Personality and Mate Preferences: Five Factors in Mate Selection and Marital Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT   Although personality characteristics figure prominently in what people want in a mate, little is known about precisely which personality characteristics are most important, whether men and women differ in their personality preferences, whether individual women or men differ in what they want, and whether individuals actually get what they want. To explore these issues, two parallel studies were conducted, one using a sample of dating couples ($N = 118$) and one using a sample of married couples ($N = 216$). The five-factor model, operationalized in adjectival form, was used to assess personality characteristics via three data sources—self-report, partner report, and independent interviewer reports. Participants evaluated on a parallel 40-item instrument their preferences for the ideal personality characteristics of their mates. Results were consistent across both studies. Women expressed a greater preference than men for a wide array of socially desirable personality traits. Individuals differed in which characteristics they desired, preferring mates who were similar to themselves and actually obtaining mates who embodied what they desired. Finally, the personality characteristics of one's partner significantly predicted marital and sexual dissatisfaction, most notably when the partner was lower on Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness than desired.

Personality characteristics figure prominently in unstructured nominations of what people want in a mate (Langhorne & Secord, 1955). Both women and men say they want a mate who is kind, understanding, dependable, sociable, stable, and intelligent. Personality traits such as these have made their way onto more structured instruments designed to assess mate preferences (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hill, 1945; McGinnis, 1958), but not in a systematic fashion. A few personality descriptors have been sprinkled throughout mate preference instruments designed to assess an array of qualities, such as physical appearance, economic resources, and education level. No prior studies have undertaken a systematic evaluation of what men and women desire in a broad array of personality characteristics, such as that represented by the five-factor model (Goldberg, 1982; John, Angleitner, & Ostendorf, 1988; McCrae & Costa, 1985, 1987; Norman, 1963).

Two theoretical orientations provide some preliminary hypotheses about the role of personality in mate selection and marital happiness—one stemming from conceptions of assortative mating and one stemming from evolutionary psychology.

Assortative Mating and Personality

Perhaps the most well-documented theory of human mating is that likes attract likes—that men and women become coupled with those who are similar to themselves (Buss, 1985; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). This notion has received voluminous support in dozens of studies that show that people positively assort on age, ethnicity, religious background, height, weight, socioeconomic status, values, political orientation, and even nose breadth and earlobe length. When it comes to personality characteristics, however, there is little evidence for positive assortment, at least for the two traits that have been examined most commonly—Extraversion and Neuroticism (Eysenck, 1981). Lacking, however, is a broader-gauged evaluation of assortative mating for personality that encompasses not just these two factors, but an array of personality factors, such as that captured by the five-factor model.

A key question with any finding of assortative mating is this: What causal processes lead to assortment? Many causal processes have been proposed as candidates. One is propinquity, the notion that one tends to marry those that are near at hand. Regardless of conceptions of romantic love, the "one and only" typically lives within driving distance (Buss, 1985). Cultural institutions such as colleges and universities

may promote assortative mating by preferentially admitting those who are similar with respect to certain variables such as intelligence, motivation, and in some cases social skills. Little is known, however, about one potentially powerful cause of assortative mating: Do men and women actively desire those who are similar to themselves? And do people's desires in a mate drive them to select those who embody their preferences?

Evolutionary Psychology of Personality Mate Preferences

A second key issue pertains to sex differences. Evolutionary psychology provides a metatheory for predicting when men and women will be similar or dissimilar psychologically (Buss, 1995). Specifically, men and women are predicted to be essentially the same in all domains where they have faced similar adaptive problems over human evolutionary history. Only in those narrow pockets where men and women have confronted recurrently different adaptive challenges are the sexes predicted to differ, according to this metatheory.

The proclivities of another to cooperate, to reciprocate, and to engage in mutualism for common goals are predicted to be central mate selection criteria for both sexes in the context of long-term mating (Buss, 1989a, 1994). And there is evidence that Agreeableness, in part, covaries with commitment proclivities (Ellis, 1995). Since both sexes have faced the problem of securing a cooperative, committed partner, we predicted that both sexes would value Agreeableness in potential long-term mates because it provides a strong cue to these proclivities.

Men and women differ, however, in the domain of obligatory parental investment (Trivers, 1972). To produce a single child, women over evolutionary history have had to incur a 9-month investment of internal fertilization, placentation, and gestation, as well as subsequent investments of lactation. Men, in contrast, can produce a child without these heavy costs—in principle, by a single act of sex. Because the minimum obligatory parental investments of the sexes have recurrently differed, the benefits to the high-investing sex (women) of being highly discriminating, and the costs of being indiscriminate, are higher for women. Thus, women were predicted to be more discriminating across a wide array of personality characteristics.

Furthermore, in species that show some male parental investment, such as ours, and where male variance in resources that can be in-

vested is sufficiently high, women could select men in part based on their ability and willingness to invest resources in themselves and their offspring. Because men's resources are often closely connected with position in dominance hierarchies, women were predicted to place greater value on personality characteristics that lead to social ascendance and resource acquisition. Within the five-factor model, Surgency would be an obvious candidate. Conscientiousness and Intellect-Openness, however, would also be candidates for sex-linked personality preferences, given the link between intelligence and income (Jencks, 1979) and between Conscientiousness and Intellect-Openness and the usage of effective tactics of hierarchy negotiation (Kyl-Heku & Buss, 1996). It should be noted, however, that the personality trait of Intellect-Openness correlates only modestly with tested intelligence (McCrae & Costa, 1985).

Discrepancies from Personality Ideals

A fact of human mating is that individuals sometimes cannot get what they want. Desirable mates are always in short supply compared with the numbers that seek them, especially when there is consensus about what qualities are desired (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Therefore, many end up mated with individuals who depart from their ideals to differing degrees. It is reasonable to predict, therefore, that individuals whose mates deviate more from their ideals will be less satisfied than those mated with persons who embody their desires.

Goals of Studies of Dating and Married Couples

In order to examine the role of personality in mate selection and marital satisfaction, we conducted two parallel studies—one on a sample of relatively young dating couples, the other on a somewhat older sample of newlywed couples. The dating couples were targeted to secure an assay of the personality preferences at an early stage in the mate selection process. The newlywed couples, drawn from the larger community, were targeted because they already had made a long-term mate choice. Both samples permitted an evaluation of personality mate preferences, personality characteristics of target individuals, and personality characteristics of their mates.

The primary goals of these two studies were (*a*) to identify which personality characteristics individuals view as desirable in a long-term

mate; (*b*) to test hypotheses that the sexes might differ in how exacting they are on a variety of personality dimensions, and on the dimensions of Conscientiousness and Intellect-Openness in particular; (*c*) to evaluate the degree to which dating and married couples are assortatively mated for personality characteristics; (*d*) to determine whether individuals actively prefer those who are similar to themselves in personality; (*e*) to assess whether the expressed preferences in a mate correspond to the actual mate attained; and (*f*) to determine whether failure to get what one wants—that is, being mated with someone who is discrepant from one's personality ideals—significantly predicts marital unhappiness.

METHOD

Participants

Dating couples. Two samples were used in this study. Participants in both samples received a small sum of money and personal feedback for their participation in the study. Participants in the first sample were 118 undergraduates comprising 59 dating couples. Couples were recruited through classes, fliers placed in dormitories, and advertisements placed in the student newspaper. To ensure a reasonable period of contact between the target participants, couples were required to have been dating each other for a minimum of 6 months.

Newlywed couples. The second sample consisted of 214 individuals comprising 107 newlywed couples. These individuals were recruited by obtaining the public records of marriage licenses issued within Washtenaw County, Michigan. Couples who had been married less than 1 year at the time of the data collection were invited to participate in the study through mail solicitation. See Buss (1989b, 1991) for further details on the nature and composition of this sample.

Materials

Along with a larger battery of assessment instruments used for other purposes, the following instruments were used in this study. These instruments were interspersed within the test battery.

Confidential biographical questionnaire. This questionnaire solicited information about physical and demographic characteristics, personal habits, and family background. To establish comparability between previous studies of assortative mating and this study, we included a number of markers used in

other studies. These variables included age, height, weight, personal habits, religious convictions, political convictions, and educational background.

Trait rating adjectives—self-report. The five-factor model of personality was assessed through 40 bipolar adjective pairs. These adjectives represent markers for the dimensions of Surgency, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness. The adjective pairs were drawn from the highest-loading pairs of adjectives from a factor analysis conducted by Goldberg (1983). Participants were presented with a list of adjective pairs with the numbers 1 to 7 printed between the two anchors.

Participants were asked to read each adjective pair and to circle the number that best described them generally. They completed the self-report version of this instrument at home in their spare time. The complete list of rating scales used is as follows: passive-active, unenergetic-energetic, dominant-submissive, timid-bold, conforming-independent, humble-proud, quiet-talkative, retiring-sociable (Surgency); cold-warm, disagreeable-agreeable, critical-lenient, stubborn-flexible, suspicious-trusting, unfair-fair, selfish-selfless, stingy-generous (Agreeableness); undependable-reliable, negligent-conscientious, careless-careful, disorganized–well-organized, lazy-hardworking, untraditional-traditional, liberal-conservative, impractical-practical (Conscientiousness); emotionally unstable–emotionally stable, insecure-secure, nervous–at ease, high-strung–relaxed, temperamental–even-tempered, emotional-unemotional, envious/jealous–not envious/jealous, subjective-objective (Emotional Stability); and uncultured-cultured, ignorant-knowledgeable, stupid-intelligent, imperceptive-perceptive, uncreative-creative, simple-complex, uncurious-curious, unanalytical-analytical (Intellect-Openness).

Trait ratings—partner report. In a testing session in which the couples were physically separated, each participant described their partner on the same 40 bipolar trait instrument.

Trait ratings—interviewer reports. Following the testing sessions, each couple was interviewed by a pair of interviewers, one man and one woman, from a rotating team of interviewers. Different teams of interviewers were used in each sample. Questions posed during the interview included how the partners met, what initially attracted them to each other, and their judgments of their similarities and differences with their partner. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Directly following the interview, each interviewer independently rated each participant on the 40 bipolar adjective pairs. Ratings from the two interviewers were unit weighted and then summed to secure more reliable indexes of each dimension.

Mate preference ratings. A parallel version of the trait rating questionnaire was designed to assess mate preferences for personality traits. This question-

naire was based on the same 40 pairs of trait rating adjectives used in the instruments mentioned above. The instructional set requested that participants rate each adjective pair in terms that "best corresponds to your *preference* in a potential spouse."

Marital satisfaction. This questionnaire measured the following domains of marital satisfaction: general marital satisfaction (Thinking about things all together, how would you say you feel about your marriage?), intimacy (How do you feel about your spouse as someone to confide in about things that are important to you?), and sexual satisfaction (How do you feel about your sexual relationship?). Each of these items was rated on a scale of 1 (unsatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). In addition, the following item was rated on a 4-point scale, from 1 (untrue) to 4 (extremely true): There is a great deal of love and affection expressed in our marriage. The following items were rated on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (all the time): (*a*) I enjoy the time I spend with my spouse; (*b*) How often do you and your spouse laugh together? and (*c*) How often do you and your spouse have a stimulating conversation?

Procedure

The same procedure was used in both samples. Participants completed the self-report instruments at home in their spare time. Subsequently the couples were scheduled for testing sessions. During the testing sessions participants were physically separated from their partners to preserve the independence of their ratings. These sessions typically lasted 3 hours. Participants completed the partner report ratings, the personality mate preference ratings, and the marital satisfaction inventory during this session. These instruments were separated and interspersed throughout a larger battery of instruments. Toward the end of the testing session, each couple was brought together and interviewed for approximately 40 minutes. Immediately following the interview, the male and female interviewers independently rated each participant on the 40-item bipolar rating scales.

RESULTS

Assortment for Background Variables

Table 1 shows the couple correlations for age, weight, height, consumption of cigarettes and alcohol, political and religious orientation, and academic background for the dating couples and newlywed couples separately. Both dating couples and married couples were strongly assorted for age, .55 and .68, respectively. These correlations

Table 1
Cross–Person Correlations for Background Variables

Background variable	Dating couples	Newlywed couples
Age	.55***	.68***
Weight	−.03	.00
Height	−.07	.04
Alcohol consumption	.46***	.57***
Cigarette consumption	.89***	.51***
Political views		
(conservative vs. liberal)	.15	.49***
Religious, self	.44***	.60***
Religious, family	.10	.16
Catholic	.19	.50***
Jewish	.22	.50***
Protestant	.05	.50***
No religious preference	—	.37***
Verbal SAT	.41**	.42[a]
Math SAT	−.10	.31[a]
High-school GPA	−.08	.34***
College GPA	—	.29**
College percentile rank	—	.37**
Years of education completed	—	.31**
Highest academic degree earned	—	.40***

a. $N = 16$ couples for these variables.
**$p < .01$
***$p < .001$.

are comparable to the strong couple correlations for age found in pre-
vious studies (Buss, 1984; Price & Vandenberg, 1980). Partners in
these samples were essentially uncorrelated for weight and height,
whereas prior studies have found small but significant positive couple
correlations for these variables. Consumption habits—both for alcohol
and cigarettes—showed strong partner similarity, as has been found in
prior studies of assortative mating.

Dating couples were essentially uncorrelated in their political orien-
tation, whereas newlywed couples were strongly correlated. This dif-
ference may suggest that in the transition between dating and getting
married, couples either selectively break up with those who do not
share their political orientations, or that partners converge in their
political views by the first year of marriage. Both dating and married

couples were strongly assorted for religiosity, although more so for married than for dating couples. Interestingly, couples were not assorted for the degree of religiosity of their family of origin. The findings also showed that married couples were assorted for a specific religion, although this was not true of dating couples. Again, this may suggest a selective attrition of disassorted couples on specific religion, or a convergence over time by the first year of marriage, or both.

The academic backgrounds of the two samples were sufficiently different to preclude direct comparison of assortment for these variables. The dating couples were largely college students, most of whom had taken standardized tests such as the SAT. The newlywed couples, in contrast, were selected from the general population, and hence many had not taken standardized college admissions tests. Nonetheless, it is clear that the married couples were modestly assorted for education, as indexed by number of years of education and highest degree obtained.

Factor Analyses of Trait Adjectives

Although the 40 bipolar adjectives were selected based on the factor analyses reported by Goldberg (1983), we sought to confirm the correctness of the five-factor solution for the married and dating couples data. We conducted a series of principal component analyses using varimax rotation for each of the three data sources—self-report, partner report, and composited reports by the two interviewers. In each case, the expected five-factor solution emerged, accounting for 42%, 47%, and 68% of the variance, respectively. Furthermore, a parallel analysis was performed on the 40 items, composited with unit weighting from each of the three data sources. Five factors also emerged, which accounted for 55% of the variance.

The factor structure originally found by Goldberg (1983) was largely replicated in each of these four solutions, although in each case there were a few individual items that did not have their highest loadings on the expected factor. In each of these cases, however, the items showed loadings nearly as high on the expected factors. In examining the items that were "misplaced" in each of the four factor analyses, there were no consistencies from analysis to analysis. In the self-report data source, for example, the item "analytic-unanalytic" had its highest loading on Agreeableness rather than on Intellect-Openness. However, in the partner report, interviewer report, and composite data source analyses, this item had its highest loadings on the "correct" factor of

Intellect-Openness. To take another example, the item "even-tempered–temperamental" had its highest loading in the interviewer analyses on Agreeableness, rather than on the "correct" factor of Emotional Stability. In the three other analyses, however, it had its highest loading on Emotional Stability. The item "traditional-untraditional" had its highest loading in the partner report data source analyses on Intellect-Openness, rather than on Conscientiousness. For the self-report, interviewer report, and composite analyses, however, this item showed the highest loading on the "correct" factor of Conscientiousness.

Given these analyses, it was concluded that the five-factor solution initially described by Goldberg (1983) represented the most robust factor solution. Prior reports on this data set have used composite scores, representing sums with unit weighting, across the three data sources, with each given equal weight (Buss, 1991). To preserve comparability with these previous reports, we decided to continue using these composite scores in this report. To verify that these composite scores accurately captured the factor solution, however, we created factor scores based on the analysis of the composited scores. We then correlated these factor scores with the original composites. These correlations were as follows: Surgency (.94), Agreeableness (.86), Conscientiousness (.96), Emotional Stability (.93), and Intellect-Openness (.91). Thus, it was concluded that the composite scores adequately captured the factor structure, and they were used in subsequent analyses where appropriate.

Reliability of Trait Ratings and Personality Partner Preferences

Table 2 shows the internal consistency reliabilities, as indexed by alpha (Cronbach, 1951), for the personality ratings for all three data sources, for the two samples of couples separately. For the self-report and partner report, all reliabilities were in the moderate range for both samples. They ranged from .62 to .77 for the self-report data sources and from .57 to .78 for the partner report data sources. Alpha reliabilities for the interviewer ratings were evaluated after the two interviewer ratings were composited.

To generate data-source generalizable indexes of each of the major personality dimensions and to streamline the presentation of results where appropriate, data on personality descriptions from the three

Table 2
Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha Reliabilities for
Trait Rating Adjectives

Scales	Dating couples	Newlywed couples
Self-report		
Surgency	.75	.77
Agreeableness	.63	.62
Conscientiousness	.71	.72
Emotional Stability	.72	.73
Intellect-Openness	.63	.65
Partner report		
Surgency	.74	.74
Agreeableness	.78	.77
Conscientiousness	.70	.74
Emotional Stability	.71	.77
Intellect-Openness	.57	.73
Interviewer report		
Surgency	.92	.90
Agreeableness	.88	.88
Conscientiousness	.86	.88
Emotional Stability	.84	.83
Intellect-Openness	.92	.92
Aggregate ratings		
Surgency	.89	.90
Agreeableness	.89	.88
Conscientiousness	.86	.88
Emotional Stability	.84	.83
Intellect-Openness	.92	.92
Preference ratings		
Surgency	.62	.67
Agreeableness	.58	.69
Conscientiousness	.68	.69
Emotional Stability	.46	.62
Intellect-Openness	.66	.69

sources were combined. Prior to creating composite scores, the convergence between the two interviewers and among the three data sources was examined. The correlations across participants between

the two interviewers were as follows: Surgency (.66, .55), Agreeable-
ness (.48, .43), Conscientiousness (.54, .56), Emotional Stability (.52,
.48), and Intellect-Openness (.62, .51) for the dating couples and new-
lywed couples, respectively. Perhaps because of securing two indepen-
dent ratings from the interviews, the subsequent alpha reliabilities
were somewhat higher than for self-report and partner report, ranging
from .83 to .92.

Correlations were computed across participants between the person-
ality ratings provided by the participants, their spouses, and the
summed interviewers. Surgency and Conscientiousness showed the
highest convergence across data sources, with mean correlations of .52
and .51, respectively. Agreeableness, perhaps the most heavily saturated
with an evaluative component, showed the lowest convergence across
data sources (mean correlation of .24). Overall, this level of conver-
gence is comparable to that achieved by other studies of personality
ratings across multiple data sources (McCrae & Costa, 1985, 1987).

The three data sources were then composited, with unit weighting,
to form aggregate measures of the five factors. These aggregate scores
can be expected to be more valid than any of the individual data
sources, because true score variance will cumulate, whereas the unique
method variance associated with each individual data source will not
cumulate. These composite scores all achieved adequate reliability,
ranging from .84 and .83 for Emotional Stability for the dating and
newlywed couples, respectively, to .92 and .92 for Intellect-Openness
for the dating and newlywed couples, respectively.

Also shown in Table 2 are the alpha reliabilities for the personality
mate preference ratings. All were in the moderate range, from .46 to
.68 for dating couples, and from .62 to .69 for the married couples.

Sex Differences in Personality Ratings

Tables 3 and 4 show the means, standard deviations, and t tests for sex
differences for each of the data sources separately, as well as for the
composites across data sources. For both the dating and newlywed cou-
ples, men scored higher than women on Emotional Stability for each
data source, as well as for the aggregate scores. These findings replicate
the commonly found sex difference on this dimension (Eysenck &
Eysenck, 1975; Feingold, 1994). No other significant sex differences
emerged that were replicable across both samples and all data sources.

Table 3
Sex Differences on Five Factors in Dating Couples: Self-Report,
Partner Report, Interviewer Report, and Aggregate Ratings

Scales	Men (N = 105)		Women (N = 106)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t statistic
Self-report					
Surgency	5.01	.70	4.97	.81	0.24
Agreeableness	4.99	.62	5.00	.63	−0.09
Conscientiousness	4.85	.71	4.91	.79	−0.44
Emotional Stability	4.79	.67	4.18	.88	4.11***
Intellect-Openness	5.64	.61	5.67	.54	−0.27
Partner report					
Surgency	5.08	.87	4.80	.68	1.86
Agreeableness	5.21	.87	5.23	.69	−0.16
Conscientiousness	4.82	.88	4.87	.68	−0.34
Emotional Stability	4.94	.74	4.16	.81	5.31***
Intellect-Openness	5.31	.62	5.35	.51	−0.42
Interviewer report					
Surgency	4.01	.84	4.24	.86	−1.46
Agreeableness	4.24	.60	4.39	.52	−1.40
Conscientiousness	4.32	.62	4.28	.62	0.31
Emotional Stability	4.37	.58	3.92	.62	4.02***
Intellect-Openness	4.28	.70	4.27	.70	0.08
Aggregate ratings					
Surgency	4.65	.68	4.66	.64	−0.53
Agreeableness	4.80	.53	4.85	.42	−0.53
Conscientiousness	4.63	.65	4.67	.56	−0.30
Emotional Stability	4.68	.52	4.08	.59	5.87***
Intellect-Openness	5.02	.54	5.08	.42	0.52

***$p < .001$.

Sex Differences in Personality Mate Preferences

Evaluation of the means for the personality preferences suggests that
Agreeableness and Intellect-Openness were the two most valued per-
sonality characteristics by both sexes. Examination of the standard
deviations for the personality preferences reveals that they were gener-
ally lower than the standard deviations for actual standings on these
dimensions, as gauged by self-, partner, or interviewer reports. This

Table 4

Sex Differences on Five Factors in Newlywed Couples: Self-Report,
Partner Report, Interviewer Report, and Aggregate Ratings

Scales	Men (*N* = 105)		Women (*N* = 106)		*t* statistic
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	
Self-report					
Surgency	5.04	.70	4.99	.78	0.52
Agreeableness	4.88	.55	5.00	.65	−1.42
Conscientiousness	5.17	.67	5.31	.76	−1.52
Emotional Stability	4.83	.68	4.33	.87	4.95***
Intellect-Openness	5.46	.62	5.41	.51	0.71
Partner report					
Surgency	5.13	.86	4.86	.77	2.09*
Agreeableness	5.36	.83	5.02	.74	3.14**
Conscientiousness	5.19	.92	5.21	.74	−0.24
Emotional Stability	5.09	.77	4.05	.87	9.26***
Intellect-Openness	5.59	.70	5.30	.64	3.36**
Interviewer report					
Surgency	4.57	.94	4.55	.91	0.14
Agreeableness	4.45	.87	4.69	.69	−3.03**
Conscientiousness	4.84	.85	4.85	.78	−0.11
Emotional Stability	4.78	.66	4.32	.71	5.15***
Intellect-Openness	4.64	.92	4.59	.85	0.66
Aggregate ratings					
Surgency	4.91	.69	4.80	.68	1.10
Agreeableness	4.89	.55	4.90	.49	−0.10
Conscientiousness	5.07	.68	5.12	.61	−0.74
Emotional Stability	4.90	.52	4.23	.61	8.80***
Intellect-Openness	5.24	.55	5.11	.49	2.32*

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

suggests, but does not unambiguously document, greater consensus in
the desires for the personality characteristics of mates than occurs
among the actual selected partners themselves.

   At the level of individual items, the following are the 20 personality
attributes most valued by men in potential mates, rank ordered from
most to least valued: reliable, warm, fair, intelligent, knowledgeable,

conscientious, trusting, hardworking, secure, at ease, emotionally stable, perceptive, even-tempered, energetic, practical, curious, sociable, creative, well-organized, and relaxed. The analogous top-rated desires of women were warm, reliable, fair, intelligent, knowledgeable, trusting, secure, hardworking, emotionally stable, at ease, perceptive, lenient, conscientious, energetic, generous, sociable, curious, well-organized, flexible, and relaxed. Thus, there was extensive overlap between the sexes, with men and women sharing 17 of the top 20 most desired traits.

From these data, it is clear that each of the five factors had a socially desirable pole (cf. Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995). The means for all five scales were well above the 4.0 neutral point. It is within these contexts—a clear desirable pole for each of the five factors and large overlap between the sexes in what traits are desired—that the sex differences must be evaluated.

Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and *t* tests for sex differences for the personality mate preferences, for the two samples separately. In sharp contrast to the similarity between the sexes in their standing on all dimensions of the five factors except for Emotional Stability, men and women differed in their desires for the personality characteristics in an ideal partner.

The preference total score—the sum across all 40 trait rating scales—can be viewed as an index of the degree to which a person is exacting, or requires high levels, of all socially desirable traits. Examination of the preference total shows that women were more exacting or extreme in their desires for the five factors. The finding, consistent across both samples of participants, supports the hypothesis based on Trivers's (1972) theory of parental investment that women will generally be more choosy and exacting in their desires in potential mates.

Across both samples of participants, women consistently were more exacting on the Surgency and Intellect-Openness factors. An analysis of the individual adjective scales composing Surgency was particularly revealing. Significant sex differences were found in preferences for mates who were dominant ($t = -4.33$, $p < .0001$; $t = -3.46$, $p < .001$, for dating couples and newlywed couples, respectively). In contrast, no significant differences were found at the item level for sociable, talkative, or proud. These results suggest that the power, ascendance, or dominance theme of Surgency was especially valued by women, whereas the sociable theme showed no sex difference (see Wiggins, 1991). These findings support the hypothesis that the sexes differ on personality attributes known to be linked with resource acquisition.

Table 5
Sex Differences for Preferences on Five Factors in Dating and
Newlywed Samples

Dating couples	Men (*N* = 53)		Women (*N* = 57)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t* statistic
Preference dimension					
Surgency	5.09	.44	5.31	.52	−2.33*
Agreeableness	5.56	.43	5.71	.47	−1.74
Conscientiousness	5.17	.50	5.22	.63	−0.47
Emotional Stability	5.18	.46	5.26	.49	−0.87
Intellect-Openness	5.62	.49	5.89	.50	−2.89**
Preference total	5.33	.30	5.48	.32	−2.56*
Newlywed couples	Men (*N* = 103)		Women (*N* = 104)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t* statistic
Preference dimension					
Surgency	5.02	.61	5.29	.55	−3.68***
Agreeableness	5.49	.55	5.84	.50	−4.48***
Conscientiousness	5.36	.56	5.57	.63	−2.77**
Emotional Stability	5.20	.60	5.49	.54	−4.22***
Intellect-Openness	5.47	.55	5.73	.56	−3.88***
Preference total	5.31	.42	5.58	.39	−5.03***

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

   In the newlywed sample, but not the dating sample, women also were more exacting in their desires for a partner who is agreeable. A large sex difference also was found in preference for the individual item of generosity, with women placing greater value than men on this mate characteristic ($t = -2.87$, $p < .005$, for dating couples; $t = -4.18$, $p < .0001$, for newlywed couples). This suggests that women value a man's willingness to channel resources, in addition to his ability to attain them.

   Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were significantly more desired by women than by men in an ideal mate in the newlywed sample but not in the dating sample. The reasons for the presence of these sex differences in one sample, but not in the other, are not immediately apparent.

   The cross-characteristic assortment correlations (e.g., analyses that examine whether people who are high in Extraversion, for example,

tend to marry people who are high in Conscientiousness) did not reveal any consistent pattern across the samples. Thus, there was no evidence in these data for consistent cross-character assortment for personality.

Assortative Mating for Personality

Table 6 shows the assortative mating coefficients for the five personality factors. Using the self-report data source alone, there was only one significant assortative mating coefficient—for Conscientiousness for the married couples. The partner report data source showed similarly low levels of assortment, with only one coefficient reaching significance $(-.23, p < .05,$ for Surgency for the married couples). In contrast, the interviewer data source showed significant assortment for Agreeableness and Intellect-Openness for both samples. The composite measures of personality showed significant assortment across both samples for Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness. It is clear that the significant correlations for the Agreeableness and Intellect-Openness composites were driven primarily by the interviewer data source. Whether the differences between the different data sources were due to the greater validity of the interviewer scores or to possible contamination due to shared method variance in the interviewer and composite scores, cannot be determined from these analyses. We can conclusively rule out positive assortative mating for Surgency and for Emotional Stability—significant positive correlations did not occur for any data source for either of the two samples. Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness, in contrast, are candidates for low-level positive assortment.

Do Individuals Prefer Partners
Similar to Themselves?

Table 7 shows the correlations between individuals' personality characteristics and the personality characteristics they desired in potential mates. Characteristics are shown separately for men and women, for the dating and newlywed couples, and for the self-report and composite personality scores. Across all four subsamples, individuals preferred partners who were similar to themselves on personality characteristics. This preference was especially strong for partners who were similar in Intellect-Openness and Conscientiousness. These findings support the

Table 6

Assortative Mating for Personality, by Data Source

Trait	Dating couples				Married couples			
	Self	Partner	Interviewer	Aggregate	Self	Partner	Interviewer	Aggregate
Surgency	.11	.13	.23	.25	-.04	-.23*	.11	-.10
Agreeableness	-.03	.22	.32*	.27*	.12	.07	.44***	.33***
Conscientiousness	-.08	-.07	.26	.27*	.20*	.12	.09	.22*
Emotional Stability	-.24	-.11	-.01	-.18	.04	.02	.11	.06
Intellect-Openness	.12	.22	.54***	.51***	.00	.12	.67***	.38***

*p < .05
***p < .001.

Table 7
Personality Correlated with Mate Preferences

	Dating couples				Married couples			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
Trait	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate
Surgency	.33*	.42**	.59***	.35**	.20*	.15	.30**	.25**
Agreeableness	.37*	.17	.44***	.46***	.30**	.12	.44***	.31**
Conscientiousness	.34**	.45***	.59***	.53***	.53***	.49***	.61***	.53***
Emotional Stability	.29*	.36**	.52***	.30*	.27**	.21*	.32***	.27**
Intellect–Openness	.56***	.54***	.63***	.50***	.24*	.31**	.48***	.52***

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

hypothesis that individuals actually prefer partners who are similar to themselves in personality.

Do Individuals Have Partners Who Embody Their Preferences?

Table 8 shows the correlations between the preferences that individuals express for the ideal personality characteristics of their mate and the actual personality characteristics of the obtained mate. Across three of the four subsamples—women from both samples and married men—there were modest but consistently positive correlations between the desired and the actual personality characteristics displayed by the partner. The correspondence between what people wanted versus what they got was especially strong for Surgency and Intellect-Openness. These findings were obtained using the self-report data source alone, as well as using the composite personality scores, suggesting that the finding is robust.

Despite the modest tendency for individuals to have partners who corresponded to their personality preferences, these same correlations suggested individual differences. Some individuals may get what they want, whereas others do not.

Personality, Discrepancies from Personality Ideals, and Marital Satisfaction

To examine the discrepancy between participants' obtained versus ideal mate, we created difference scores between the preferences each individual expressed for the ideal personality of their mate and their reports of their spouse's personality for each of the five personality factors separately. Next, we conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regressions, using the marital satisfaction items as dependent variables. Two blocks of predictor variables were entered into each equation. First, the spouse's self-reported personality scores for the five factors were entered (self-report was used in these analyses to preserve independence—individuals' descriptions of their partner's personality and ratings of satisfaction with their marriage might be contaminated due to shared variance, and hence the composite personality measures were inappropriate in this context). The second block of predictors consisted of the discrepancy scores for each of the five factors.

Table 8

Personality Mate Preferences and Personality of Partner Obtained

	Dating couples				Married couples			
	Women's preferences		Men's preferences		Women's preferences		Men's preferences	
Partner's personality	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate	Self	Aggregate
Surgency	.25	.39**	.28*	.24	.39***	.49***	.31***	.32**
Agreeableness	.28*	.32	.24	.02	.20*	.40***	.03	.25
Conscientiousness	.28*	.29*	.24	.26	.36***	.46***	.13	.24
Emotional Stability	.36**	.12	.40**	.10	.27**	.37**	.07	.12
Intellect-Openness	.33**	.41**	.40**	.11	.24**	.39***	.14	.39***

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001.

The results were consistent across all the analyses—there were significant main effects of participants' partner's personality on marital satisfaction, but the discrepancy scores between partners' personalities and their mate's ideal for each factor of personality did not contribute any unique variance above and beyond the partner's personality scores.

The zero-order correlations between participants' marital satisfaction scores and their partner's personality scores obtained independently through the partner's self-report are shown in Table 9. Having a partner who is agreeable was an especially strong predictor of marital satisfaction for both sexes. Having an agreeable partner was associated with higher general marital satisfaction, greater sexual satisfaction, and viewing the spouse as loving, affectionate, a source of shared laughter, and a source of stimulating conversation.

The other personality factors consistently linked with marital satisfaction were Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness, with the latter two being especially strong. Men whose wives scored high on Conscientiousness were significantly more sexually satisfied with the marriage. Women whose husbands scored high on Conscientiousness were generally more satisfied, as well as being happier with the spouse as a source of stimulating conversation. Both sexes who had spouses high on Emotional Stability were generally more satisfied, viewed their spouse as a source of encouragement and support, and enjoyed spending time with their spouse. Similarly, both sexes whose spouses scored high on Intellect-Openness were generally satisfied with the marriage and perceived that a lot of love and affection were expressed in the marriage. Women whose husbands scored high on Intellect-Openness viewed their husbands as a source of stimulating conversation—the strongest link shown in Table 9, with a correlation of .45 ($p < .001$). This link was positive, but not significant, for husbands' satisfaction and their wife's personality.

In sum, the personality of one's spouse appears to have important links with satisfaction with one's marriage, both generally and in terms of specific components. Discrepancies from ideal personality, however, do not contribute any unique variance to marital satisfaction above and beyond the personality of the spouse.

DISCUSSION

The results from these studies of dating and married couples provide strong evidence that personality plays a critical role in mate selection

and marital happiness. Several major conclusions about the role of personality in mating can be drawn from these studies: (a) Women are generally more exacting in personality mate preferences, desiring higher levels of a variety of socially desirable personality characteristics in potential mates; (b) these sex differences are especially strong and consistent across samples for Surgency and Intellect-Openness; (c) couples show low levels of assortment for personality, significantly so for the dimensions of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness using the composite personality measures, but not significantly for the self-reports alone; (d) men and women both desire mates who are similar to themselves in personality; (e) men and women actually are mated with individuals who embody their preferences, although there are clear individual differences in the degree of such embodiment; (f) individuals who have a mate high on Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness are more satisfied with their marriage; and (g) having a mate who is discrepant from one's ideal does not contribute any unique variance to marital satisfaction above and beyond the partner's personality. These conclusions will be discussed in turn.

Sex Differences in Personality Mate Preferences

Across both samples of couples, women expressed more extreme preferences for the personality characteristics of their ideal mate. This finding supports Trivers's (1972) theory of parental investment and sexual selection. The sex that invests more in offspring is proposed to be more exacting and discriminating in their choice of a mate. Since women undergo an obligatory 9 months of internal fertilization, gestation, and placentation in order to produce a child, whereas men's obligatory investment can be as little as a single act of sex, it is clear that women are the heavier investing sex, at least initially. Both men and women can invest heavily in a long-term relationship. Thus, it is interesting that women are more exacting than men across a range of personality characteristics, even in the long-term mating context.

Across the two samples of couples, the sex differences were particularly consistent for the factors of Intellect-Openness and Surgency. Replicable sex differences in mate preferences occurred at the item level for partners who were active and dominant (Surgency), as well as intelligent, knowledgeable, and perceptive (Intellect-Openness). Replicable sex differences also occurred at the item level in preferences for mates

Table 9

Facets of Marital Satisfaction and Spouse's Self-Reported Trait Ratings

Marital satisfaction	Spouse's self-reported trait ratings				
	S	A	C	E	I-O
Husband's marital satisfaction					
General	.12	.32***	.06	.27**	.29**
Spouse as someone to confide in	-.05	.27**	.07	.11	.05
Sexual	-.08	.31**	.32***	.25**	.04
Spouse as source of encouragement and support	.03	.29**	.11	.26**	.18
Love and affection expressed	.07	.31**	.14	.21*	.26**
Enjoyment of time spent with spouse	.11	.30**	.13	.28**	.08
Frequency of laughing with spouse	.19*	.23*	.19	.11	.24**
Spouse as source of stimulating conversation	.06	.12	-.04	.21*	.17

Wife's marital satisfaction

	S	A	C	E	I-O
General	.07	.37***	.20*	.23*	.31***
Spouse as someone to confide in	.06	.25**	.15	.24**	.27**
Sexual	.08	.19*	.14	.09	.13
Spouse as source of encouragement and support	.04	.47***	.06	.20*	.31***
Love and affection expressed	-.04	.29**	.14	.28**	.33***
Enjoyment of time spent with spouse	.06	.27**	.06	.33***	.18
Frequency of laughing with spouse	-.02	.27**	-.02	.10	.08
Spouse as source of stimulating conversation	.23*	.24**	.25**	.18	.45***

Note. S = Surgency; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Emotional Stability; I-O = Intellect-Openness.
*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$
***$p < .001$.

who were fair, warm, and generous (Agreeable), secure, at ease, and emotionally stable (Emotional Stability), and hardworking (Conscientious). Since many of these qualities are reliable predictors of resource acquisition over time, women's greater desire for them may reflect a more general preference for men likely to be successful providers. That generosity was especially desired by women suggests that the willingness to share resources, not merely possession of resources, is a critical personality factor in mate selection (Buss, 1994).

Despite the consistent sex differences, it is clear that women and men generally desired the same qualities in a mate. Intellect-Openness and Agreeableness were consistently the most valued personality factors by both sexes. Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness also were highly valued. The sex differences in personality mate preferences must be evaluated within the context of these overall similarities between the sexes in the ideal personalities of potential mates.

Assortative Mating Based on Personality

Although assortative mating based on intelligence, values, religiosity, age, and interests has long been documented, the evidence for assortative mating in the personality domain has been inconsistent. Most summaries of the assortative mating literature conclude that assortment for personality is either trivial or absent (Eysenck, 1981; Jensen, 1987). These conclusions may stem in part from the fact that Extraversion and Neuroticism have been the two most frequently examined personality factors in mating and, in the current studies, these are precisely the personality factors that showed absent or trivial levels of assortment.

The five-factor model, in contrast, subsumes an array of personality factors beyond Extraversion and Neuroticism. In the current studies, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness all showed significant levels of assortative mating for both the dating and the newlywed couples, at least when using the personality measures composited across data sources. The degree of assortment documented for these factors is lower than that typically found for IQ, which averages approximately .45, but higher than for many physical characteristics, which average approximately .10 (Jensen, 1978; Spuhler, 1968). In sum, at least three personality factors showed a modest level of assortative mating using the composite measures, and this occurred among dating couples as well as among married couples.

One critical question is what causal processes led to the observed assortment? Our studies showed that men and women expressed preferences for those who were similar to themselves. This preference for mates who are similar was especially strong for Conscientiousness (average correlation of .50 on the composite measures) and Intellect-Openness (average correlation of .47 on the composite measures). These findings lend support to the hypothesis that assortment for personality, to the degree that it occurs, may be caused by articulated preferences and active selection, rather than by a more passive process such as mere proximity.

Another finding that supports this hypothesis is that the men's and women's preferences were positively correlated with the personality characteristics of the mates obtained. By themselves, these correlations are ambiguous with respect to causality, because it is possible that individuals come to prefer the qualities of those whom they have already selected. Nonetheless, in conjunction with the other findings—that individuals express strong preferences and that their preferences correspond to their own personality characteristics—these findings are at least consistent with the hypothesis that personality preferences actually affect mate selection, as is known to be the case with other preferences such as for a particular age of a mate (Buss, 1994).

Marital Happiness, the Fulfillment of Desire, and the Adaptive Landscape

Not all individuals succeed in getting what they want. Some end up with dating partners or spouses who deviate from their ideals and display personality characteristics that are not desired. In these two studies, we found that most people preferred mates who were high on Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness. Having a mate low on these qualities was linked in both sexes with marital and sexual unhappiness. At the individual differences level, however, discrepancies from the ideal mate did not add to marital dissatisfaction above and beyond the main effects of the spouse's personality. Thus, the personality of one's spouse played a role in participants' marital happiness, but individual discrepancies from ideals did not appear to add incremental predictive variance.

The evolutionary hypothesis articulated earlier anticipated that women would express preferences for husbands high on Surgency, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness, which they did. Although we did not predict this in advance, one might also predict that women

who are successful in attracting partners high on these qualities would be more satisfied with their marriage. Our results yielded only a partial confirmation of this prediction—women who had husbands high on Conscientiousness and Intellect-Openness tended to be more generally satisfied than women who had husbands low on these dimensions. The results for Surgency, however, provided no support for the evolutionary prediction. Furthermore, having a husband high on Agreeableness and Emotional Stability was also significantly linked with marital satisfaction. Clearly, a more sophisticated theory of marital satisfaction than the current one is warranted by these data (cf. Shackelford & Buss, in press).

In conclusion, these studies provide evidence that personality plays an important role in the mating process. Both men and women have well-articulated desires for the personality characteristics they want in a mate. They tend to select mates who are similar to themselves and who embody their ideals. Having a mate who shows certain personality characteristics, particularly low Agreeableness, low Emotional Stability, and low Intellect-Openness, is linked with marital dissatisfaction. Those who have mates who fulfill their desires for high Agreeableness, high Emotional Stability, and high Intellect-Openness show higher levels of marital happiness.

A few years ago, Buss (1989c, 1991) speculated that the personality factors represented by the five-factor model may in part capture important features of the "adaptive landscape" of humans—dimensions of the social world that are important for solving a variety of social adaptive problems. Selecting a mate is one such adaptive problem. Attempted solutions to this adaptive problem can bring a mate who will bestow a bounty of resources and with whom one can coordinate and synchronize action to attain mutual goals. Other attempted solutions lead to the imposition of heavy costs and strident failure to achieve harmonious coordination. Personality appears to play a key role for individuals as they traverse the adaptive landscape of mating.

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