple regression. All variables that are entered in the first step are effectively controlled for in the analysis those variables entered in the second step. If a third set of variables was entered, then the first and second set of variables would be controlled for, and so on. Therefore, in order to control for the main effects of similarity and order in the analysis of the product-term, then similarity and order can be entered into the hierarchical multiple regression in the first step and the product-term in the second. In sum, moderated multiple regression was used to test for a similarity x order interaction. Results failed to provide evidence of a *similarity x order* interaction, $R^2 = .02$, $F(10, 626) = 1.20$, $p > .05$, suggesting that the relationship between similarity and desirability did not change as the experiment

progressed from the 1st potential date to the last. Independent analysis of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd potential dates all revealed that similarity significantly predicted desirability in all three sets of data – 1st date: $R^2 = .13$, $F(10, 205) = 3.03$, $p < .001$; 2nd date: $R^2 = .11$, $F(10, 205) = 2.55$, $p < .01$; 3rd date: $R^2 = .27$, $F(10, 205) = 7.39$, $p < .001$. Note that, for reasons discussed in the footnote, the following analyses were limited to evaluations regarding the 3rd potential date ¹.

¹ There are three interrelated reasons why analysis was limited to the 3rd potential date. First, the evidence that order of presentation had no effect on the similarity-desirability relationship means that evaluations regarding any one of the three potential dates could serve as an adequate data set. Second, the statistical assumption of *independent cases* makes it more difficult to justify collapsing the three potential dates into one analysis. Last, there is reason to believe that the 3rd potential date may be the most valid. The process of evaluating the 1st and 2nd could be considered to be practice trials for the 3rd potential dates. Rating the first two potential dates provides the participants an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the basic procedures and questions. Further, the socio-cultural traits used to describe the potential dates were likely best understood the third time around. To use an example, the first potential date may have been described as “Higher Education: None”, the second, “Higher Education: University” and the third, “Higher Education: Community college”. The meaning of the last trait is given clarity, when put into its proper context. In this case, clarity is gained from knowing that potential dates are being distinguished between 1) those that do not attend any institution of higher education, 2) those that attend a community college, and 3) those that attend a university. For these reasons, analysis was limited to data regarding the evaluations of the 3rd potential date.

Desireability as a Function of Socio-cultural Similarity

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that socio-cultural similarity is a predictor of the desirability of a potential date. Similarity judgments between the participant and the potential date regarding education, ethnicity, favorite style of music, language, leisure interests, occupation, religious affiliation, political affiliation, socio-economic background, and style of dress served as measures of socio-cultural similarity. Response to the question, "Considering EVERYTHING you know about this person, how desirable is he/she as a romantic partner?" served as a measure of desirability. In a multiple regression analysis, desirability was regressed onto the ten measures of socio-cultural similarity. Results indicate that socio-cultural similarity was a significant predictor of the desirability of a potential date, such that socio-cultural similarity accounts for approximately 27 percent of the variance in desirability ratings, $R^2 = .27$, $F(10, 205) = 7.39$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that potential dates that are more socio-culturally similar tend to be judged as more desirable.

Analysis of the individual predictors indicates that similarity with regard to music interest was the best predictor of desirability ($\beta = .28$, $t = 4.53$, $p < .001$), followed by similarity with regard to style of dress ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$), education ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.42$, $p < .05$), and political affiliation ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$). Similarity with regard to leisure interest approached significance ($\beta = .12$, $t = 1.86$, $p = .06$). Non-significant predictors of desirability include similarity with regard to ethnicity, religion, language, occupation, and socio-

TABLE 2:
Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of
Similarity Predicting Desirability

<i>Domain</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Music	.21	.05	.28***
Dress	.14	.05	.18**
Education	.09	.04	.15*
Politics	.09	.04	.13*
Leisure	.08	.05	.12
Ethnicity	.06	.05	.07
Religion	.04	.05	.05
Language	.02	.04	.03
Occupation	-.02	.06	-.02
SES	-.04	.05	-.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

economic background. Table 2 displays the results of the multiple regression analysis for all socio-cultural similarity variables that were used to predict desirability, ranked from strongest positive relationship to strongest negative relationship.

Courtship Behavior

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that socio-cultural similarity predicts courtship behavior. Choosing to submit or not to submit an e-mail address to be forwarded to the potential date served as a measure of courtship behavior. In a multiple regression analysis, e-mail submissions were regressed onto the ten measures of socio-cultural similarity. Results indicate that socio-cultural similarity was not a significant predictor of e-mail submissions, $R^2 = .03$, $F(10, 637) = 1.81$, $p > .05$. The non-significant

result may have been due to low response rate. The implications of this will be covered in the discussion.

Gender

Moderated multiple regression was conducted to test the hypothesis that the relationship between socio-cultural similarity and desirability is stronger among females compared to males. Ten *similarity x gender* product-terms were created by taking the ten measures of socio-cultural similarity and multiplying them by gender – either “0” for females or “1” for males. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, similarity and gender were entered prior to the product-term in order to isolate the *similarity x gender* interaction. In the first step, desirability was regressed onto ten similarity judgments and gender. Then, desirability was regressed onto the similarity x gender product-terms, and analyzed for significance. Results failed to reveal a significant *similarity x gender* interaction, $R^2 = .05$, $F(10, 194) = 1.53$, $p > .05$, suggesting that the relationship between similarity and desirability was consistent among males and females.

The moderated multiple regression analysis appeared to lack the statistical power to identify some gender differences – independent analysis of male and female responses revealed a number of differences with regard to *which predictors* were significant. The issue of potentially high Type I error rates with moderated multiple regression has been addressed in the literature (e.g., Paunonen & Jackson, 1988). Because of this, additional analysis was

conducted whereby male and female data sets were analyzed individually. First, female responses were analyzed by regressing their desirability ratings onto the ten measures of socio-cultural similarity. As expected, socio-cultural similarity predicted desirability among females, $R^2 = .23$, $F(10, 103) = 5.00$, $p < .01$. Also, socio-cultural similarity predicted desirability among males, $R^2 = .39$, $F(10, 91) = 5.82$, $p < .001$, but contrary to predictions, it is males ($R^2 = .39$) rather than females ($R^2 = .23$) that appear to show the strongest similarity-desirability relationship.

Also, the individual predictors that were significant for males were distinct from those that were significant for females. Among males, the best predictor of desirability was similarity in dress ($\beta = .25$, $t = 2.52$, $p < .05$), followed by education ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.82$, $p < .01$), political affiliation ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.06$, $p < .05$), and language ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$). Among females, the only significant predictor of desirability was similarity in music interest, ($\beta = .37$, $t = 4.09$, $p < .001$). Table 3 displays the results for the separate male and female multiple regressions, with strongest positive predictors at the top of each list.

Commitment Interest

A moderated multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that the socio-cultural similarity-desirability relationship was stronger for those participants evaluating potential dates interested in a *serious* relationship compared to those participants evaluating potential dates interested

TABLE 3:

Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Similarity

Predicting Desirability – Separate Analyses for Males

and Females

<i>Domain</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Males			
Dress	.20	.08	.25*
Education	.15	.05	.24**
Politics	.14	.07	.19*
Language	.11	.06	.17*
Music	.13	.07	.16
Leisure	.06	.07	.08
Ethnicity	.04	.08	.05
Religion	.01	.07	.01
Occupation	-.05	.08	-.06
SES	-.06	.08	-.07
Females			
Music	.24	.06	.37***
Dress	.10	.06	.15
Religion	.08	.07	.11
Leisure	.07	.06	.10
Politics	.05	.06	.08
SES	.02	.07	.03
Occupation	.00	.08	.00
Education	.00	.05	.00
Ethnicity	-.05	.07	-.06
Language	-.08	.05	-.14

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

in a *casual* relationship. Ten similarity judgments were multiplied by the commitment interest of the potential date – assigned a “0” when casual and a “1” when serious. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, similarity and commitment interest were entered prior to the product-term in order to isolate the *similarity x commitment interest* interaction. In the first step, desirability was regressed onto ten similarity judgements and commitment interest. In the

second step, desirability was regressed onto the similarity x commitment interest product-term. Results failed to indicate a significant *similarity x commitment interest* interaction, $R^2 = .03$, $F(10, 194) = .80$, $p > .05$, suggesting that the similarity-desirability relationship was not moderated by the commitment interest of the potential date.

Despite the non-significant results of the moderated multiple regression analysis, the *serious* and *casual* conditions were analyzed independently of one another. Results were suggestive. Despite the non-significant results of the moderated multiple regression analysis, similarity may in fact have been slightly more predictive of desirability in the serious condition ($R^2 = .36$) compared to the casual condition ($R^2 = .24$). Further, there were differences in the pattern of predictors that were significant. Among those in the casual condition, dress style was significant ($\beta = .28$, $t = 2.76$, $p < .01$), but not in the serious condition. Among those in the serious condition, political affiliation was significant ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.14$, $p < .05$). Music affiliation was significant in both conditions (casual: $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.07$, $p < .05$; serious: $\beta = .38$, $t = 4.47$, $p < .001$), but comparison of the Beta weights appears to show a stronger relationship in the serious condition. Surprisingly, despite being significant in the overall model, education was significant in neither condition when analyzed separately (casual: $\beta = .13$, $t = 1.32$, $p > .05$; serious: $\beta = .15$, $t = 1.71$, $p > .05$).

Physical Attractiveness

Moderated multiple regression analysis was conducted to test for differences in the similarity-desirability relationship between those that were evaluating physical attractive potential dates and potential dates average in physical attractiveness. A product-term was created by multiplying the ten similarity judgments by the physical attractiveness condition – assigned a “0” when average and a “1” when highly attractive. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, similarity and physical attractiveness were entered prior to the product-term in order to isolate the *similarity x physical attractiveness* interaction. In the first step, desirability was regressed onto the ten similarity judgments and physical attractiveness. In the second step, desirability was regressed onto the ten similarity x physical attractiveness product-terms. Results failed to reveal a significant *similarity x physical attractiveness* interaction, $R^2 = .04$, $F(10, 194) = 1.18$, $p > .05$. This would suggest that there were no differences in the similarity-desirability relationship between those evaluating average and physically attractive potential dates.

Emotion

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that emotions mediate the relationship between similarity and desirability. Feelings of comfort/discomfort, attraction/aversion, and harmony/discord served as measures of emotion. If the relationship between similarity and desirability is reduced substantially when emotions are statistically

controlled, then it may suggest that emotions serve as a mediating variable between perceptions of similarity and desirability. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, emotions were entered prior to similarity. In the first step, desirability was regressed onto the three measures of emotion (comfort, attraction, and harmony). In the second step, desirability was regressed onto the ten similarity judgments. It had been established earlier that similarity, when analyzed alone, accounts for approximately 27 percent of the variance in desirability, $R^2 = .27$, $F(10, 205) = 7.39$, $p < .001$. When controlling for emotions, the predictive power of similarity is reduced substantially, $R^2 = .02$, $F(10, 202) = 1.72$, $p > .05$. This large reduction in predictive power (from 27 percent to 2 percent) suggests that emotions mediate the relationship between similarity and desirability.

When the three emotions were analyzed independently, results indicated that any of the three emotions could serve as an adequate mediator. The predictive power of similarity was substantially reduced when controlling for comfort, $R^2 = .03$, $F(10, 204) = 2.13$, $p > .05$, attraction, $R^2 = .03$, $F(10, 204) = 2.29$, $p > .05$, and harmony, $R^2 = .05$, $F(10, 204) = 2.53$, $p > .05$.

Familiarity

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that familiarity with a potential date's socio-cultural traits (i.e., knowing someone who has the trait) is a predictor of the desirability of a potential date. For each of the potential date's socio-cultural traits that appeared, participants were

asked whether or not they have family members, friends, and/or co-workers who possess the trait. This data served as a measure of trait familiarity across the social network of family, friends, and co-workers. In a multiple regression analysis, desirability judgments were regressed onto the thirty distinct indications of trait familiarity (family, friend, and co-worker trait possession for each of the ten potential date's socio-cultural traits). This analysis revealed that familiarity was a significant predictor of desirability, such that familiarity accounted for approximately 28 percent of the variance in desirability ratings, $R^2 = .28$, $F(30, 185) = 2.42$, $p < .001$.

It would also be of interest to investigate whether familiarity is predictive of desirability when holding similarity constant. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the ten similarity judgments were entered prior to the thirty familiarity judgments. In the first step, desirability was regressed onto the ten similarity judgments. In the second step, desirability was regressed onto the thirty measures of familiarity. Results indicated that familiarity remained a significant predictor of desirability, even when controlling for socio-cultural similarity, $R^2 = .16$, $F(30, 175) = 1.58$, $p < .05$.

Pride

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that *the degree to which the social network has pride for a socio-cultural trait* predicts desirability for potential dates that possess that trait. For each of the potential date's socio-cultural traits that appeared, participants were asked to

indicate the degree to which they agreed with this statement, "People who are close to you would say 'this trait is a source of PRIDE'". Thus, measures were obtained indicating the degree to which a trait is a source of pride for the social network. In a multiple regression analysis, desirability judgments were regressed onto nine measures of pride (one for each socio-cultural dimension minus political affiliation ²). This analysis revealed that the degree to which one's social network has pride for a trait was a significant predictor of desirability, such that pride accounts for approximately 28 percent of the variance in desirability ratings $R^2 = .28$, $F(9, 206) = 9.09$, $p < .001$. The results suggest that a potential date is more desirable when in possession of traits that are a source of pride to one's own social network.

Analysis of the individual predictors revealed that degree of pride regarding education was the best predictor of desirability ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.31$, $p < .01$), followed by music interest ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.90$, $p < .01$), dress style ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.36$, $p < .05$), language ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.32$, $p < .05$), and leisure interest ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.06$, $p < .05$). Non-significant predictors of desirability were occupation, religious affiliation, socio-economic background, and ethnicity. Table 4 displays the results from the multiple regression analysis with the strongest positive predictors at the top.

It would also be of interest to investigate whether the predictive power of pride remains when controlling for familiarity and similarity. In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, desirability was regressed onto the ten similarity

² Due to a programming error, the data regarding political affiliation was not available.

TABLE 4:
Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of Pride
Predicting Desirability

<i>Domain</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Education	.16	.05	.21**
Music	.23	.08	.20**
Language	.21	.09	.17*
Dress	.16	.07	.16*
Leisure	.13	.06	.13*
Occupation	.13	.08	.11
Religion	.08	.06	.08
SES	-.06	.09	-.04
Ethnicity	-.14	.09	-.12

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

measures and the thirty familiarity measures prior to the measures of pride.

Results indicated that pride was a significant predictor of desirability even after controlling for similarity and familiarity, $R^2 = .07$, $F(9, 166) = 2.59$, $p < .01$.

Normative Pressures

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that normative pressures to mate within-group would predict desirability. For each of the potential date's socio-cultural traits that appeared, participants were asked, "According to the people who are close to you, should you SEEK OR AVOID dates that possess this trait?" Thus, measures were obtained indicating the perceived presence of normative pressures to seek or avoid dates with certain socio-cultural traits (i.e., normative pressure to mate within-group). In a multiple regression analysis, desirability judgments were regressed onto the ten

measures of normative pressure (one for each of the ten socio-cultural dimensions). This analysis revealed that normative pressure was a significant predictor of desirability, such that normative pressures account for approximately 43 percent of the variance in desirability ratings, $R^2 = .43$, $F(10, 205) = 15.26$, $p < .001$. When there was pressure to seek, the potential date tended to be rated higher in desirability. When there was pressure to avoid, the potential date tended to be rated as lower in desirability.

Analysis of the individual predictors revealed that normative pressure to mate within-group was strongest for dress style ($\beta = .26$, $t = 4.48$, $p < .001$), followed by music interest ($\beta = .23$, $t = 3.93$, $p < .001$), education ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.98$, $p < .01$), leisure interest ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.74$, $p < .01$), and religion ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.65$, $p < .01$). Non-significant predictors include normative pressures to mate within-group for political affiliation, ethnicity, occupation, language, and socio-economic background. Table 5 displays beta weights and t-scores for all predictors, ranked from strongest positive relationship (top) to strongest negative relationship (bottom).

TABLE 5.
Multiple Regression Analysis for Domains of
Normative Pressure Predicting Desirability

<i>Domain</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Dress	.25	.05	.26***
Music	.27	.07	.23***
Education	.15	.05	.17**
Leisure	.17	.06	.16**
Religion	.17	.06	.15**
Politics	.12	.07	.10
Ethnicity	.13	.09	.09
Occupation	.03	.08	.02
Language	-.01	.06	-.01
SES	-.06	.07	-.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

General Findings

The results were consistent with the proposal that participants possessed a desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate. Similarity in music interest, dress style, education, and political affiliation were the best predictors of social desirability. Similarity in ethnicity, language, leisure interest, occupation, socio-economic background, and religious affiliation did not predict desirability. No differences were found between males and females in the *strength* of this relationship. However, there were differences in the *pattern* of predictors between males and females. Further, the physical attractiveness of the potential date did not moderate the similarity-desirability relationship. Also, evidence was suggestive, although not convincing, that the commitment interest of the potential date may have moderated the similarity-desirability relationship. Finally, the similarity-desirability relationship was strongly mediated by emotions such as as comfort, attraction, and harmony.

The influence of social networks on preferences were also investigated. Familiarity was associated with higher ratings of desirability. Further, when subjects perceived that a certain trait was a source of pride for those in their social network, they rated potential dates with that trait as more desirable.

Finally, the normative pressures to mate within-group predicted desirability. That is, when there was pressure to seek, the potential date tended to be rated higher in desirability. When there was pressure to avoid, the potential date tended to be rated as lower in desirability.

The Desire for Similarity

Many correlational studies have established that assortative mating occurs in various degrees for physical attractiveness, attitudes, personality, intelligence, and a battery of socio-cultural traits (e.g., Vandenburg, 1972; Jensen, 1978; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). A central question then becomes, which of these spouse similarities are due to homotypic preferences – do we have a preference (or desire) for a mate with the same type of intelligence, or physical attractiveness? There is reason to believe that homotypic preferences are limited to the domains of socio-cultural traits and attitudes. First, there is little evidence that mating is driven by homotypic preferences for physical attractiveness. The reason we match on physical attractiveness is because of practical considerations of the mating market. It becomes necessary to court those who are approximately equal in mate value, because anyone with greater mate value can attract a more desirable mate, and will likely do so. Computer simulations have demonstrated that these conditions can lead to assortative mating (Kalick & Hamilton, 1986). These dynamics probably apply to personality as well. People with more desirable personalities (considerate, honest, affectionate, dependable, kind, understanding, interesting to talk to, and

loyal; Buss & Barnes, 1986) most likely pair-up with others that have similarly desirable personalities. For those who remain, the choice must be made to “be happy” with someone perhaps less desirable in character. Evidence suggests that assortative mating for intelligence is likely due to propinquity (preferences for those in close proximity) in and out of college environments, and the differential effects that those environments can have on an individual’s intellectual development (Kalmijn, 1998; Reynolds, Baker, & Pedersen, 1996, 2000). The thing that distinguishes the socio-cultural and attitude domains from those mentioned above is the social nature of these domains. Groups are anchored on, organized around, and identified by their socio-cultural traits and their attitudes. The fact that socio-cultural traits and attitudes tell you something about one’s lifestyle and the lifestyle of that person’s social network is a valuable piece of information that largely contributes to mate value in terms of similarity because similarity suggests compatibility.

In this study, the proposition that socio-cultural similarity predicts a potential mate’s desirability was tested across ten socio-cultural dimensions. Results strongly supported this hypothesis. Socio-cultural similarity explained 27 percent of the variance in desirability ratings. Although not the only possible interpretation, these results are consistent with the proposition that homotypic preferences for socio-cultural traits affect mating decisions. It is very likely that this reflects a human desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate.

The e-mail submission measure did not prove to be successful in terms of differentiating the courtship behavior of the participants. Because of a low

response rate, it could not be determined whether similarity could adequately predict actual courtship behavior ³

Socio-cultural Predictors

Very little attention in the literature has been directed toward preferences regarding music interest and dress style in mating, yet this study suggests that music and dress may be central to the mating preferences of Westernized young adults. Out of the ten socio-cultural distinctions, similarity regarding music interest and dress style had a stronger positive effect on desirability judgments than similarity regarding any other socio-cultural distinction. The ability of socio-cultural similarity to predict attraction was largely due to music and dress similarity. Zillmann and Bhata (1989) also demonstrated in an experimental study that potential dates are rated as more attractive when they possess similar music interests. As far as one can tell, this is the only other study that has investigated shared music taste as a predictor of mate evaluation. Lewis (1988) suggests that the formation of highly specific taste groups based around music styles should have important implications. In discussion of their findings, Zillmann & Bhatia (1989) suggested that this homotypic preference is a reflection of the devotion that young adults show toward particular styles of music. Apparently, such devotion is capable of producing cohesion among devotees. Given the traits used to differentiate potential dates in this study (pop music, hip-hop, and punk) these findings may

³ Out of 216 participants that could have, only 12 participants (6%) submitted their email address to the 3rd potential date.

be an indication that westernized young adults currently differentiate themselves to a large degree in terms of specific taste cultures characterized by these music styles. While religion and ethnicity may have been useful in the past to distinguish between types of people, in our mass media culture, whole new distinctions could be emerging – distinctions that may be more relevant to the youth of today.

Dress style is the second most important socio-cultural distinction found in this study. Here, potential dates were rated as more desirable when they shared similar dress styles. Once again, few studies have investigated the effects of dress style on attraction. In Townsend and Levy's (1990) study, females found males dressed in such a way as to suggest high status to be more attractive. However, no similarity effect was found. Therefore, this is the only study known that would suggest that individuals identify with others based upon how they dress (whether sophisticated, casual, or freaky) given that similarity contributes to judgments of mating desirability.

In this study, shared education contributed positively to judgments of mating desirability. Previous research shows that individuals who attend college tend to date and marry individuals within their own college environment (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1994), and married individuals tend to be matched in level of education (Houts et al., 1996; Nagoshi and Johnson, 1994; Reynolds, et al., 2000). Probably, this is largely due to proximity constraints on the dating market – individuals tend to date those who live nearby. Before this study, there was little evidence that individuals actually prefer mates with similar levels

of education (Nagoshi and Johnson, 1994; Knox, Zusman, and Nieves, 1997). Previous studies did not adequately control for proximity effects (Nagoshi and Johnson, 1994) or relied on self-reports without adequate controls (Knox, Zusman, and Nieves, 1997). Unfortunately, this study was somewhat flawed as well. Our sample was limited to college students. Therefore, these results may merely reflect a preference among college students to date other college students - "the more educated the better". Until a study is able to demonstrate that individuals without a college degree prefer to date others without a college degree, only the most conservative conclusions can be made from these results.

Finally, this study demonstrated a small tendency to rate potential mates as more desirable when those persons shared a political affiliation. Although a few studies have found assortative mating for political affiliation (e.g., Verbrugge, 1977, 1983; Knoke, 1990), beyond this spouse correlation there is very little direct evidence in the literature that would suggest a homotypic preference for political affiliation. These results could imply that our participants were differentiating between those with a liberal belief system (democrats) and those with a conservative belief system (republicans).

Being that music interest, dress style, level of education, and political affiliation were the only significant predictors of desirability, we are left with six other domains with non-significant predictive roles. Similarity in ethnicity, language, religion, leisure interest, occupation, and socio-economic background had no measurable value in predicting desirability. This is surprising because

these represent the most extensively studied socio-cultural variables among married couples, and it is well established that strong spouse correlations exist for ethnicity, religion, and education (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Further, evidence suggests that assortative mating for leisure interest and occupation occurs, although at a slightly weaker level.

First, previous research would suggest that this study should have found a homotypic preference for leisure interests. Assortative mating for leisure interest has been found, even when controlling for shared environments (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996). In Houts and colleagues' discussion, it was suggested that because this alternate explanation for assortative mating had been ruled out, assortment likely was due to a homotypic preference for leisure interest. The null effects for leisure interest reported in this study could raise concerns about Houts' conclusion. However, the discrepancy between these findings may be due to the fact that Houts' cast a wide net in defining and measuring leisure interest, while the leisure interests of our potential dates were limited to *hangs out at coffee houses*, *roams the internet*, and *athletic activities*.

That similarity in occupation had no predictive value is also somewhat surprising because a respectable body of literature has reported a relatively high degree of assortative mating for occupation (Verbrugge, 1977; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Kalmijn, 1991). One report suggests that assortment for occupation is likely to be due to homotypic preferences rather than shared environments (Nagoshi, Johnson, & Ahern, 1987). If this is true, this study was not sensitive enough to uncover such preferences.

One of the most surprising, and yet comforting results of this study was that ethnicity did not appear to be a factor in participants decisions about a potential date's desirability. This finding runs in contrast to a large body of research suggesting that ethnicity and race are important components in relationship formation. Together with age, education, race, and religion, spouse correlations for ethnicity are consistently shown to be the strongest in the assortative mating literature (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Vandenburg, 1972; Jensen, 1978; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). In the United States, ethnic intermarriage remains the trend despite the many opportunities to meet and marry a person outside of one's race or ethnicity. Strong tendencies toward ethnic intermarriage have been found in Hawaii (Schoen & Thomas, 1989), among Hispanics in New York (Gurak & Fitzpatrick, 1982), among European Americans (Alba & Golden, 1986), and among Asian Americans (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). Are individual preferences responsible for this pattern of mating? While many studies have reported spouse correlations, few controlled experiments have demonstrated that ethnically similar individuals are preferred over dissimilar ones. In one study, greater attraction was reported for ethnically similar stimulus persons compared to ethnically dissimilar stimulus persons (Chaisson, Charbonneau, and Proulx, 1996). In this study, there seemed to be no relationship between ethnic similarity and desirability. The weak and inconsistent findings regarding homotypic preferences for ethnicity make it necessary to investigate alternative explanations for the high degree of assortative mating on this variable.

Kennedy (1944) provided evidence that the boundaries between ethnicity are largely the result of differences in religion. That is, the rate of marriage between ethnic groups is largely a function of religious differences and similarities. The tendency toward religious intermarriage has been demonstrated in the United States (Kalmijn, 1991), Germany (Hendrickx, Schreuder, & Ultee, 1994), the Netherlands (Hendrickx, Lammers, & Ultee, 1991), and Australia (Hayes, 1991) to name a few.

On the other hand, Fu & Heaton (2000) provide evidence that socio-economic status can explain rates of marriage between ethnic groups. Because status is often correlated with ethnicity, intermarriage based upon socio-economic status alone would make it appear as though assortative mating was being based upon ethnicity.

Clearly, the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status is complex (Kalmijn, 1998). While spouse correlations for ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status have been firmly established, it is surprising that there is so little evidence that homotypic preferences play any role in these mating trends. In this study, similarity in these big three socio-cultural factors appeared to be unimportant when participants judged the desirability of a mate.

Also a surprise, language had no value in predicting desirability. It seems reasonable that the practical importance of communication in relationship formation would weigh heavily on judgments about mating. After all, similarity in communication style has been found to moderate attraction between culturally dissimilar persons (Lee & Gudykunst, 2001). Perhaps our

measure of desirability is a better indication of *emotional* desirability and less an indication of *practical* considerations. Another explanation may be that our manipulation of language was not potent enough. Remember, all three of the potential mates were described as speaking English. The manipulation was that one of the potential dates was described as having another language as their “Primary” language and English as their “Secondary” language. A stronger manipulation would be one in which a potential date was described as “not being fluent at all” in the native language. A participant’s consideration of the practical consequences of this surely could not be avoided. Another interesting aspect of this finding is that since language is intimately tied to ethnicity, the null effect for language gives additional support to the idea that ethnicity is less of an important distinction to Westernized young adults than may have been previously thought.

In a review of assortative mating research in the sociological paradigm, Kalmijn (1998) provided a theoretical two-step process that could help explain how assortative mating for socio-cultural traits could occur without a corresponding homotypic preference for such traits, as this study suggests is the case regarding ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. In the first stage of this process, social networks are organized around ethnic, religious, and socio-economic distinctions. As a result of this organization scheme, interpersonal interaction becomes largely contained within relatively homogenous networks of friends, acquaintances, and potential mates. Second, Kalmijn suggests that mates are further differentiated based upon their

psychological characteristics. In this summation, social network formation occurs prior to mate selection, influencing the demographics of the mating market. Given the homogenous mating market, mate preferences could be blind to ethnic, religious, and socio-economic differences, and yet, those who marry would be significantly similar because of how their social networks were formed.

It seems reasonable to make a distinction between preferences that influence network formation and those that influence mate selection, as Kalmijn (1998) has done. For instance, this study suggests that distinctions based upon ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status were not important when looking for a mate, however, it still seems reasonable that their current social networks are shaped somewhat along ethnic, religious, and socio-economic lines and that our participants too will come too marry within their respective ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups. Another possibility may be that young adults today have little vested interest in maintaining stereotypes that are no longer as salient as they once were for previous generations.

Further, because this study suggests that certain socio-cultural variables are important in the process of mate evaluation, this study contradicts Kalmijn's (1998) claim that mates are chosen from the mating market merely based upon psychological variables. The reason why music interest and dress style, in particular, are important in mate evaluation may have something to do with the stereotypes projected by the media and the degree to which music and dress style, especially, are central to these stereotypes. It is no mystery that Pop

stars, Rap stars, Punks, and Country artists serve as prototypes for different lifestyles. Each represents a way of life: how should I appear to others, how should I behave, what is my philosophy, what media should I consume, who are my friends, and who are not likely to be friendly. For instance, Brittany Spears specifically, and “Pop” media in general, provides young girls with an answer to most of these questions: appear sexy and wear revealing clothes and yet retain an air of virginal purity, do not “rock the boat” too much, avoid rejection at any cost, pursue popularity, purchase anything that is on a “top ten” list, befriend people who are beautiful and popular, and avoid misfits and freaks. In contrast, the Country star Johnny Cash serves as a prototype for a way of life that is attractive to a completely different demographic. As a prototype, he provides very different answers to the questions: how should I appear to others, what is my life philosophy, and so on. If large numbers of people come to identify with a particular prototype or lifestyle projected in the media (pop stars, rap stars, punks, country artists, etc), then social networks may emerge in such a way as to be organized around these categories. Once this differentiation becomes salient, stereotypes based upon these social categories are likely to emerge as a part of the social language of describing different types of people. Most likely, what makes music interest and dress style so important is that these variables identify one’s membership to one of these social categories better than most other socio-cultural variables that have been studied (ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, etc). In sum, because the degree of compatibility between young adult’s media defined social networks is likely to be important, in this

study, potential dates similar in media relevant traits (music interest and dress style) were desired more than individuals that were dissimilar in these traits.

The Role of Gender

It was hypothesized that females would be more sensitive to the socio-cultural implications of mating and thereby would respond more favorably to potential dates that were socio-culturally similar. Consistently, research has provided evidence of females' more selective and sophisticated mate preferences. In one study (Buss & Barnes, 1986), females were found to be more sensitive to (showed a higher preference for) nine personality characteristics such as considerate, honest, dependable, kind, understanding, fond of children, well-liked by others, good earning capacity, ambitious and career oriented, etc. In contrast, males were found to be more sensitive to only two personality characteristics: good cook and frugal. Further, it was males that showed much higher preferences for the non-personality traits of physical attractiveness and good-looking.

According to evolutionary logic (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), males should have been shaped by evolution, due their higher reproductive potential, to develop preferences that were less selective than females, pursuing a strategy that maximizes the quantity of mates. Male reproduction is not restricted, like it is for females, by periods of gestation and lactation necessary to produce one healthy child. Although there are many *social* constraints on male reproduction, there are no *biological* constraints. Because female reproductive potential is

limited by gestation, some have suggested that an evolutionary selection pressure would have shaped female preferences to focus more on the *quality* of the mate rather than the *quantity* of mates. It could be that a sense of quality would be boosted by socio-cultural similarity and the social network compatibility that it suggests. As a result of this logic, it was hypothesized that one possibility of a female bias toward quality and greater selectivity may be reflected in a stronger preference among females for a mate that is socio-culturally similar.

Contrary to predictions, initial analysis revealed no significant differences between males and females in the overall strength of the relationship between socio-cultural similarity and desirability. It appears that males were just as sensitive to the socio-cultural traits of a potential date as females were. Another surprise occurred during the analysis of the individual predictors. There were differences in the predictors. Among males, socio-cultural similarity in education, dress, political affiliation, and language (to a small extent) were significant predictors of male participants' romantic desire for a potential date, but these were not significant predictors for females. In contrast, among females, similarity in music interest was the only significant predictor, but music interest was not significant for males. This runs contrary to what Zillmann & Bhatia (1989) found regarding music interest. In their study, it was males rather than females that showed the strongest homotypic preferences for music interest. Here, while there appeared to be no difference in the overall weight of importance males and females attached to socio-cultural similarity, males appeared to incorporate more sources into their judgments. It is also very

interesting that the predictors that were significant for males were not significant for females and vice versa. Males preferred other college students, those who dress in a similar fashion, and those who presumably share similar political beliefs. In contrast, homotypic preferences for socio-cultural traits among young adult females were singularly focused on music interests.

It should be noted that, although females appeared to be singularly focused on music interest at the expense of all other socio-cultural factors, we should not conclude that females are less sophisticated by any stretch. Rather, it is likely that various music interests are strongly associated with a broad range of other socio-cultural factors such as political affiliation, religious affiliation, dress style, and so on. Therefore, a concern with music interest may reflect sensitivity to the socio-cultural implications of a person's music interest. That is, females may have been paying attention to music interest because it is an efficient way of summing up a person's socio-cultural status across a broad range of meaningful areas of interest.

Knox, Zusman, & Nieves (1997) reported that female college students compared to males rate similarity in occupation, religious values, and education to be more important. These findings were not replicated here. First, similarity in occupation and religious values did not adequately predict desirability. Second, males rather than females showed a preference for similarity in education. Which study is most correct? The Knox, et al. (1997) study utilized a survey method, and tested for differences between males and females. The implications of Knox's data rest on the accuracy of individual's perceptions of

their own preferences. In contrast, this study gauges the importance of similarity by measuring the functional relationship between similarity and desirability. The advantage of testing for a functional relationship is that it does not rely on the perceptiveness of the participant. Therefore, the current study appears to be a better test of homotypic preferences, and gender differences, than the study conducted by Knox and his colleagues.

Because the hypothesis for gender differences was derived from the quality/quantity distinction that emerged from evolutionary psychology, these findings put a strain on such a hypothesis. This study suggests that the quality/quantity distinction should not be used willy-nilly as a blanket statement to describe gender differences in mating. While it may apply to certain aspects of mating, it does not appear to apply to the socio-cultural realm – this study suggests that males are just as concerned about the socio-cultural quality of a mate as females are.

The Role of Commitment Interest

It was hypothesized that participants would be more sensitive to socio-cultural similarity when placed in a situation where potential dates were looking for a *serious* relationship compared to a situation where potential dates were only looking for a *casual* relationship. Assessing the compatibility of social networks as a function of socio-cultural similarity may only be practical for those situations in which a long-term, serious relationship is likely to occur. Because short-term, casual relationships tend to be centered more on physical attraction,

and they often do not involve the other person's social network, it seems reasonable to assume that socio-cultural traits would be less relevant under short-term, casual conditions. In order to assess this potential moderating variable in the relationship between similarity and desirability, some participants were informed that their potential dates were interested in a serious relationship while other were described as being interested in a casual relationship. In the casual condition, similarity in dress style was preferred, but not in the serious condition. In the serious condition, political affiliation was preferred, but not in the casual condition. Also, music interest appeared to be more important in the serious condition ($\beta = .38$) compared to the casual condition ($\beta = .19$), though this difference was not significant. Yet, in all, similarity did not appear to be more important in the serious condition when compared to the casual condition. It would be intriguing to test more potent manipulations of this variable, contrasting in-depth descriptions of a desire for a marriage partner vs. sexual partner, as these may reveal a greater impact for the commitment interest variable. Further, commitment interest may be even more important at later stages of relationship development. It may be at these later stages, when considering marriage for instance, that socio-cultural variables become particularly salient.

The Role of Emotions

It was hypothesized that emotions would mediate the relationship between similarity and desirability, such that similarity would lead to more

positive emotions and positive emotions would lead to judgments of the potential date as being more desirable. In previous research, it has been demonstrated that emotions mediate the effect of physical features on attraction (Mehrabian & Blum, 1997). It seemed plausible that emotions would play the same role in the relationship between socio-cultural similarity and desirability. This prediction was strongly supported. When participants imagined themselves in a romantic situation with a potential date, they reported stronger feelings of harmony, attraction, and comfort when the potential date was socio-culturally similar. Further, these emotions were strongly related to ratings of desirability. Finally, when emotions were controlled, the statistical relationship between similarity and desirability became non-significant.

One interpretation of this data is that the presence of similar others triggers positive emotional states (conversely, the presence of dissimilar others triggers negative emotional states), and it is these states that influence cognitive judgments about the desirability of a potential mate. However, because of the correlational design of this study, it should be noted that the exact direction of causality is far from being resolved here. It could be that similarity triggers judgments regarding desirability, which influence emotions. Emotions could trigger similarity judgments, which trigger desirability judgments. Finally, desirability judgments could trigger emotions, which trigger similarity judgments. These alternative explanations could be valid. However, a Similarity → Emotion → Desirability Judgment causal structure appears to be the most parsimonious interpretation at this time.

If emotions do in fact play a mediating role, then the similarity-desirability relationship would seem to be the result of some automatic internal mechanism, rather than the product of practical reasoning. What is the origin of this emotional response? One possible explanation is that similarity triggers particular emotions because of our human nature. That is, it could be the result of some design feature of the human brain that has been shaped by natural selection. Perhaps ancient humans who were relaxed toward their fellow tribe members and were more guarded when in the presence of outsiders had a survival advantage over humans that were emotionally indifferent to tribal membership. Of course, this is mere speculation. Another, possible explanation is that the phenomenon is due to classical conditioning. Perhaps experience shapes people's expectations such that people come to predict that good outcomes tend to follow from interactions between socio-culturally similar people and bad outcomes tend to follow from socio-culturally dissimilar people. For instance, judging that a stranger is socio-culturally similar may come to trigger a positive emotion in anticipation of a positive interaction with that person. This begs the question: do people in fact have more positive interactions with similar people than with dissimilar people? Until this question can be answered, the classical conditioning explanation must also be left as mere speculation.

Social Networks

The influence of social networks on the mating behavior of its individual members was of particular interest to this study. Pressure from social networks may play a part in facilitating a desire for similarity by shaping attitudes that promote homotypic preferences. Yet, the influence of social networks may be most evident in those cases in which the person has *heterotypic preferences* (preferences for different types). For instance, in some cases it is in the individual's best interest to broaden their mating prospects by courting potential mates outside of their own socio-cultural group (perhaps the grass really *is* greener on the other side). Yet, individuals may feel compelled to adhere to the wishes of their social network in spite of their own personal desires. So, even in cases when homotypic preferences are weak and assortative mating would not be expected, pressure from one's social network alone could still produce assortative mating to some measurable degree (Kalmijn, 1998). The problem with this hypothesis, while it sounds reasonable and has been used to explain such things as high rates of intermarriage among the Jewish and Catholic population, is that it has not been adequately tested.

The results of this study provide evidence that social networks play an integral part in mating decisions. First, it was found that potential dates that have traits that are familiar tend to be rated higher in desirability. Familiarity should be a direct function of the degree to which a trait saturates one's social network – the higher the percentage of family, friends, and co-workers who possess a given trait, the more familiar that trait should be. In this study,

participants were asked to indicate if a member of their family, friends, or co-workers shared a trait with the potential date. For instance, among one's family, friends, and co-workers, is someone affiliated with the Catholic religion? Results suggest that such measures of familiarity had a strong positive relationship with desirability ($R^2 = .28$). Potential dates tended to be more desirable when their traits were familiar to the participant because one or more people within their social network possessed the trait. This relationship remained significant even when controlling for the effects of similarity ($R^2 = .16$, $p < .05$), suggesting that familiarity with a trait was predictive of desirability even when holding similarity constant.

It is possible that familiarity with a trait is important only when the social network considers the trait to be central to their group identity. For instance, while every person in a group of Irishmen may have red hair, it is not the red hair that anchors the group. Rather, shared Irish heritage is more likely to anchor this group under a single social identity. Thus, it is likely that the degree to which *a particular trait is a source of pride for a social network* may serve as an adequate indicator of the degree to which a group is anchored by that trait. In this study, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which a trait is a source of pride to the people who are close to them (their social network). For instance, is the Catholic religion a source of pride or is it not a source of pride? Results indicated that when a trait was a source of pride, potential dates that possessed that trait tended to be rated higher in desirability ($R^2 = .28$). This suggests that merely being familiar with a trait may not be enough. Rather, it is

those traits that are central to the identity of the group, those that are a source of pride, that most likely shape one's preferences.

Those questions regarding familiarity and pride were necessary to demonstrate that homotypic preferences could be influenced *passively* by their social network. However, these questions do not reflect directly upon whether or not social networks exert *normative pressure* on their members to mate within-group. So, one additional question was asked of the participants. Participants were asked a question about the attitudes of those who are close to them. Specifically, in response to each trait (e.g., *Religious Affiliation: Catholic*), participants were asked, "according to the people who are close to you, should you seek or avoid dates that possess this trait?" Responses to this question were the strongest predictors of a potential date's desirability ($R^2 = .43$), when compared to trait similarity, familiarity, and pride. Potential dates tended to receive higher ratings of desirability when there were normative pressures to seek potential dates of their type. Conversely, potential dates tended to receive lower ratings when there was pressure to avoid dates of their type. Upon analysis of the individual predictors it was found that dress style, music interest, education, leisure interest, and religious affiliation were significant. Thus, normative pressures appear to exert an influence on preference, but only when considering these sorts of traits. Recall that it was also important for potential dates to be *similar* in music interest, dress style, and education. This could suggest that preferences for similarity are shaped in part by the attitudes of one's social network. In addition to these dimensions, leisure

interest and religious affiliation emerged as significant predictors. In all, the desirability of a potential date appeared to be affected by normative pressure to seek or avoid persons with certain dress style, music interests, education, leisure interests, and religious affiliations.

Limitations of this Study

In this study, participants were exposed to potential dates described along a number of socio-cultural dimensions (ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc.). This particular set of traits may have interacted with one another such that merely presenting information about one trait could have influenced the effect of other traits. Previous research has shown that the effects of socio-economic status (occupation prestige) on attraction are eliminated when information regarding attitudes is available (Bond, Byrne, & Diamond, 1968). Access to information regarding religion (Kennedy, 1944) and socio-economic status (Fu and Heaton, 2000) may eliminate the effects of ethnicity on attraction. Further, as a function multiple regression analysis, the effect of each predictor is analyzed after controlling for the effects of all other predictors in the model. Therefore, the pattern of significance among the predictors is partly determined by the particular set of predictors that are used. Depending upon how you look at it, this could be considered a limitation or an advantage. It is a limitation in so far as some control is lost, but it is an advantage in so far as ecological realism is gained. In the real world, we become aware of many socio-cultural traits

soon after meeting a person – all of which presumably interact to produce an impression of the person.

Along the same lines, for each socio-cultural dimension, potential dates were distinguished by only three traits chosen by the researcher. For instance, the traits used to describe the occupations of our potential dates were limited to *restaurant server*, someone who works in the *entertainment industry*, and a *department store clerk*. The obvious problem is that the diversity of possible occupations in the real world is not adequately represented in our Internet dating service. Occupation may have emerged as an important socio-cultural dimension if a wider range of occupations implemented. For instance, using *drug dealer*, a *CIA agent*, and *the president of a company* would certainly have produced different results. Along the same lines, the diversity of music interest among our potential dates was limited to *hip-hop*, *pop*, and *punk*. In this study, similarity in music interest was highly significant, but may not have been if other styles of music were used to describe the interests of our potential dates. There are dozens if not hundreds of distinct styles of music that could have been used in the place of these. The same critique can be made of the results regarding all ten socio-cultural dimensions analyzed in this study.

In defense of the particular traits used in this study, the attempt was made to provide a diversity of traits that represents common types that populate our participant's environment. For instance, college students are likely to come into contact with Protestants, Catholics, and those that have no religious affiliation. Therefore, these results should generalize to most interactions

between those that live in states with similar demographics. Of course, there will be cases in which a Protestant meets a Muslim or a Buddhist meets a Jew. This study does not necessarily indicate that religious similarity would not be important in these particular cases – religion may very well be important in these cases. In particular, distinctions between Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism need to be studied under similar contexts in order to gain a better grasp of the influence that similarity can have on one's desirability when factoring in these religions. The same can be said about the other socio-cultural dimensions used to describe potential dates in this study – the question is, what would have been the effect if different traits were used to describe potential dates? Until further research can be conducted, this question must be left unanswered. For now, the traits that were chosen appear to be representative of the population from which the participants were drawn, and therefore, the results should apply to most interactions between individuals who occupy similar demographic environments.

Outside of the laboratory, it is often the case that we first gain access to certain socio-cultural traits before others. For instance, we are likely to observe a person's ethnicity and dress style before we gain access to information regarding a person's political affiliation. Under natural conditions, strangers are judged according to traits that are salient. In most cases, the traits that are most salient are those that can be easily observed. Thus, socio-cultural traits will have differential importance depending upon the level of interaction between two people. If they are strangers staring at each other from across a

room, then only those traits that are observable will be factored into judgments of desirability. However, if you were introduced to a friend of a friend while at a political rally, then information that would normally not emerge until much further into relationship formation (political affiliation) would be immediately accessible. In this case the trait is salient because of the context rather than because it is easily observable. Many factors can influence the point at which in relationship formation a trait become apparent – sooner or later. The conditions of this study are quite distinct in this respect, because participants had the luxury of access to a great deal of socio-cultural information before even meeting the person. In addition, the sequence in which participants were informed of the potential date's traits was random, and therefore, much different from the real world where certain traits usually become apparent before others. The limitation of this study is that it is quite distinct from the real world in this respect.

Another limitation of this study centers on the degree to which these results can be generalized to the larger population. The socio-cultural world of Westernized young adults is fairly distinct. They live in a modern landscape and consume a hefty portion of mass media. Their religious, economic, political, and educational environment is also distinct compared to those that live in much of Asia, Africa, and South America. They also live in a particular time in history that is very different from the one that their parents grew up in. The Internet, cell phones, 9/11, MTV, and reality shows are potent factors within their culture. Further, adolescents can be known to form strong alliances and

be quite cynical of outsiders. Adults also build alliances and can be cynical of outsiders. Yet, through experience, adults also often learn to be more self-sufficient and tolerant of people that are different. For these reasons, the results of this study should be considered to apply mainly to Westernized young adults. While the desire for socio-cultural similarity in a mate is likely to be shared by most humans, how this desire is displayed must be largely contingent upon the cultural history, social dynamics, and demographic reality of the people. For instance, with our sample, similarity in music interest was a highly significant predictor of desirability. One would not expect this same pattern to emerge in China, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, or Nicaragua because the people of these countries have very different cultural histories, social dynamics, and demographic realities. Further, music interest is likely to be a much less potent predictor of desirability for most adults. The cultural landscape in which American adults developed has changed in many ways, and the socio-cultural factors that adults find important are likely to be different from those of adolescents and young adults of today. In one way, this study should serve as an estimate of the importance that *humans* place in socio-cultural similarity. In another way, this study should serve as an estimate of the specific homotypic preferences of *Westernized young adults* for music interest, dress style, education, and political affiliation.

APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

Department of Psychology

INFORMED CONSENT

General Information:

I am Nelse Ostlund from the UNLV Department of Psychology. I am the researcher on this project. You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is an investigation of facial characteristics and cognitive processes. The study will take no longer than 1 hour.

Procedure:

If I volunteer to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

- 1) Wear a device during the study that will track my eye movements.
- 2) Look at people's faces on a computer screen and memorize their names.
- 3) Submit information about myself.

Benefits of Participation:

By participating in the study you will be given credit toward class requirements. You will also receive an increased understanding of research methods in social psychology. Finally, you will receive an increased understanding of how technology is used in psychological research.

Risks of Participation:

You may find the eye-tracking device uncomfortable. You are encouraged to discuss any discomfort with me at any time so that if adjustments can be made, they are made in a timely manner. You are also encouraged to leave any answers blank that you are not comfortable responding to.

Contact Information:

You may have questions after you leave the study. If so, you may contact Gretchen Kambe (895-0648) or Murray Millar (895-0179) at the Department of Psychology. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality:

All information gathered will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

REFERENCES

- AhYun, K. (2002). Similarity and attraction. In R. W. Preiss (Ed.), *Interpersonal communication research: Advances through meta-analysis. LEA's communication series* (pp. 145-167). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Alba, R. D., & Golden, R. M. (1986). Patterns of ethnic marriage in the United States. *Social Forces*, 65(1), 202-223.
- Bentler, P. M., & Newcomb, M. D. (1978). Longitudinal study of marital success and failure. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 46(5), 1053-1070.
- Berscheid, E., Dion, K., Walster, E., & Walster, G. W. (1971). Physical attractiveness and dating choice: A test of the matching hypothesis. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 7(2), 173-189.
- Bond, M., Byrne, D., & Diamond, M. J. (1968). Effect of occupational prestige and attitude similarity on attraction as a function of assumed similarity of attitude. *Psychological Reports*, 23(3), 1167-1172.
- Brislin, R. W., & Lewis, S. A. (1968). Dating and Physical Attractiveness: Replication. *Psychological Reports*, 22(3), 976.
- Burgess, E. W., & Wallin, P. (1943). Homogamy in social characteristics. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49, 109-124.

- Burgess, E. W., & Wallin, P. (1944). Homogamy in personality characteristics. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, 39, 475-481.
- Buss, D. M. (1985). Human mate selection. *American Scientist*, 73(1), 47-51.
- Buss, D. M., & Barnes, M. (1986). Preferences in human mate selection. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 50(3), 559-570.
- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual Strategies Theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, 100(2), 204-232.
- Byrne, D. (1996). Interpersonal attraction and attitude similarity. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, 62, 713-715.
- Byrne, D., London, O., & Griffitt, W. (1968). The effect of topic importance and attitude similarity-dissimilarity on attraction in an intrastranger design. *Psychonomic Science*, 11(8), 303-304.
- Byrne, D., & Nelson, D. (1965). The effect of topic importance and attitude similarity-dissimilarity on attraction in a multistranger design. *Psychonomic Science*, 3(10), 449-450.
- Byrne, D., Nelson, D., & Reeves, K. (1966). Effects of consensual validation and invalidation on attraction as a function of verifiability. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2(1), 98-107.
- Chiasson, N., Charbonneau, C., & Proulx, J. (1996). In-group-out-group similar information as a determinant of attraction toward members of minority groups. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 136(2), 233-241.

- Cohen J., & Cohen P. (1983). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Condon, J. W., & Crano, W. D. (1988). Inferred evaluation and the relation between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 54(5), 789-797.
- Drigotas, S. M. (1993). Similarity revisited: A comparison of similarity/attraction versus dissimilarity/repulsion. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 32(4), 365-377.
- Feingold, A. (1981). Testing equity as an explanation for romantic couples "mismatched" on physical attractiveness. *Psychological Reports*, 49(1), 247-250.
- Feingold, A. (1988). Matching for attractiveness in romantic partners and same-sex friends: A meta-analysis and theoretical critique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 104(2), 226-235.
- Folkes, V. S. (1982). Forming relationships and the matching hypothesis. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 8(4), 631-636.
- Fu, X., & Heaton, T. B. (2000). Status exchange in intermarriage among Hawaiians, Japanese, Filipinos and Caucasians in Hawaii: 1983-1994. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 31(1), 45-61.
- Gangestad, S. W. (1993). Sexual selection and physical attractiveness: Implications for mating dynamics. *Human Nature*, 4(3), 205-235.

- Gurak, D. T., Fitzpatrick, J. P. (1982). Intermarriage among Hispanic ethnic groups in New York City. *American Journal of Sociology*, 87(4), 921-934.
- Hayes, B. C. (1991). Religious identification and marriage patterns in Australia. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30(4), 469-478.
- Hendrickx, J., Lammers, J., & Ultee, W. (1991). Religious assortative marriage in the Netherlands, 1938-1983. *Review of Religious Research*, 33(2), 123-145.
- Hendrickx, J., Schreuder, O., & Ultee, W. (1994). Religious assortive marriages in Germany [1901-1986] and the Netherlands [1914-1986]. *Kolner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 46(4), 619-645.
- Hensley, W. E. (1981). The effects of attire, location, and sex on aiding behavior: A similarity explanation. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 6(1), 3-11.
- Houts, R. M., Robins, E., & Huston, T. L. (1996). Compatibility and the development of premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 58(1), 7-20.
- Huston, T. L. (1973). Ambiguity of acceptance, social desirability, and dating choice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 9(1), 32-42.
- Jensen, A. R. (1978). Genetic and behavioral effect of nonrandom mating. In R. T. Osborne, C. E. Noble, & N. J. Wey (Eds.), *Human Variation: Biopsychology of Age, Race, and Sex* (pp. 51-105). NY: Academic Press.

- Kalick, S. M., & Hamilton, T. E. (1986). The matching hypothesis reexamined. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 51(4), 673-682.
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). Inter marriage and homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 395-421.
- Kalmijn, M., & Flap, H. (2001). Assortative meeting and mating: Unintended consequences of organized settings for partner choices. *Social Forces*, 79(4), 1289-1312.
- Keller, M. C., & Young, R. K. (1996). Mate assortment in dating and married couples. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 21(2), 217-221.
- Kennedy, R. J. R. (1944). Single or triple meltingpot? Inter marriage trends in New Haven, 1870-1940. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49, 331-339.
- Knoke, D. (1990). Networks of political action: Toward theory construction. *Social Forces*, 68(4), 1041-1063.
- Knox, D., Zusman, M., & Nieves, W. (1997). College students' homogamous preferences for a date and mate. *College Student Journal*, 31(4), 445-448.
- Lee, C. M., Gudykunst, W. B. (2001). Attraction in initial interethnic interactions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25(4), 373-387.
- Lee, S. M., & Yamanaka, K. (1990). Patterns of Asian American inter marriage and marital assimilation. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies. Special Issue: Inter marriage*, 21(2), 287-305.

- Lewin, K., Dembo, T., Festinger, L., & Sears, P. S. (1944). Level of aspiration. In J. Hunt & McV. (Eds.), *Personality and the behavior disorders* (pp. 333-378). Oxford, England: Ronald Press.
- Liu, J. H., Campbell, S. M., & Condie, H. (1995). Ethnocentrism in dating preferences for an American sample: The ingroup bias in social context. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 95-115.
- Lum, K., & Curran, J. P. (1975). Personality similarity and interpersonal attraction in the computer dating situation. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 95(2), 233-239.
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415-444.
- Mehrabian, A., & Blum, J. S. (1997). Physical appearance, attractiveness, and the mediating role of emotions. *Current Psychology: Developmental, Learning, Personality, Social*, 16(1), 20-42.
- Murstein, B. I., & Christy, P. (1976). Physical attractiveness and marriage adjustment in middle-aged couples. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 34(4), 537-542.
- Nagoshi, C. T., & Johnson, R. C. (1994). Phenotypic assortment versus social homogamy for personality, education, attitudes, and language use. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 17(6), 755-761.

- Nagoshi, C. T., Johnson, R. C., & Ahern, F. M. (1987). Phenotypic assortative mating vs. social homogamy among Japanese and Chinese parents in the Hawaii Family Study of Cognition. *Behavior Genetics*, 17(5), 477-485.
- Nakamura, M. (1984). Effects of personality similarity on interpersonal attraction. *Japanese Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 23(2), 139-145.
- Nakazato, H., Inoue, T., & Tanaka, K. (1975). Personality similarity and interpersonal attraction: On the dimensions of extraversion and need. *Japanese Journal of Psychology*, 46(2), 109-117.
- Paunonen, S. V., & Jackson, D. N. (1988). Type I error rates for moderated multiple regression analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73(3), 569-573.
- Price, R. A., & Vandenberg, S. G. (1979). Matching for physical attractiveness in married couples. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 5(3), 398-400.
- Rai, S. N., & Rathore, J. (1988). Attraction as a function of cultural similarity and proportion of similar attitudes related to different areas of human life. *Psycho-Lingua*, 18(1), 47-57.
- Reynolds, C. A., Baker, L. A., & Pedersen, N. L. (1996). Models of spouse similarity: Applications to fluid ability measured in twins and their spouses. *Behavior Genetics*, 26(2), 73-88.

- Reynolds, C. A., Baker, L. A., & Pedersen, N. L. (2000). Multivariate models of mixed assortment: Phenotypic assortment and social homogamy for education and fluid ability. *Behavior Genetics*, 30(6), 455-476.
- Sakai, D. K., & Johnson, R. C. (1997). Active phenotypic assortment in mate selection: Self-descriptions and sought-for-attributes of mates in dating advertisements.
- Schoen, R., & Thomas, B. (1989). Intergroup marriage in Hawaii, 1969-1971 and 1979-1981. *Sociological Perspectives*, 32(3), 365-382.
- Singh, R. (1973). Attraction as a function of similarity in attitudes and personality characteristics. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 91(1), 87-95.
- Singh, R., & Ho, S. Y. (2000). Attitudes and attraction: A new test of the attraction, repulsion and similarity-dissimilarity asymmetry hypotheses. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(2), 197-211.
- Singh, R., & Tan, L. S. (1992). Attitudes and attraction: A test of the similarity/attraction and dissimilarity/repulsion hypotheses. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(3), 227-238.
- Stewart, S., Stinnett, H., & Rosenfeld, L. B. (2000). Sex differences in desired characteristics of short-term and long-term relationship partners. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*, 17(6), 843-853.
- Stretch, R. H., & Figley, C. R. (1980). Beauty and the boast: Predictors of interpersonal attraction in a dating experiment. *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior*, 17(1), 35-43.

- Stroebe, W., Insko, C. A., Thompson, V. D., & Layton, B. D. (1971). Effects of physical attractiveness, attitude similarity, and sex on various aspects of interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 18(1), 79-91.
- Suman, H. C., & Sethi, A. S. (1985). Interpersonal attraction as a function of proportional similarity in personality. *Journal of Psychological Researches*, 29(3), 141-148.
- Sunnafrank, M. (1992). On debunking the attitude similarity myth. *Communication Monographs*, 59(2), 164-179.
- Tambs, K., Sundet, J. M., & Berg, K. (1993). Correlations between identical twins and their spouses suggest social homogamy for intelligence in Norway. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 14(1), 279-281.
- Thiessen, D., & Gregg, B. (1980). Human assortative mating and genetic equilibrium: An evolutionary perspective. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 1(2), 111-140.
- Townsend, J. M., & Levy, G. D. (1990). Effects of potential partners' costume and physical attractiveness on sexuality and partner selection. *Journal of Psychology*, 124(4), 371-389.
- Vandenburg, S. G. (1972). Assortative mating, or who marries whom? *Behavior Genetics*, 2, 127-158.
- Verbrugge, L. M. (1977). The structure of adult friendship choices. *Social Forces*, 56(2), 576-597.

- Verbrugge, L. M. (1983). A research note on adult friendship contact: A dyadic perspective. *Social Forces*, 62(1), 78-83.
- Walster, E. (1970). The effect of self-esteem on liking for dates of various social desirabilities. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 6(2), 248-253.
- Walster, E., Aronson, V., Abrahams, D., & Rottmann, L. (1966). Importance of physical attractiveness in dating behavior. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 4(5), 508-516.
- Whitbeck, L. B., & Hoyt, D. R. (1980). Social prestige and assortive mating: A comparison of students from 1956 and 1988. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*, 11(1), 137-145.
- White, G. L. (1980). Physical attractiveness and courtship progress. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 39(4), 660-668.
- White, S. G., & Hatcher, C. (1984). Couple complementarity and similarity: A review of the literature. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 12(1), 15-25.
- Zillmann, D., & Bhatia, A. (1989). Effects of associating with musical genres on heterosexual attraction. *Communication Research*, 16(2), 263-288.

VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Nelse M Ostlund

Home Address:

4050 Pacific Harbors #222
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, 2000
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title: The Desire for Socio-cultural Similarity in a Mate

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Murray Millar, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Michael Hall, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Gretchen Kambe, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. David Biesecker, Ph. D.