Single white attractive female searching for Mr. Right: 
Characteristics in mate selection.

Mona. Sleiman

University of Windsor

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“Single White Attractive Female Searching For Mr. Right”:
Characteristics in Mate Selection

by

Mona Sleiman

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research through the
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

“Single White Attractive Female Searching For Mr. Right”: Characteristics in Mate Selection

Characteristics offered and sought in the mate selection process were examined by analyzing personal advertisements posted on the Internet. Goode’s theoretical framework guided the exploration of the hypotheses addressing the salience of physical attractiveness, the exchange of packages of traits, the gender-linked valuation of traits, and the process of matching. In addition to these hypotheses, the study addressed the question of the persistence of characteristics deemed essential in past arranged and supervised mate selection practices, and examined gender and sexual orientation differences.

Six hundred personal advertisements were randomly selected from Internet sites and stratified by sex and sexual orientation. The advertisements, written by 200 heterosexual men, 200 heterosexual women, 100 gay men, and 100 lesbian women ranging in age from 18 to 74, were content analyzed according to 27 characteristics. The data were analyzed using rank ordering, correlations, chi square tests, and Cramer’s V.

The results indicate that although the process of heterosexual mate selection has changed over time, the characteristics sought in mate selection persist. These enduring characteristics include: the gendered pattern of age preference, the preference for racial similarity, the salience of women’s physical attractiveness, and the gendered attractiveness/financial security exchange. One significant result of this study differs from previous research findings. Age, rather than attractiveness, is the most offered and sought characteristic. A methodological critique of prior research is offered as an explanation. Expressiveness was found to be an essential attribute of a potential mate for both men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals. In general, the pattern of characteristics offered and sought reflect the inequality of heterosexual relationships and the equality of homosexual relationships. Recommendations for future research include clarification and standardization of the concept of attractiveness and studying the personal advertisement respondents to examine matching of characteristics.
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INTRODUCTION

Dating back from the horse and buggy days to present day North America, societal changes have altered the mate selection process. The change in women's roles in society, the change in the role of the family, increasing acceptance of diversity and increased mobility have created a context that has widened the possibilities of who and where we can date. Also, a wide array of technological advancements ranging from the invention of the automobile to the invention of the home computer have created open, accessible venues for meeting prospective mates. The mate selection process has undergone profound changes. In the past the process of arranged marriages and supervised courtship outlined the characteristics one should seek in a mate; today a pattern of individual preferences exists in selecting a mate. Since today's mate selection process can be characterized as having no boundaries as to who and where individuals can meet, a fundamental question emerges as to whether the characteristics deemed essential in the mate selection process have changed from past to present times. This emergent question creates a context that necessitates the revelation of a historical to present day analysis of the mate selection process.

History of Mate Selection Practices

For most of North American history, romantic love had very little to do with choosing a mate for life. Throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries marriage or mate selection was a contract between families, not between individuals (Blood, 1967). Parents took the initiative in deciding when and whom their child should marry. The criteria for choice were family-oriented, since marriages established economic and biological bonds between families.

Historically, arranged marriages and supervised mate selection were practices
employed by families to ensure that standards were met when their children sought mates. Such standards were based upon parameters set up by parents of characteristics deemed appropriate for a prospective mate. Biological considerations were characteristics used to carefully scrutinize prospective mates. Though taken into consideration during supervised courtship practices, biology was of utmost importance during the times of arranged marriages. Research on arranged marriages in North America indicates that a biological emphasis in mate selection was paramount when wives were chosen for families’ sons. “Brides were selected for their presumed ability to bear healthy children in which the eugenic calculus considered the young women’s health, prizing vigor and robustness” (Blood, 1967: 118).

In addition to biological and physical characteristics, women were expected to possess the characteristics of proper womanhood. During arranged and supervised courtship practices, to train daughters to be considered a candidate as a prospective young bride, young women were taught to be submissive and obedient by parents (Blood, 1967). The definition of women during the Victorian era set up a vast array of parameters for proper womanhood in order to be deemed a valuable prospective bride. The Victorian era saw an extreme polarization of sex roles in which male and female spheres became increasingly separated and static. The passivity, frigidity, and uselessness of the female model idealized during this era consigned women to the domestic, private sphere and subjected women to male authority (Vicinus, 1977). Even the educational system reinforced role appropriate behaviours that were taught in the home. The aim of education during the 19th Century was to prepare children for their position in adult life. Historically, education reflected societal attitudes and expectations for women’s roles. Women’s education was limited to areas that best served men. For example, in Quebec, between the years of 1899 and 1920 a number of private schools developed in order for women to be granted a recognized diploma in secondary education (Dumont-Johnson,
Even though great strides were made in permitting the entrance of women into secondary education, the programs designed propagated the ideology of woman as wife and mother. Courses in cooking, pattern-cutting, sewing and hat making were disguised under the label of ‘domestic science’ (Dumont-Johnson, 1987). These courses were designed to train women to be good housekeepers and concentrated on preparing girls for married life. Women were not allowed into faculties other than domestic science, and strict segregation of the sexes on educational grounds was deemed desirable. Such tactics ensured men greater educational attainment and, therefore, higher social status over women. A statement formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and documented by Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen (1981: 16) can be applied to the rationale behind women’s education during the Victorian era:

A woman’s education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all times, and this is what she should be taught when she is young.

These tactics also had implications for men and the characteristics they were to possess to be deemed a worthy mate for single women. In both arranged and supervised courtship practices, in selecting a prospective son-in-law, the women’s families needed to ensure that their daughters would be financially secure. Due to the stratified educational system and the resulting higher social status men had over women, women were economically dependent on their husbands. Therefore, the ability of a young man to support a young woman financially was of utmost importance. Parents sought characteristics in men such as high status, property ownership, and economic stability. Thus, the characteristics for husbands were external components (Riker & Brisbane, 1988), while for women, the characteristics were based on biology and personality.

Whether during the periods of arranged marriages or supervised courtship, race continued to be a social barrier that couples were least likely to cross. Race was first
employed as a means of categorizing human beings in the late seventeenth century, and it was only in the eighteenth century that there began to be made what were taken to be authoritative racial divisions of human beings (Nicholson, 1994). Race is a social definition of a social category of people, typically based on visible physical features (Rothman, 1993). Smedley (1993: 21) articulately summarizes the pervasiveness of race by stating that:

Race in the North American mind was and is tantamount to a statement about profound and unbridgeable differences. In whatever context race comes to play, it conveys meaning of nontranscendable social distance. This sense of difference is conditioned into most individuals early in their lives . . . It is expressed in all kinds of situations and encounters between people. It is structured into the social system through residential separation, differential education, and informal restrictions against socialization, intermarriage and common membership in various organizations . . . It provides the unspoken guidelines for daily interaction among persons defined as of different races, especially black and white. It sets the standards and rules for conduct, even though individuals may not always be conscious of this fact.

Such racial awareness has implications for many aspects of human existence, including mate selection. Even though the ‘melting pot’ and ‘cultural mosaic’ hypothesis foresaw the gradual development of a new society in which immigrants from various ethnic and racial backgrounds were to live amongst each other in harmony, social norms and even laws effectively impinged upon such a co-existence. For example, research on North American arranged marriages indicated that a woman’s family tree was carefully examined for evidence of racial similarity and also for criminal acts and mental or physical illnesses presumed to be hereditary and likely to contaminate the husband’s genetic line (Blood, 1967). “As recently as 1965, 19 states in the United States still had laws that prohibited black and white intermarriage, while mores throughout North
America where it was legal generally functioned to limit its occurrence” (VanderZanden, 1966: 323). Social barriers make physical proximity for varying racial group members to interact difficult. Also, punishments for the union of interracial couples have been documented which served as a deterrent for the other societal members. For example, in Golden’s (1954) examination of black-white families, reports were documented by interracial couples of the loss of membership in clubs, church, and other groups and several white spouses reported that they had lost their jobs when their intermarriage was discovered. Therefore, racial mores serve to place strong and explicit limits on an individual’s selection of a mate by the moral values ascribed to race.

A review of various studies conducted on arranged marriages and supervised courtship also highlighted the importance that social class exerted as a characteristic deemed essential in the mate selection process. Social class refers to an individual’s location in the economic system of society. Unlike race or gender, it is based in part on material reality and whereas race and gender are considered ascribed status (i.e., based on relatively fixed characteristics of individuals), class is considered an achieved status, based on the individual’s own behaviour (Howard & Hollander, 1997). Just as race, social class has an impact on mate selection practices. Parents were apt to select a mate for their children with similar social standings as their own. However, when class lines that divide social groups were crossed, men selected women from a lower class far more frequently than was true for women (Riker & Brisbane, 1988). Mate selection with respect to education proved to be quite similar to social class in which parents chose mates with similar educational attainment as their children. Also, parallel to social class,
if educational lines were crossed, men chose women with less educational attainment far more likely than was true for women which served to be consistent with gender role expectations. Age was another characteristic that influenced mate selection with most people marrying others near to their own age. As we would expect, when gender differences do occur, there exists a pattern of the older man with the younger women. Men above 20 years of age tended to select women who were within a five year age range or younger whereas women above 20 tended to select men who were within a five year age range or older (Hollingshead, 1990).

Propinquity factors were also deemed extremely advantageous during these mate selection practices. “There are approximately 5 billion people in the world. In your lifetime, you have the opportunity to meet and interact with only minuscule percentage of the people on this planet” (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1999). Thus, a major determinant of mate selection and interpersonal attraction is proximity, also referred to as ‘propinquity’. Parents were likely to choose mates residing in close proximity to themselves to assure the opportunity to observe the courtship process and oversee the development of the relationship. Geographical proximity assures parents that families residing in the same neighbourhood sustain similar social class and educational levels reaffirming the importance of such characteristics in the mate selection process.

Even though the vast amount of research on essential characteristics in historical mate selection processes focuses on white, middle to upper class families, there does exist research examining cross cultural mate selection practices that parallel the above findings. Marriages in India, for example, are alliances formed after careful consideration
of characteristics in prospective mates such as historical origins, ritual positions, occupational affiliations and social distance (Kurian, 1979). “Generally, women from India hope for kind and vigorous providers and protectors and men for faithful mothers and good housekeepers” (Kurian, 1979: 169).

One aspect of historical mate selection research that is essentially non-existent concerns studies on characteristics deemed essential in homosexual contexts. Historical documentation reflecting homosexual mate selection practices is absent since Western society has had a long tradition of fear and hatred of homosexuality. Research that has been conducted on the history of gay men and lesbian women focuses on why people become homosexual, how gay men and lesbian women live, gay/lesbian politics, how homosexual people are different, etc., while neglecting research on the relationships of lesbian women and gay men (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). This lacunae in the literature invites research on the central characteristics in mate selection for lesbian women and gay men.

Despite the difference in time periods in which arranged marriages and supervised courtship practices were predominant, the characteristics deemed essential in the mate selection process remained stable.

**Current Mate Selection Practices**

Even though arranged and supervised mate selection may still be observed in some present day cultures, the current practice in North American society is for individuals to select mates on the basis of their personal preferences. This shift in mate
selection involves informal, unchaperoned individual interaction with no specific commitment (Murstein, 1974). Dating became a mate selection process that provides opportunities for explorations into romantic intimacy without requiring rapid escalation toward marriage and permits the attainment of traits and characteristics one might want in a life partner (Whyte, 1990). In the past, pairing off or dating was subject to more direct supervision and was interpreted more in terms of the immediate goal of choosing a mate to ‘live happily ever after’ than the current interpretation of experimentation (Whyte, 1990). Today, our dating culture gives approval to people pairing off with various romantic partners, without adult supervision and without defining those partners necessarily as potential mates (Whyte, 1990). This new system of dating added new stages to courtship and multiplied the number of partners an individual was likely to have before marriage (Bailey, 1988). At the same time, it removed couples from the direct supervision of their parents and allowed individuals the opportunity to meet others at a variety of different locations using a variety of different venues. Yet, this free-choice situation does not inherently imply that the mate selection process is immune to external forces such as parents, friends, social class, mass culture which in turn affects the characteristics that we seek when choosing a potential mate. According to Blumstein and Schwartz (1983: 27):

A tension developed between unsupervised dating (having a good time while acquiring self-knowledge and social skills) and courtship (dating that could result in marriage). Since what had started out as unsupervised dating might easily turn into courtship, parents feared democratic environments that exposed their child to someone who could be endured as a date but would never be accepted as a son- or daughter-in-law. Thus, sometimes openly, but more often unconsciously, parents supported a double standard that allowed their children to experiment with ‘exotic’ partners, but subtly directed their children’s serious romantic commitments
toward people who met parental standards.

In North America, we encourage the ideology of romantic love and adhere to it as the basis of mate selection. However, in pursuing the objective of a mate for life, love itself becomes structured by an array of social and demographic factors in which prospective mates are carefully scrutinized on a number of characteristics deemed important (Lindsey, 1990). The composition of North American societal members has changed remarkably throughout history. The vast influx of immigrants during the late 1800s and early 1900s and their offspring have created a multi-racial, cultural, and religious society. According to Statistics Canada (1997), its population for 1996 consists of over 28.5 million people. Males comprise 49.5% and females comprise 50.5% of the total population. When examining the population by age, the percentage of the male-female ratio changes with increased age where women begin to outnumber men resulting in a shortage in the number of available single men for women. The 1996 Census data report that Canada's visible minority population consists of over 3 million people. An even more striking Canadian demographic statistic for 1996 reveals that of the total 28.5 million population, 81% have ethnic origins that originate in countries other than Canada. When examining the religious composition of Canada, 1991 Census data report 18 different religious affiliations which include Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, etc., each having a wide array of belief systems (Bibby, 1995). Such a diverse population serves to contribute further to society's already existing stratified levels of socioeconomic status, educational achievements, and value/belief systems.

Even amidst such a diverse population, it has been found that some 90% of Canadians say that they would be comfortable in the presence of any differing culture (Bibby, 1995). There has been a gradual increase in the approval of marriages between Canadians of different racial backgrounds. For example, approval of intergroup marriages between whites and blacks has increased from 57% in 1975 to 81% in 1995 (Bibby, 1995). One of Canada's institutions that has been most affected by social
changes is religion in which participation is down sharply. Bibby (1995) found that even though 9 in 10 Canadians continue to identify with religious groups, weekly service attendance has dropped from 75% in 1975 to 30% in 1995. Therefore, where racial, ethnic, or religious affiliations served to limit mate selection processes in the past, the limitation of these factors has been subdued and the effective result has been a gradual increase in the approval of marriages between Canadians of different cultural and religious affiliations since the 1970s (Bibby, 1995). With respect to homosexuality, attitudes of societal members has slowly become more lax throughout the years. When Canadians were surveyed as to whether homosexuality was ‘sometimes wrong’ to ‘not wrong at all’, the numbers increased from 27% in 1975 to 48% in 1995 (Bibby, 1995). The increase in the approval of homosexuality appears to reflect a liberalization of attitudes among baby boomers since the 1970s.

With respect to sociocultural factors, if one is to understand the process of mate selection one needs to take into account more than the personal characteristics of the two people involved. The larger social setting is significant because of its opportunities of contacts with a diverse population of prospective mates. Although other socioeconomic characteristics are important considerations in marriage patterns, educational attainment is a characteristic that has many implications that impact the mate selection process. Since educational attainment changes little after prime marrying ages, it is an attribute that applies equally well to both sexes (Stevens & Schoen, 1988). Also, increased educational attainment reduces the likelihood of youth marriages which in turn increased the number of dating partners one has in a lifetime. Also, greater educational attainment is positively correlated with greater geographical mobility due to distant locations of post secondary institutions. The population comprising post-secondary institutions is quite heterogeneous, which increases the opportunity for social intercourse and possible mate selection choices with diverse individuals with varying value structures, racial and
religious affiliations and socioeconomic status. Therefore, there is considerably less assurance an individual will select a prospective mate of the same race, religion, or nationality.

Age is another characteristic which influences mate selection where as previously highlighted, the combination of the older man with the younger woman is the predominant pattern. However, age at first marriage for both sexes is inevitably affected by a number of circumstances, including the proportion of available men and women. When an imbalance exists between available men and women, a marriage or ‘mate selection’ squeeze is said to exist, with one or the other sex having a more limited pool of potential partners (Lindsey, 1990). Societal influences, such as changing birth rates, male and female mortality rates, war, marriage and divorce trends are factors that influence the number of single adults (Lindsey, 1990). Today, women have a limited range of mate selection choices due to the greater number of single women compared to single men. The trends of women marrying men two to three years older than themselves, combined with higher male mortality rates, and economic independence of women has served to restrict the availability of eligible partners. Therefore, one option for women would be to ‘cast a wider net’ or choose from a more heterogeneous composition of potential mates in order to expand the pool of potential partners (Lichter, Anderson, & Hayward, 1995).

Technological factors, which changed how individuals are able to meet and select mates, include inventions such as the telephone, the automobile, and the home computer. The mass use of such inventions has expanded the dating pool and has transformed the dating process by eliminating many of the restrictions of who, where, how, and when one can meet others. The telephone allows individuals to contact others to plan future meetings or encounters at nightclubs, restaurants, movie theaters, or concerts. The automobile, as a means of transportation, provides access to potential mates and a variety of dating activities. The use of home computers allows individuals to meet and date on-
line potential mates via a variety of venues, such as the Internet, chat lines, electronic mail, and personal advertisements. Propinquity research has generally shown that the general pattern of homogamy simply reflects the fact that in our society people of similar social characteristics live in contiguous areas, that they, therefore, interact with each other more, and that they are thus more likely to be able to identify prospective mates within the socially homogenous neighbourhood than outside it (Huston, 1974). Even though the telephone and the automobile expand the geographical locations in which individuals can meet others, the home computer virtually eliminates propinquity restrictions. “The diverse possibilities of print, sight, and sound today are succinctly summarized in the multimedia computer, a glorious machine that offers us a geometric jump in entertainment and communication, putting us in touch with the entire diverse world in seconds from the comfort of our own homes” (Bibby, 1995: 119). It is no longer necessary to limit first introductions to school, work, church, or related social gatherings. Computers facilitate contact between individuals by increasing accessibility. The use of home computers serve to overcome nights at home alone or the round of bars and singles’ clubs which are often deemed tedious and meaningless (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977). Computers also overcome the inevitable reality of the importance of physical attractiveness that occurs in first time face-to-face encounters, whether it be at a church function, on a university campus or at a nightclub. Finally, computers overcome the constraints of family, educational, and career obligations that may serve to limit the time, exposure, and expenses that one can commit to the dating process. Thus, computers remove many of the barriers to meeting others from physical appearance to geographical area and as a consequence are the most accessible mate selection venue. Accessibility also provides the opportunity for individuals to come into contact with a diverse composition of prospective mates. Therefore, access to computers creates greater exposure to a dating pool that is considerably larger and quite heterogeneous. Therefore,
the question emerges as to whether opening up the diversity of individuals one is exposed to may serve to alter the characteristics deemed essential in the mate selection process.

Accessibility is particularly important in the face of the changing demographics of singles. Sociocultural and economic influences have contributed to a diverse dating pool that is older and remains single longer (Bailey, 1988). Prolongation of formal education, the influx of women into the paid labour force, increased geographical mobility to attend post secondary institutions or to seek employment opportunities have postponed the age of first marriage. Changes to the traditional dating pool is further affected by demographic trends such as the differential rate in life expectancy rates for women and men and the rise in the number of divorces since more liberal divorce laws were introduced (Baker, 1982). Both trends contribute to the aging of the dating pool.

Therefore, such sociological and demographic influences have contributed both to a larger and a wider age spectrum of single adults that run the gamut from teenagers to senior citizens. The opportunities or avenues for older single adults to find a mate may be in disjunction with younger singles. The diverse composition of the dating pool corresponds to the diverse needs of its members. Despite the diversity of individuals who place and respond to ads, there seems to be a lingering belief that people who use these ads are atypical from the population at large. However, there is little evidence to support such a contention. Lynn and Bolig (1985) refer to a study conducted by Brock and Buttermore (1983, unpublished), in which individuals who used a video-dating service (which is also considered atypical) were within the national norms on the California Psychological Inventory. Personal advertisements represent a growing avenue for meeting people. Therefore, as the number of participants increase, so their representativeness of the population at large should also increase (Lynn & Bolig, 1985). Computers serve to satisfy the needs of all. Home computers serve as a formidable dating venue since accessibility seems to be quite conducive for a broad range of
prospective mates. Therefore, computers function as a vital medium from which to examine current mate selection processes.

**Purpose of the Research**

Given the significance of computers, there has not yet been a study, to my knowledge, examining the role of computers as a dating venue by analyzing whether the characteristics offered and sought in the mate selection process have persisted, altered or broadened in comparison to previous research conducted on mate selection. To investigate the mate selection process through home computers I will analyze personal advertisements posted on the Internet and make comparisons with personal advertisements found in the print media in order to gain a broader understanding of who uses such a dating venue and what characteristics individuals desire in a prospective mate amidst the diversity of the population of single adults. In an attempt to reveal who uses personal advertisements posted on the Internet and what characteristics are deemed essential in the mate selection process it is necessary to provide an illustration of personal advertisements and their composition and review previous studies conducted in their usage as a mate selection venue in the print media.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Description of Personal Advertisements

In modern North American society, though romantic love and personal compatibility are widely assumed to be the primary components of mate selection and single men and women generally are left to their own devices to find one another, several commercial institutional facilitators have emerged to help enhance the mate selection process. Personal advertisements, also called lonely heart advertisements, have increasingly become an accepted and popular means of meeting people and establishing various relationships. For many individuals, personal advertisements offer a unique opportunity for seeking prospective mates. Once only found in underground or sensationalistic tabloids, they now are found in family-oriented newspapers, intellectual and literary journals, local advertisement sheets which are distributed free to subscribers, and slick magazines (i.e., Cosmopolitan, GQ) for trendy consumers (Goode, 1996).

The content of an advertisement typically includes a list of the characteristics that describe the advertiser, a list of characteristics sought in a prospective respondent, and the type of relationship desired. Since personal advertisements often include both the characteristics of the advertisers and the qualities they seek in a partner, such advertisements are a valuable source of information about self-presentation, social roles, gender stereotypes, and judgments of attractiveness in interpersonal relationships (Child, Low, McCormick, & Cociarella, 1996). Individuals who place personal advertisements comprise quite a heterogeneous mix. “Advertisers, and their respondents run the gamut from heterosexual to homosexual, from single to married, from teenagers to octogenarians, from those advertising for a single lifetime partner to those seeking candidates for impersonal, commercial sex, ‘discreet’ afternoon trysts, threesomes, foursomes, or one night stands” (Goode, 1996: 144).

The differences between the use of personal advertisements and the more
traditional venues of finding mates are threefold. First, according to Goode (1996), through the use of personal advertisements, the initial selection process takes place prior to a face-to-face meeting. Secondly, advertisers and respondents have much more control over the information they allow potential mates to have access to than is true of more naturalistic avenues of courtship (Woll & Young, 1989: 483). Thirdly, as Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels (1994: 4) assert, "while courtship through traditional channels is overwhelmingly a product of personal associations, such as friendship networks, school, place of employment, personal advertisements transcend this restriction by attempting to establish an intimate relationship with strangers." Even amongst these differences, there is an overwhelming similarity between the use of personal advertisements and the more common courtship processes. Whether we find ourselves mingling at a social function or responding to a personal advertisement on one's home computer, the intent or desire to find a mate is the driving force motivating each behaviour.

Hering (1994: 1) states, "the once monochrome computer screen, which somehow made computing an occupation pursued only by scientists with sideburns, has become a playground for even the most timid of users." The general format comprising personal advertisements found in the print media may parallel the ads found on the Internet; however, computers provide the opportunity to gain much more knowledge about prospective mates. Delving one step further than personal ads placed in periodicals, the Internet offers a three-dimensional medium. Such a medium allows for greater breadth and depth in space providing individuals with the latitude to describe themselves and their ideal mate without restricting the number of words or lines available. Also, the Internet provides the opportunity to send a photograph of oneself, request a photograph, link up to an advertiser's homepage, or enter shared video conference rooms or chat lines together. According to Sheryl Turkle (1995: 26), "Today people are embracing the notion
that computers may extend an individual’s physical presence.” Computers also offer individuals a new medium from which to project a presentation of self.

We come to see ourselves differently as we catch sight of our images in the mirror of the machine. A decade ago, when I first called the computer a second self, these identity-transforming relationships were almost always one-on-one, a person alone with a machine. This is no longer the case. A rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known as the Internet, links millions of people in new spaces that are changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities. (Turkle, 1995: 1)

Previous Research on Mate Selection Practices

Research analyzing mate selection preferences using personal advertisements found in periodicals contain an array of findings ranging from the characteristics deemed essential in the mate selection process to the gender differences found in characteristics offered and sought in personal advertisements (Bolig, Stein, & McKenry, 1984; Child, Low, McCormick, & Cocciarella, 1996; Deux & Hanna, 1984; Feingold, 1992; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). The characteristic that has most often been examined in mate selection research is physical attractiveness. Research comparing the effects of physical attractiveness of a potential date with other characteristics (e.g., personality traits) has consistently found that physical attractiveness has a greater effect on attraction (Feingold, 1992; Lynn & Shurgot, 1984; Sprecher, 1989). Gender differences found in the importance of physical attractiveness points to men’s greater desire for physical attractiveness in both sexual and long-term relationships (Nevid, 1984). Furthermore, research analyzing the content of personal advertisements indicates that men were more likely than women to request physical attractiveness in a partner while women were more likely than men to offer it (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Deux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988).

Research on mate selection processes has also examined the importance of
financial status or earning potential. Whereas physical attractiveness has been documented to be more important to men than to women, earning potential or social status has been assumed to be more important to women (Sprecher, 1989). In personal advertisements, financial security has been found more likely to be requested by women but more likely to be offered by men (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). Through an examination of the findings related to physical attractiveness and financial security found in personal advertisements, researchers interpret their findings in terms of traditional sex-role expectations for males and females. Men are significantly more likely to request physical attractiveness in a partner and offer financial and occupational success, while women are more likely to request financial and occupational success and offer physical attractiveness (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Deux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988).

When examining age preferences in studies of interpersonal attraction, results indicate that men and women personal advertisers have markedly different age preferences (Rajecki, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991). Men are more likely than women to express a preference for a younger mate, whereas women are more likely than men to say that they want an older mate (Bolig, Stein, & McKenry, 1984; Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Harrison & Saeed, 1977). Probing deeper in an examination of age preferences, Rajecki, Bledsoe, and Rasmussen (1991) found that women sought men who were from 2.0 years younger to 8.4 years older than themselves whereas men sought women who were from 9.8 years younger to 2.2 years older than themselves.

Age, physical attractiveness, and earning potential are external or extrinsic characteristics of an individual (Sprecher, 1989). However, when examining intrinsic qualities, such as expressive and instrumental traits, the research results have been inconsistent. According to Spence, Deux, and Helmreich (1985), men highly value
expressive qualities (e.g., kindness, sensitivity, emotional responsiveness) in women whereas women highly value instrumental qualities (e.g., assertiveness, independence, decisiveness) in men. In opposition to the findings of Spence et al. (1985), women were more likely than men to request an expressive partner and men sought women with instrumental traits (Koestner & Wheeler, 1988).

Theoretical Framework

Erich Goode (1996) conducted an analysis of the literature on personal advertisements as a system of courtship. In examining the characteristics offered and sought in the ads, Goode asserted that many consistent findings were evident across studies. Based on these findings, Goode devised a typology which contains four main components concerning the process of mate selection in personal advertisements—the central role of physical attractiveness, the fact that dating parties exchange ‘packages’ of traits, the gender-linked valuation of traits and characteristics and the process of matching. Goode’s typology provides a theoretical framework for my analysis in the present research by allowing me to conduct my data analysis in a manner which will allow me to examine these four components. The primary component of Goode’s typology concerns the central role of physical attractiveness in mate selection. According to Goode (1996), numerous studies have been conducted on the role of physical attractiveness in the courtship process in which the evidence documenting its strength is abundant and convincing, even overwhelming (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Greenless & McGrew, 1994; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Lynn & Shurgot, 1984; Singh, 1995). Explanations for the importance of physical attractiveness have been explained in terms of both evolutionary and sociocultural processes. According to Darwin (1961), both sexes, if the females as well as the males were permitted to exert any choice, would choose their partners not for mental charms, or property, or social position, but almost
solely from external appearance. While physical attractiveness may serve to please and excite both men and women, evolutionary and sociocultural theories assert differing reasons for the importance of physical attractiveness with respect to gender. According to evolutionary or sociobiological theorists, for females, male physical attractiveness is a reliable indicator of male qualities such as vigor and health (Cronin, 1991). According to Symons (1979), an evolutionary theorist, physical appearance is a strong cue to age and health, which in turn are indicative of reproductive value. Therefore, since physical attractiveness cues provide the most powerful observable evidence of a woman's reproductive capacity, the evolutionary logic of mating suggests that men may evolve a preference for, and attraction to women who display these cues (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

For decades, social psychologists have contended the essential role that physical attractiveness has exerted in the selection of a mate. Apparently, in addition to aesthetic appeal, being physically attractive implies that these individuals, whether male or female, have many other desirable traits. Physically attractive women are equated with being more sensitive, poised, kind, sexually inviting, and sociable (Riker & Brisbane, 1988), while physically attractive men are equated with being more interesting, outgoing, assertive, confident, and potentially successful (Smith & Waldorf, 1990). Also, according to sociocultural theorists, individuals may hope that their own prestige, status, and even attractiveness will increase and will be rated more appealing by being associated or paired with an attractive partner (Sprecher, 1989). Therefore, physical attractiveness highlights the belief that 'what is beautiful is good' by both evolutionary and sociocultural theories.

The second component Goode (1996) outlines in his typology of the mate selection process is the fact that dating partners exchange 'packages' of traits. "Even though physical attractiveness may be a crucial factor determining the sifting, weighing, and matching process in courtship, other factors are simultaneously at work" (Goode,
Exchange theory, as propounded by Homans (1961), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), and Blau (1964) provides a highly relevant theoretical context for which to study modern mate selection processes. The social exchange theory combines the basic principles of behavioural psychology with concepts from economics. Taken from behavioural psychology, social exchange theory assumes that individuals pursue rewards and attempt to avoid punishments. Social exchange theory also uses concepts from economics that assert that interaction is an economic transaction where people try to maximize their profits in social situations in which profit is conceptualized as rewards minus costs (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977). Therefore, according to exchange theorists, individuals are goal oriented, purposively attempting to obtain something in a relationship by exchanging something else in return. According to Hirschmann (1987: 98-99), each party in the courtship process offers ‘a collection of diverse resources’, whereas on the other side, ‘another collection of resources’ is being sought. The resource sets that are offered and sought by individuals warrants one to view people as ‘products’ during the mate selection process. Among the resource sets or characteristics possessed and desired by men and women are physical attractiveness, intelligence, educational attainment, occupational prestige, financial status and personality traits. Such resource characteristics are assigned different degrees of desirability depending on the evaluation of the larger culture in which we interact and live. Personal advertisements, in which men and women pay to communicate their availability and marketable assets to others serve as a unique and constructive context from which to examine resource exchanges for a number of reasons. According to Hirschman (1987):

Personal advertisements are clearly a form of marketing exchange, even in the most traditional economic sense due to the fact that people must pay to place the advertisements. Secondly, like marketing advertisements, personal ads list a set of desirable properties or resources that are put forward to attract potential buyers. Thirdly, a price is also stated in personal ads, which consists of the set of properties or resources sought in return.
With every courtship exchange, each individual seeks and offers a set of traits in order for a ‘profile’ of each potential partner to be assembled and ranked (Goode, 1996). Each party hopes to maximize his or her own resources by seeking an individual with a highly ranked set of resources. A fair exchange would be represented by equity in this exchange process -- trading one total ‘package’ that closely approximates all the relevant dimensions to another (Goode, 1996). To take a classic example, a very attractive, intelligent woman possesses highly ranked resources. By possessing these resources, she may be able to maximize her gains in seeking a partner with equally rewarding attributes which may be a man with great financial stability and a fine physique. According to Goode (1996: 152), demanding to date partners whose total package value is vastly greater than one’s own would not only represent a serious lack of equity; it is also likely to elicit rejection. In essence, one can suggest that the mate selection process demonstrates similarities to ‘offers and bids’ suggestive of a stock market (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977).

The third component comprising Goode’s typology of the mate selection process demonstrates gender-linked valuation of traits, characteristics, and dimensions. From the moment a girl infant is wrapped in a pink blanket and a boy infant in a blue one, gender role development begins. The term gender role refers to a set of behaviours, prescriptions, and proscriptions for behaviour believed to be appropriate for males and females (Howard & Hollander, 1997). There exists a host of social institutions such as parents, siblings, peers, the educational system and the media which shape our gender role socialization which undoubtedly evolves into gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of women and men, including their physical characteristics, typical behaviours, occupational positions and personality traits (Howard & Hollander, 1997). Gender stereotypes often involve characteristics that are polar opposites to one another reflecting the strongly held assumption that sex is dichotomous.
Therefore, masculinity and femininity, as defined through opposition to one another, translate readily into ‘traditional’ sex roles (Bailey, 1988). Masculine roles are labeled as being instrumental while feminine roles are expressive. Men are said to possess relatively more self-directed, goal-oriented characteristics such as independence, assertiveness, ambition, and dominance, while women are said to possess more interpersonally oriented, emotive qualities such as kindness, dependence, sensitivity, and emotional responsiveness. According to Bailey (1988), even though these definitions do not mesh well with changing social realities, which often merge men’s and women’s spheres, Buss and Barnes (1986: 169) argue that traditional socialization practices are still evident which supports structural differences and instill role-appropriate behaviours for males and females. Nowhere is this sex role distinction between genders more evident than in the courtship relations between men and women. The system of requests and offers expressed in personal advertisements seems to match the stereotypical roles and expectations that men and women exhibit in mate selection processes (Goode, 1996). Deux and Hanna (1984: 364) state that “each sex offers social assets characteristically associated with their own sex and seeks social assets characteristically associated with the opposite sex.” Also supporting Goode’s assumption, Cameron, Oskamp, and Sparks (1977) contend that since adherence to traditional sex roles minimizes concern as to which partner is getting the better deal, the characteristics claimed for self and desired in a partner would tend to be one frequently valued as sex-appropriate in North American society. Further, in line with traditional sex-role specifications, personal advertisements should demonstrate greater height, age, intelligence, and status, for male partners so that their women could ‘look up’ to them both literally and figuratively (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977). Therefore, it seems apparent that ‘stereotyped sex role characteristics continue to be valued commodities” (Cameron et al., 1977: 30).

The final component in Goode’s (1996) typology is the process of matching.
According to the matching hypothesis, when individuals select a mate they tend to choose someone whose level of social desirability approximates their own (Harrison & Saeed, 1977). The matching hypothesis is based on the notion that similarity in relationships ensures a common basis of conversation, provides confirmation of one’s norms and values, and reduces friction that may arise from dissimilarity in tastes (Kalmijn, 1994). Research on interpersonal attraction consistently demonstrates that friends and mates tend to be similar on a number of dimensions (Kalmijn, 1994; Walster & Walster, 1976). Matching theory, also referred to as the homogamy theory, provides an explanation for the phenomenon of ‘like attracting like.’ Similarity of values and opinions leads to mutual confirmation of behaviour and worldviews, similarity of taste enlarges opportunities to participate in joint activities, and similarity of knowledge creates a common basis for conversation, which enhances mutual understanding (Kalmijn, 1994). Tendencies toward homogamy have been observed along many dimensions such as education, socioeconomic status, level of attractiveness, ethnicity and religious affiliations. Since social environments and subcultures such as schools, neighbourhoods, and place of employment from which mates are often selected tend to be homogenous, homogamy often results even in the absence of homogamous preferences or social preferences for homogamy (South, 1991). With specific reference to attractiveness, the physical attractiveness phenomenon, taken by itself, would predict the ‘idealistic’ or ‘maximization’ strategy among mate selection participants in which every party in the dating enterprise would seek partners who are regarded as highly attractive, regardless of his/her own level of attractiveness (Goode, 1996). However, a mitigating factor intervenes which defies the maximization dating strategy. According to Hatfield and Sprecher (1986:114), “ideally, people would prefer to date very attractive others, but, because rejection is costly, they end up choosing someone of about their same level of attractiveness.” Also, variations in physical attractiveness are associated with variations
in social desirability, and it has been found under many conditions that people become involved with partners who are about as good-looking as they themselves (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Deux & Hanna, 1984). Goode suggests that rejection and the prospect of not being able to date at all, result in courtship parties drifting toward persons similar to themselves in levels of attractiveness (Goode, 1996). Therefore, in essence, this theory contradicts the famous quotation that ‘opposites attract’ and instead postulates the famous quotations that ‘like attracts like’ or ‘birds of a feather flock together’.

The changes that have occurred throughout the history of courtship from arranged to supervised to open selection of partners have influenced what we look for in a mate. The literature and research, encompassing past to present day mate selection practices, have identified what characteristics were deemed essential to offer in oneself and to seek in a prospective mate. As we approach the millenium, following a quarter of a century of significant changes in gender roles, family, and work, the question emerges as to whether the characteristics deemed valuable in a potential mate persist.
METHODOLOGY

Description of Content Analysis

In order to perform a careful analysis of the characteristics/variables deemed valuable in the mate selection process I will conduct a content analysis of personal advertisements posted on the Internet. Personal advertisements are an excellent source of data for an analysis of mate selection processes. According to Lynn and Bolig (1985), personal advertisements contain a variety of positive features. First, persons who place an advertisement do so for instrumental reasons, not intending to be subjects of research. Thus confounding ‘demand characteristics’ or impression management demands so often present in the laboratory are eliminated. Second, placing an advertisement is a ‘real-life’ act with genuine consequences and, therefore, its study is more akin to naturalistic observation than to the short-term and artificial manipulations of laboratory research. Third, these advertisements offer a broader range of age, socioeconomic status, and geographical location than do the typical group of undergraduate subjects. Personal ads are placed by people of all ages, races, occupations, religions, and educational levels. Moreover, if we take the warning seriously that ‘what we say’ may be different from ‘what we do’ (Deutscher, 1973), taking personal ads and their responses as indicative of what parties do in the process of courtship is vastly superior to asking them what values they hold concerning their potential partners (Goode, 1996: 145).

In content analysis, researchers examine artifacts of social communication which in this case are personal advertisements. Cameron, Oskamp, and Sparks (1977), Harrison and Saeed (1977), and Bolig, Stein, and McKenry (1984) have conducted impressive examinations on personal ads using content analysis to test various hypotheses. Broadly defined, content analysis is “any technique for making inferences and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1968: 608). It is a coding scheme
used to analyze various types of documents, including personal ads. Content analysis provides a method for obtaining access to the words of the text which offers, in turn, an opportunity for the investigator to learn about how individuals view their social worlds (Berg, 1998). The most important advantage of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive since no one needs to be interviewed, no one needs to fill out a lengthy questionnaire, and no one must enter a laboratory (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, Sechrest, & Grove, 1981). Also, content analysis is cost effective since the materials necessary for undertaking such a procedure are easily and inexpensively accessible (Berg, 1998). According to Berg (1998: 244), “one college student alone can effectively undertake a content analysis.” Furthermore, content analysis provides a means by which to study processes that may occur over long periods of time or that may reflect trends in society (Babbie, 1992). Therefore, results gathered today on personal advertisements can be compared to personal ads written thirty years ago or thirty years from now in order to determine whether characteristics deemed valuable in the mate selection process persist.

**Sampling Procedure**

Personal advertisements will be obtained from various sites found on the Internet. A number of sites for personal ads require advertisers to comprise their ads based upon criteria or characteristics that are outlined for them. These sites will not be selected. Instead, the sites that will be selected are those which essentially give advertisers a blank page, or allow advertisers to compose their own ad based solely on characteristics they want to offer in themselves and seek in a prospective respondent. Systematic random sampling in which every fifth ad is selected from the population of ads found in each site will be employed. In an attempt to gain a representative sample of personal advertisements, 600 ads in which 200 heterosexual men, 200 heterosexual women, 100 gay men and 100 lesbian women advertisements will be examined. Gay men and lesbian
women advertisers seek long-term relationships less often than heterosexual men and women. The smaller population of long-term relationship ads necessitated the collection of fewer ads for gay men and lesbian women in comparison to heterosexual men and women. Even though personal advertisers comprise quite a heterogeneous mix “the overwhelming majority of personal ads are written by heterosexual singles between 22 and 65 who at least claim to seek a long-term, marriage-oriented relationship” (Goode, 1996: 144). Several rules for the inclusion of personal advertisement sites found on the Internet will be established in the selection of the sample. First, only personal advertisements in which the content includes not only characteristics offered by the advertiser but also characteristics sought in a prospective respondent will be included. In analyzing both the characteristics offered and sought one is able to determine whether the process of matching or the exchanging of ‘packages’ of traits play a role in the mate selection process. Second, since characteristics offered and sought in personal advertisements may differ depending on the nature of the relationship desired, ads requesting causal liaisons, secret trysts, extramarital encounters or one night stands will be excluded from the sample while ads requesting marriage or long-term commitments will be included. In controlling for the type of relationship sought I will be able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics deemed valuable in long-term relationships.

**Coding Categories**

The extensive list of variable/characteristics formulated by previous research on mate selection via personal advertisements conducted by Deux and Hanna (1984) and Davis (1990) will provide the foundation of the coding categories. Also, some additional categories and subcategories relevant to the hypotheses will be included. The research reviewed does not employ such a wide range of subcategories. I believe that
subcategories will provide more specific information on the global characteristic, therefore, permitting a more comprehensive analysis of the data. Each personal advertisement will be carefully coded with respect to each of the following 27 categories and subcategories. For almost all coding categories, separate coding will be conducted for attributes offered, attributes sought and similar attributes in order for careful analysis of the data to be completed.

1. Attractiveness: positive descriptors of physical appearance including references such as pretty, handsome, beautiful, good-looking.

2. Physique: this category is similar to the above, however, this does not focus on the face but rather on various body characteristics. This category will be divided into the following subcategories:
   a) height: examples include any specific height preference and examples such as tall, short, over six feet.
   b) weight: examples include any specific reference to weight and other references such as underweight, overweight, thin.
   c) eye colour: examples include obvious references such as blue-eyed, green-eyed, dark-eyed.
   d) hair colour: examples include blonde, brunette, red-head.
   e) body type: examples include references such as muscular, hour-glass shape, good figure, voluptuous.

3. Sexuality: sexual references referring to sexual behaviour, erotic fantasies or sexual physical characteristics were coded. Examples include erotic, sensuous, high sex drive, passionate.

4. Financial Security: references eluding to income, wealth, or other financial resources will be coded. Some examples include affluent, prosperous, well established, successful.
5. Employed: any reference pertaining to holding a specific job or occupation. This category will be divided into the following two subcategories:
   a) professional: examples include references such as doctor, lawyer, professor.
   b) nonprofessional: examples include references such as manual labourer, farmer, blue-collar worker.
6. Education: any references regarding educational attainment will be coded into the following subcategories:
   a) highschool: includes any reference to acquiring a highschool diploma.
   b) college: includes any reference to acquiring a college degree.
   c) university: includes any reference to acquiring a university degree.
7. Intelligence: any reference eluding to intellectual ability including bright, intellectual, smart will be coded.
8. Personality Traits: reference to any cognitive or personality disposition will be divided into the following subcategories:
   a) stability: includes any reference pertaining to one’s emotional and/or mental capacity such as emotionally stable, level headed, mature.
   b) humour/fun: examples include any reference indicating sense of humour, cheerfulness, fun-loving.
   c) instrumental: examples include self-directed goal-oriented traits such as independence, assertiveness, outgoing, aggressive, adventurous, self-confident, outspoken, and forward.
   d) expressive: examples include interpersonally-oriented, emotive qualities, such as kind, warm, tender, gentle, emotional, considerate, understanding, devoted, caring, loving, thoughtful, shy, and soft-spoken.
9. Values: any reference pertaining to moral virtue including examples such as honest, trustworthy, sincere, loyal, good character.
10. Relationship Status: specific reference to relationship status will be coded into the following subcategories:
   a) single
   b) separated
   c) divorced
   d) widowed
   e) relationship dissolution: examples include references pertaining to the dissolution of a long-term same-sex relationship.

11. Presence of Children: any reference providing information regarding having children from a previous relationship will be divided into one subcategory:
   a) number: includes references to the number of children one has if specifically mentioned.

12. Family Oriented: any reference regarding interest or lack of interest in having or enjoying children will be divided into yes or no subcategories:
   a) yes: includes references such as family man, father figure, great mothering capabilities.
   b) no: includes references such as no desire to have children, no interest in raising a family, desire a double income no kids lifestyle.

13. Friendship: any reference for a supportive friendship being a desired quality of the relationship will be coded.

14. Age: any reference to the advertiser or respondent’s age will be coded within the following subcategories:
   a) advertiser’s age: specific reference to the advertiser’s age or age range will be documented depending on whether age is mentioned in the advertisement.
   b) younger: any reference with regard to desiring a younger partner will be coded.
c) older: any reference with regard to desiring an older partner will be coded.

15. Hobbies/Interests: references pertaining to activities a person does or prefers will be divided into the following subcategories:
   a) sports: includes examples such as hiking, jogging, fishing, athletic, hockey fanatic.
   b) academic: includes examples such as enjoys reading, writing, attending seminars.
   c) cultural: includes examples such as likes art lover, coach potatoe, likes music, traveler.
   d) domestic: includes examples such as enjoys cooking, cleaning, gardening.

16. Race: any reference pertaining to an advertiser’s or respondent’s racial background will be documented.

17. Religion: any reference pertaining to an advertiser’s or respondent’s religious affiliation will be coded as similar or dissimilar in comparison to the advertiser’s specified religious affiliation.

18. Length: the length of the advertisement (in number of words) will be documented.

Coding and Data Analysis Procedures

Variables will be measured by a method similar to that employed by Davis (1990): Each ad requesting one of the aforementioned categories and/or subcategories will be scored for that attribute. If not explicitly mentioned, it will not be scored. Conceivably, an individual ad could mention all, some, or none of the variables. Comparisons will then be made between the sexes and sexual orientation on the basis of the variables, using percentages and chi squares.

The intent of my present research is to extend the foundation of past studies. An
expanded category system would provide one means to extend previous research by allowing for a more descriptive and specific analysis of the data. Also, acquiring personal ads from the Internet rather than from periodicals serves to advance my present research into the present day since the computer, even more importantly, the Internet, is an integral component of the day and age in which we live.
RESULTS

A total of 600 personal advertisements were used in the present research analysis. The length of the advertisements ranged from 27 words to 576 words with an average length of 228 words. Of this number, 200 ads were placed by heterosexual men, 200 by heterosexual women, 100 by gay men and 100 by lesbian women. Just as the composition of single adults runs the gamut from teenagers to senior citizens, the sample ranged in ages from the youngest at 18 years of age to the oldest at 74 years of age. The mean age of subjects placing ads was 35.8. The mean age of men and women was similar: 35.28 for women and 36.32 for men. Of the total number of individuals who mentioned their relationship status, 60.5% were single, 30.9% were divorced, 4.2% were separated and 4.2% were widowed. When race was offered by advertisers, 87.3% were White, 5.9% were Black, 3.8% were Hispanic and 2.9% were Asian. When religion was offered by advertisers, 81.9% were Christian, 13% were Athiest/Agnostic, 2.9% were Jewish, 1.2% were Buddhist, .8% were Muslim and .5% were Hindu.

Table 1 presents the rank order of the frequencies of the characteristics sought (cs) and characteristics offered (co) in the personal advertisements. The rank order of the characteristics sought differed from the rank order of the characteristics offered. A correlation (Rho= +0.433) between the rank order of the characteristics suggests a moderate reciprocal relationship for the characteristics offered and sought. The top five characteristics sought in the personal advertisements are age, expressiveness, race, body type, and humour. The five least sought characteristics include eye colour, domestic, academic, hair colour, and education. The top five characteristics offered in the personal
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advertisements are age, weight, hair colour, relationship status, and eye colour whereas the five least offered characteristics include domestic, instrumental, financial security, stability, and academic. A comparison of the percentages of characteristics offered and sought reveals that age, rather than attractiveness, is the characteristic that is both most often sought (77%) and offered (97.2%). Also, other characteristics that are quite equal in their sought and offered rankings are financial security (cs=22%, co=25%), education (cs=23%, co=22%), academic background (cs=25%, co=23%), and domestic (cs=26%, co=27%).

Table 2 presents the percentages in which characteristics are offered and sought in personal advertisements by gender and sexuality: heterosexual women, lesbian women, heterosexual men and gay men. A comparison of the characteristics in this table suggests that differences exist by gender and sexual orientation. For example, when examining the characteristic, sexuality, expressing references referring to sexual behaviour, heterosexual men (cs=30.5%, co=33%), heterosexual women (cs=22.5%, co=33.5%), gay men (cs=72%, co=62%), and lesbian women (cs=68%, co=70%) seek and offer this characteristic at quite different percentages. Differential characteristic preferences indicate variations of attributes deemed valuable in the mate selection process as a function of gender and sexual orientation.

In Tables 3 through 14, the data are presented from the highest to the lowest chi square values and levels of significance\(^1\). Presentation of data in this fashion enables the reader to detect easily the characteristics which yield the greatest significant difference between the advertisers examined.
### TABLE 2

Percentage of Advertisers Who Offered and Sought Specific Characteristics

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<th>Lesbian Women</th>
<th>Heterosexual Men</th>
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Table 3 and Table 4 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi square values, and significance levels for which men (m) and women (w) sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 3 demonstrates that for 13 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically significant gender difference was detected for financial security, values, employment, attractiveness, relationship status, expressive, body type, age (p=.01) and height, race, stability, humour, and eye colour (p=.05). Men were more likely than women to seek attractiveness, eye colour, and body type. Women were more likely than men to seek height, financial security, employment, stability, humour, expressive, values, relationship status, age, and race. For the characteristics domestic (m=4%, w=3.7%), cultural (m=20.3%, w=21%), academic (m=5.7%, w=5.3%), friendship (m=43.7%, w=44%), and family oriented (m=32%, w=31.8%), men and women were quite similar in their requests for these characteristics.

Table 4 demonstrates that for 13 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically significant gender difference was detected for financial security, weight, attractiveness, sports, employment, intelligence, academics, height (p=.01) and instrumental, number of children, stability, expressive, and domestic (p=.05). Men were more likely than women to offer height, weight, financial security, stability, employment, and sports. Women were more likely than men to offer the characteristics attractiveness, intelligence, instrumental, expressive, number of children, academics, and domestic. For the characteristics sexuality (m=42.7%, w=39%), relationship status (m=78%, w=80.7%), age
### TABLE 3

Gender Comparisons For Characteristics Sought in a Prospective Mate

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* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
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* significant at the .05 level!
** significant at the .01 level
(m=96.7%, w=97.7%), humour (m=43%, w=45.7%), and family oriented (m=36.3%,
w=37.1%), men and women offered these characteristics with minimal difference.

Table 5 and Table 6 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi
square values, and levels of significance for which heterosexuals (het) and homosexuals
(hom) sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 5 demonstrates that for 16 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically
significant sexual orientation difference was found for sexuality, number of children,
friendship, race, age, weight, education, financial security, stability, sports, values (p=.01)
and attractiveness, religion, humour and relationship status (p=.05). Heterosexuals were
more likely than homosexuals to seek attractiveness, financial security, stability, values,
sports, domestic, and religion. Homosexuals were more likely than heterosexuals to seek
the characteristics weight, sexuality, education, humour, relationship status, number of
children, friendship, age, and race. With respect to the number of children, homosexuals
were more likely to seek of the absence of children rather than the presence of children.
For height (het=41.2%, hom=44.5%), instrumental (het=19.8%, hom=18%), cultural
(het=21.3%, hom=18), eye colour (het=3.3%, hom=4%), and expressive (het=48%,
hom=46.5%), heterosexuals and homosexuals were quite similar in their requests for
these characteristics.

Table 6 demonstrates that for 18 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically
significant sexual orientation difference was found for sexuality, race, friendship, eye
colour, financial security, number of children, hair colour, weight, education, domestic,
sports, stability, relationship status, age (p=.01) and cultural, values, instrumental, and
**TABLE 5**  
Sexual Orientation Comparisons For Characteristics Sought in a Prospective Mate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
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<th>Sought By Homosexuals</th>
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<td>59.5 119</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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* significant at the .05 level  
** significant at the .01 level

NA: not applicable due to cell count of less than 5
## TABLE 6

**Sexual Orientation Comparisons For Characteristics Offered to a Prospective Mate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Offered By Heterosexuals</th>
<th>Offered By Homosexuals</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>16.73**</td>
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<td>16.26**</td>
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* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
Heterosexuals were more likely than homosexuals to offer financial security, stability, instrumental, values, age, sports, cultural, and domestic. Homosexuals were more likely than heterosexuals to offer the characteristics height, weight, eye colour, hair colour, sexuality, education, relationship status, number of children, friendship, and race. Again, with respect to number of children, homosexuals were more likely to offer the absence of children rather than the presence of children. For body type (het=62.5%, hom=67.5%) and employment (het=64.3%, hom=66%), heterosexuals and homosexuals were quite similar in the rate that they offered this characteristic.

Table 7 and Table 8 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi square values, and levels of significance for which heterosexual men (hetm) and women (hetw) sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 7 demonstrates that for 12 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically significant heterosexual gender difference was found for financial security, attractiveness, employment, values, expressive, body type, weight, relationship status, age, humour (p=.01) and stability and race (p=.05). Heterosexual men were more likely than heterosexual women to seek attractiveness, weight, and body type. Heterosexual women were more likely than heterosexual men to seek the characteristics financial security, employment, stability, humour, expressive, values, relationship status, age, and race. For instrumental (hetm=21%, hetw=18.5%), academic (hetm=7%, hetw=5.5%), education (hetm=9%, hetw=7.5%), domestic (hetm=6%, hetw=5%), and cultural (hetm=44%, hetw=41%), heterosexual men and women sought these characteristics with approximately the same frequencies.
### TABLE 7

Heterosexual Gender Comparisons For Characteristics
Sought in a Prospective Mate

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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>%</td>
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*significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
Table 8 demonstrates that for 15 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically significant heterosexual gender difference was found for financial security, weight, academic, attractiveness, height, sports, employment, stability (p=.01) and domestic, religion, instrumental, number of children, sexuality, intelligence, and education (p=.05). Heterosexual men were more likely than heterosexual women to offer height, weight, sexuality, financial security, employment, education, stability, and sports. Heterosexual women were more likely than heterosexual men to offer the characteristics attractiveness, intelligence, instrumental, number of children, academic, domestic, and religion.

Heterosexual men and women offered age (98.5%) with the same frequency and offered body type (hetm=64%, hetw=61%), friendship (hetm=24.5%, hetw=27%), family oriented (hetm=40.5%, hetw=38%), and values (hetm=31%, hetw=32%) with approximately the same frequencies.

Table 9 and Table 10 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi square values, and levels of significance for which gay men (gm) and lesbian women (lw) sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 9 demonstrates that for only 2 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically significant homosexual gender difference was found at the p=.05 level in which lesbian women sought relationship status and weight more than gay men. Therefore, gay men and lesbian women pretty much seek the same characteristics in a potential mate.

Table 10 demonstrates that for 3 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically significant difference was found in which lesbian women offered hair colour (p=.01), intelligence (p=.05), and values (p=.05) more than gay men. Therefore, just as for
### TABLE 8

**Heterosexual Gender Comparisons For Characteristics Offered to a Prospective Mate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Offered By Men</th>
<th>Offered By Women</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
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<td>81</td>
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*significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level
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<td>3.65</td>
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<td>65%</td>
<td>2.98</td>
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<td>32%</td>
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<td>68%</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Sports</td>
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*significant at the .05 level

NA: not applicable due to cell count of less than 5
TABLE 10
Homosexual Gender Comparisons For Characteristics Offered to a Prospective Mate

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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
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<th>Offered By Women</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
characteristics sought, gay men and lesbian women pretty much offer the same characteristics to potential mates.

Table 11 and Table 12 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi square values, and levels of significance for which heterosexual and gay men sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 11 demonstrates that for 7 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically significant male sexual orientation difference was found for sexuality, number of children, race, attractiveness, age, and humour (p=.01). Friendship was also found to be significantly different (p=.05). Heterosexual men were more likely than gay men to seek attractiveness. Homosexual men were more likely than heterosexual men to seek the characteristics sexuality, humour, number of children, friendship, age and race. With respect to number of children, gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to seek a partner with the absence children rather than with the presence of children. There exists very little male sexual orientation difference for the sought characteristics expressive (hetm=39%, gm=42%), height (hetm=36.5%, gm=39%), instrumental (hetm=21%, gm=19%), and weight (hetm=33%, gm=34%). For employment, there exists no difference between heterosexual men and gay men with each seeking this characteristic with a 17% frequency.

Table 12 demonstrates that for 15 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically significant male sexual orientation difference was found for financial security, race, eye colour, sexuality, friendship, number of children, stability, hair colour, sports, relationship status, religion, weight, values (p=.01) and age and family oriented (p=.05). Heterosexual
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sought By Heterosexual Men</th>
<th>Sought By Gay Men</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
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* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level

NA: not applicable due to cell count of less than 5
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<td>34</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
men were more likely than gay men to offer financial security, stability, values, family oriented, age, and sports. Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to offer weight, eye colour, hair colour, sexuality, relationship status, number of children, friendship, race, and religion. Again, when referring to number of children, gay men were more likely to offer the absence of children rather than the presence of children. Also, just as there existed no male sexual orientation difference for employment sought, there also exists no difference for employment offered and only a 0.5% difference for attractiveness offered to a potential mate.

Table 13 and Table 14 present the frequencies, corresponding percentages, chi square values, and levels of significance for which heterosexual and lesbian females sought and offered characteristics in the personal advertisements.

Table 13 demonstrates that for 11 of the 27 characteristics sought, a statistically significant female sexual orientation difference was found for sexuality, friendship, weight, number of children, financial security, race, education, stability, employment (p=.01) and values and age (p=.05). Heterosexual women were more likely than lesbian women to seek financial security, employment, stability, and values. Lesbian women were more likely than heterosexual women to seek weight, sexuality, education, number of children, friendship, age, and race. Just as for gay men, lesbian women were more likely to seek the absence of children rather than the presence of children. There exists no female sexual orientation difference for attractiveness sought and only a 0.5% difference for the characteristics family oriented and body type sought.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sought By Heterosexual Women %</th>
<th>N=200</th>
<th>Sought By Lesbian Women %</th>
<th>N=100</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26.85**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Security</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.04**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>12.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.82**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.73*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Oriented</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Colour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Colour</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level

NA: not applicable due to cell count of less than 5
Table 14 demonstrates that for 13 of the 27 characteristics offered, a statistically significant female sexual orientation difference was found for sexuality, friendship, race, eye colour, hair colour, weight, domestic, number of children, height academic, attractiveness (p=.01) and sports (p=.05). Heterosexual women were more likely than lesbian women to offer attractiveness, sports, academic, and domestic. Lesbian women were more likely than heterosexual women to offer the characteristics height, weight, eye colour, hair colour, sexuality, education, number of children, friendship, and race. Again, the absence of children rather than the presence of children was offered by lesbian women. This table also shows the existence of a very slight female sexual orientation difference for the characteristics values (hetw=32%, lw=29%), intelligence (hetw=34%, lw=32%), employment (hetw=58%, lw=60%) and body type (hetw=61%, lw=62%).

The striking difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals for the characteristic, number of children, requires a closer examination. When referring to the characteristic, number of children, Tables 1 through 14 report the frequencies and percentages of advertisers who mention the characteristic in any manner which includes the offers and requests for both the presence and the absence of children. Therefore, the values found in the tables may be misleading, especially when indicating a significant difference between two groups of advertisers. Therefore, Table 15 was developed in order to present a more precise breakdown of advertisers who offer and seek the characteristic, number of children, by dividing the characteristic into offers and requests of the presence of children and the absence of children. Table 15 demonstrates that gay men and lesbian women offer and seek the absence of children more than heterosexuals.
TABLE 14

Female Sexual Orientation Comparisons For Characteristics Offered to a Prospective Mate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Offered By Heterosexual Women</th>
<th>Offered By Lesbian Women</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% N=200</td>
<td>% N=100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>23.5 47</td>
<td>70 70</td>
<td>60.59**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>27.0 54</td>
<td>65 65</td>
<td>40.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>66.5 133</td>
<td>93 93</td>
<td>25.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Colour</td>
<td>71.5 143</td>
<td>96 96</td>
<td>24.70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Colour</td>
<td>76.5 153</td>
<td>98 98</td>
<td>22.55**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>59.0 118</td>
<td>84 84</td>
<td>18.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>27.5 55</td>
<td>8 8</td>
<td>15.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>64.5 129</td>
<td>66 66</td>
<td>15.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>17.0 34</td>
<td>37 37</td>
<td>14.76**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>79.0 158</td>
<td>95 95</td>
<td>12.92**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>36.5 73</td>
<td>20 20</td>
<td>8.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>58.0 116</td>
<td>42 42</td>
<td>6.85**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>48.5 97</td>
<td>35 35</td>
<td>4.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>26.5 53</td>
<td>17 17</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>63.5 127</td>
<td>55 55</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>98.5 197</td>
<td>96 96</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>18.5 37</td>
<td>13 13</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>79.0 158</td>
<td>84 84</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>44.5 89</td>
<td>39 39</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>44.0 88</td>
<td>49 49</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>55.5 111</td>
<td>51 51</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Security</td>
<td>5.0 10</td>
<td>7 7</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Oriented</td>
<td>38.0 76</td>
<td>35 35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>32.0 64</td>
<td>29 29</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>34.0 68</td>
<td>32 32</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>58.0 116</td>
<td>60 60</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>61.0 122</td>
<td>62 62</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .01 level
### TABLE 15

Percentages of Advertisers Who Sought and Offered
the Absence of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Heterosexual Men</th>
<th>Gay Men</th>
<th>Heterosexual Women</th>
<th>Lesbian Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sought</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages of Advertisers Who Sought and Offered
the Presence of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Heterosexual Men</th>
<th>Gay Men</th>
<th>Heterosexual Women</th>
<th>Lesbian Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sought</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, few advertisers seek the presence of children in a potential mate. Therefore, Table 15 demonstrates a clear distinction between heterosexuals and homosexuals in which the absence of children offered and sought is more prevalent amongst homosexuals than heterosexuals and that seeking the absence of children is more prevalent than seeking the presence of children.

Table 16 presents the rank order and the frequencies for the similar category in the personal advertisements. The similar category coded the request of characteristics in a potential mate that are also offered in the advertiser. The frequency rating of the similar category for friendship (35.3%) exceeded all other characteristics examined. Following friendship were body type (35.2%), sexuality (32.7%), presence of children (30.8%), and race (30.2%) indicating the importance these characteristics play when seeking a prospective mate with similar characteristics as oneself.

Upon an overview of Table 1 to Table 14, one outstanding feature of the personal advertisements is that age is the dominant characteristic that is both offered to a prospective mate and sought in a prospective mate for heterosexual women, lesbian women, and heterosexual men. For gay men, race ranks first and age ranks second for characteristics offered and age ranks first for characteristics sought.

Upon comparison of Table 3 to Table 4, it is interesting to acknowledge that for attractiveness, men sought this characteristic more often than women while women offered attractiveness significantly more often than men. Also, for financial security, employment, and stability, women sought this characteristic significantly more often than men while men offered financial security, employment, and stability significantly more
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressiveness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Oriented</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Colour</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Security</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Colour</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
often than women. Therefore, for these aforementioned characteristics, men are offering what women seek and women are offering what men seek.

When examining overall sexual orientation differences, Table 5 and Table 6 demonstrate that sexuality emerges as being the one characteristic that distinguishes homosexuals and heterosexuals in which gay men and lesbian women advertisers offer and request sexuality more than their heterosexual counterparts. In order to clarify the meaning of the attribute ‘sexuality’ in the present study, it is coded as any sexual reference referring to sexual behaviour, erotic fantasies or sexual physical characteristics. Examples include descriptives such as erotic, sensuous, high sex drive, well-hung, passionate, etc. Also, the characteristics race, sports, number of children, weight, education, and financial security were found to be significantly different between heterosexual and homosexual advertisers in both offers and requests in personal advertisements.

Upon comparison of Table 11 to Table 14, sexuality also emerges as the characteristic that distinguishes gay and heterosexual men and lesbian and heterosexual women. When comparing Table 12 to Table 14, the characteristics financial security, sexuality, and friendship were found to be significantly different between both gay and heterosexual men and lesbian and heterosexual women.

When examining overall gendered sexual orientation differences, Table 7 and Table 9 were compared. It was found there exists gender differences for 15 characteristics for heterosexuals whereas gender differences were only found for 2 characteristics for homosexuals. In fact, attractiveness was found to be the second largest
significantly different sought characteristic between heterosexual men and heterosexual women but was equally sought by gay men and lesbian women. Therefore, gay men and lesbian women essentially seek the same characteristics in a prospective mate while heterosexual men and women vary dramatically in the characteristics they seek in a prospective mate.

Also, upon comparison of Table 8 to Table 10, it was found that there existed gender differences for 15 characteristics were found for heterosexuals whereas gender differences were only found for three characteristics for homosexuals. In the case of financial security, there exists a 45% difference in offers between heterosexual men and women and only a 1% difference in offers between gay men and lesbian women. Therefore, just as for the characteristics sought, gay men and lesbian women essentially offer the same characteristics to prospective mates while heterosexual men and women vary considerably in the characteristics they offer a prospective mate.

Summary of Results

Both gender and sexual orientation, as well as their interaction, are associated with distinct patterns of characteristics sought and offered in the personal advertisements sampled. A summary of the content-analyses of the 600 personal advertisements are as follows:

⇒ age is the characteristic that is both most often sought and offered;
⇒ in the total sample, the top 5 characteristics sought are age, expressiveness, race, body type, and humour while the top 5 characteristics offered are age, weight, hair colour, relationship status, and eye colour;

⇒ overall gender differences were found for 13 of the 27 characteristics sought in which men were more likely to seek attractiveness, eye colour and body type while women were more likely to seek height, financial security, and employment;

⇒ overall gender differences were found for 13 of the 27 characteristics offered in which men were more likely to offer height, weight and financial security while women were more likely to offer attractiveness, intelligence, and instrumental;

⇒ overall sexual orientation differences were found for 16 of the 27 characteristics sought in which heterosexuals were more likely than homosexuals to seek attractiveness, financial security, and stability while homosexuals were more likely to seek weight, sexuality, and education;

⇒ overall sexual orientation differences were found for 18 of the 27 characteristics offered in which heterosexuals were more likely than homosexuals to offer financial security, stability, and instrumental while homosexuals were more likely than heterosexuals to offer height, weight, and eye colour;

⇒ heterosexual gender differences were found for 12 of the 27 characteristics sought in which heterosexual men were more likely to seek attractiveness,
weight, and body type while heterosexual women were more likely to seek financial security, employment, and stability;

⇒ heterosexual gender differences were found for 15 of the 27 characteristics offered in which heterosexual men were more likely to offer height, weight, and sexuality while heterosexual women were more likely to offer attractiveness, intelligence, and instrumental;

⇒ homosexual gender differences were found for only 2 of the 27 characteristics sought in which lesbian women sought relationship status and weight more than gay men

⇒ homosexual gender differences were found for only 3 of the 27 characteristics offered in which lesbian women offered hair colour, intelligence, and values more than gay men;

⇒ male sexual orientation differences were found for 7 of the 27 characteristics sought in which heterosexual men were only more likely to seek attractiveness while gay men were more likely to seek sexuality, humour, and number of children;

⇒ male sexual orientation differences were found for 15 of the 27 characteristics offered in which heterosexual men were more likely to offer financial security, stability, and values while gay men were more likely to offer weight, height, and eye colour;

⇒ female sexual orientation differences were found for 11 of the 27 characteristics sought in which heterosexual women were more likely to seek
financial security, employment, and stability while lesbian women were more likely to seek weight, sexuality, and education;

⇒ female sexual orientation differences were found for 13 of the 27 characteristics offered in which heterosexual women were more likely to offer attractiveness, sports, and academic while lesbian women were more likely to offer height, weight, and eye colour; and

⇒ gay men and lesbian women sought and offered the absence of children more often than heterosexual men and women, heterosexual men and women offered the presence of children more than gay men and lesbian women, and the seeking of the presence of children was rarely sought by respondents regardless of gender and sexual orientation;

⇒ friendship emerged as the characteristic that is most offered in oneself in turn for the request of friendship from a prospective mate.
DISCUSSION

The four hypotheses of this study will provide the framework for the discussion of the results. The four hypotheses are as follows:

**Hypothesis #1**: Physical attractiveness will be the characteristic most often sought and offered in personal advertisements;

**Hypothesis #2**: a) Men will offer financial security and seek physical attractiveness more than women, and

  b) Women will offer physical attractiveness and seek financial security more than men;

**Hypothesis #3**: a) Men will seek expressive traits and offer instrumental traits more than women, and

  b) Women will seek instrumental traits and offer expressive traits more than men;

**Hypothesis #4**: There will be a similarity between characteristics offered and characteristics sought in the personal advertisements.

**Hypothesis #1**:

The first hypothesis in the present research asserts that physical attractiveness is the characteristic most often sought and offered in personal advertisements. Previous research overwhelmingly reports that attractiveness is the most sought and offered attribute (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Deux & Hanna, 1984; Hatfield &

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Sprecher, 1986). It is quite surprising that the research findings of this study do not confirm the present hypothesis nor previous research findings. Overall, attractiveness ranked 8th for characteristics sought and 14th for characteristics offered (see Table 1). Since this characteristic’s frequency ratings of offers and requests dramatically differ from previous research, it serves as a characteristic worthy of further examination.

The gender of an advertiser may serve to have an impact on the frequencies of requests and offers of attractiveness from and to a potential mate. When examining the rank order of characteristics sought by men and women, attractiveness was 3rd for men and 11th for women (see Table 3). For characteristics offered, attractiveness was 15th for men and 12th for women (see Table 4). Thus, the data suggest that attractiveness in a partner is more salient for men than for women. Moreover, attractiveness is a more salient self-descriptor for women. The pattern of attractiveness in requests and offers reflects the greater expectation of attractiveness for women compared to men.

Learning to be concerned about one's physical appearance begins at the moment of birth and continues to be a lifelong process for women. Parents of newborns see their daughters as cuter, prettier and more delicate than their sons, and treat their babies accordingly. According to Unger and Crawford (1992: 331):

Many girls have their ears pierced and wear nail polish before they enter kindergarten. They listen to stories of Cinderella and princesses whose beauty drives men to slay dragons; they play with Barbie dolls and watch Miss America pageants. Throughout elementary school, girls receive more compliments on their appearance than boys do . . . Make-up sets in candy-like flavours and colors are sold for girls as young as three, advertised as ‘the fun way to learn beauty secrets’.
Hence, the cultural message is that a woman’s worth is found in her appearance. It is not surprising, then, to find that women offer attractiveness qualities to a potential mate more than men.

In an extensive review of research on attractiveness, Hatfield and Sprecher (1986: 375) conclude that “The evidence is clear: America is possessed by a culture of beauty. In school, business, in love and in life, appearance counts.” Moreover, Feingold’s (1992) contention that the physical attractiveness of a potential mate is more valued by heterosexual men is supported by the attributions of beauty. Since attractiveness is conceived as such a valuable commodity, attractive women serve to raise the status and prestige of men. “Men paired with attractive women are not necessarily seen as more physically attractive-instead, they are seen as ‘better’ people. People seem to infer that these men must have something going for them in order to win such an attractive ‘prize’ (Unger & Crawford, 1992: 330). Increased positive evaluations of men paired with attractive women makes it easy to see why seeking attractive mates is of more importance to men than to women.

Overall, in the present study, an analysis by gender (p=.01) revealed that men (48%) sought this characteristic more often than women (33%); and women (52.7%) offered this characteristic more often than men (38.7%). The fact that men seek attractiveness more than women and that women offer attractiveness more than men reflects the existence of the gender role stereotype that women are expected to be attractive.
TABLE 17
PERCENTAGE OF ADVERTISERS WHO OFFERED
AND SOUGHT ATTRACTIVENESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Heterosexual Women</th>
<th>Lesbian Women</th>
<th>Heterosexual Men</th>
<th>Gay Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offered</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advertisers’ sexual orientation should also be examined in order to determine its impact on the salience of requests and offers of physical attractiveness. Deux and Hanna (1984) contend that the heterosexual context seems to place far greater stress on physical appearance that can be brought to a relationship since they found that heterosexual advertisers offered and sought attractiveness more than lesbian/gay male advertisers. Offers of attractiveness ranked 14th for heterosexuals and 17th for lesbians/gay men with 48% and 41% offering this attribute correspondingly (see Table 6). Requests for attractiveness ranked 5th for heterosexuals and 12th for lesbians/gay men with 44% and 33.5% seeking this attribute correspondingly (see Table 5). Table 17 presents a breakdown by gender and sexual orientation of the offers and requests of physical attractiveness. Table 17 demonstrates that heterosexual women are distinguished from lesbian women (58%-42%=16%) by their greater number of offers of physical attractiveness to a potential mate. Also, heterosexual men are distinguished from gay men (55.5-33%=22.5%) by their greater number of requests for physical attractiveness in a potential mate. Heterosexual gender comparisons also fall in line with gender role stereotypes for attractiveness (p=.01) in which men seek this characteristic more often than women (55.5%-33%=22.5%); and women offer this characteristic more often than
men (58%-38.5%=19.5%). Lesbian women and gay men comparisons reveal little
difference for the offers of attractiveness (42%-39%=3%); and no difference in seeking of
attractiveness (33%). Thus, the data in the present study parallel the results documented

The present research results comparing lesbians/gay men with heterosexuals, in
their emphasis on the requests and offers of physical attractiveness, support previous
research analyzing personal advertisements (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Laner,
1978; Laner & Kamel, 1977). In Laner and Kamel’s (1977: 152) comparison of
heterosexual men and gay men, it was reported that “Appearance qualities claimed were
about the same for homo- and heterosexual men; however, considerably fewer homo-
than heterosexual men stated specifics of appearance desired in a prospective partner.”
Upon comparison of heterosexual and lesbian women, Laner (1978), reported that in
terms of characteristics offered, heterosexual women offer appearance qualities
significantly more often than lesbian women do. Therefore, with respect to attractiveness
in the lesbian/gay male context, the present and previous research supports the contention
made by Strom (1977: 8) in which she states that “there is a conscious attempt to
construct a new set of standards of attractiveness different from that of the larger society.
. . . there is an explicit denial of the importance of physical traits most usually associated
with female attractiveness.” Also, in an analysis of how attractiveness is perceived by
heterosexuals men and women and lesbian women and gay men, Blumstein and Schwartz
(1983) assert that gay men and lesbians face a challenge when judging partners’ physical
attractiveness. Since both partners can be judged by identical standards of physical
attractiveness, one way some gay and lesbian couples can avoid the pitfalls of being measured by the same yardstick is to adopt different ideals of what is attractive (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) suggest that, where heterosexuals may relate observable facial features with attractiveness, homosexuals may relate characteristics such as intelligence, personality traits, sexuality and values with attractiveness. In the present study, gay men and lesbian women may view characteristics such as age, sexuality, race, absence of children and friendship (see Table 11&12) as more important than attractiveness in potential mates.

Even amidst an examination of attractiveness by gender and sexual orientation, attractiveness still did not rise to the first ranked position in frequency of offers or requests as predicted by the present hypothesis and documented by previous researchers. The question of why the data of this study do not support prior research arises. A comparison of the methodologies of previous research with the current research was conducted in order to determine if methodological differences could account for the lower rankings for physical attractiveness in this study. The personal ad research reports numerous methods for coding the characteristic of attractiveness. For example, Smith and Waldorf's (1990) physical attractiveness category included four major components: physical features, facial features, body features, and weight. Also, Rajecki, Bledsoe, and Rasmussen (1991) defined attractiveness under the category 'looks' which included a wide range of descriptors such as attractive, beautiful, cute, plus any adjective referring to height or weight, such as 'full-figured' and 'teddy bear type'. The present research employed a more refined category for attractiveness which included only those
descriptors related to attractiveness. Reference to height, weight, body type, eye colour and hair colour were accorded separate categories. The operationalization of attractiveness employed in this study may account for the lower frequencies of offers and requests for physical attractiveness compared to previous research.

In order to determine whether the present research’s coding scheme led to lower rankings for the offers and requests for attractiveness, the six categories of attractiveness, height, weight, hair colour, eye colour and body type were collapsed to create a comprehensive category of attractiveness similar to previous research.

**TABLE 18**

**PERCENTAGES AND RANKINGS OF REQUESTS AND OFFERS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE ATTRACTIVENESS CATEGORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertisers</th>
<th>Sought (%)</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Offered (%)</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all subjects</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all men</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all women</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual men</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual women</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay men</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesbian women</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 presents the percentages and rank order of offers and requests for the new collapsed attractiveness category in the personal advertisements examined in the present research. This table demonstrates that when examining all the advertisers, attractiveness now soars to first place for both requests and offers for this characteristic. Also, by separating the advertisers’ requests and offers for attractiveness by gender and sexual orientation, attractiveness ranks either first or second place amongst the
characteristics examined. It is also interesting to acknowledge how the requests and offers of the comprehensive attractiveness category by lesbian women and gay men closely parallel the results by heterosexuals, whereas data on the single category of attractiveness report that heterosexuals requested and offered attractiveness significantly more than lesbian women and gay men.

These results raise methodological concerns about the use of comprehensive categories that serve to distort the findings and misrepresent the advertisers. For example, in the present study, one advertisement read as follows:

Single, Asian female with black hair, brown eyes, standing five feet three inches tall is seeking a man of similar descent with dark features standing over five feet five inches tall and weighing over 170 pounds . . . .

If content analyzed according to the operationalization of attractiveness by previous research, the characteristics of hair colour, eye colour, height and weight would be coded as attractiveness. If content analyzed according to the operationalization of attractiveness in the present study, attractiveness would not be coded as specific references to attractiveness (i.e., beautiful, handsome, knock-out) were not made. It is easy to see how the frequency for attractiveness would be greater in the former than in the latter example. It can be argued that the former method distorts the importance of attractiveness in seeking a partner.
Table 19 provides a frequency profile of the five characteristics added to attractiveness to comprise the comprehensive attractiveness category. This table demonstrates that attractiveness characteristics offered occur with much greater frequencies than attractiveness characteristics sought. Body type, eye colour, hair colour, height, and weight are all offered when describing oneself. When describing an ideal mate, height, weight and body type are sought; however, eye and hair colour are rarely sought. These findings indicate that height, weight, body type, hair colour, and eye colour appear in 59% to 98% of advertisements and suggest that these offered
characteristics are key ingredients in what appears to be formulaic self-descriptions. This table also shows that the five characteristics added to the attractiveness category which include body type, height, weight, hair, and eye colour, all exceed attractiveness for characteristics offered. Whether filling out passport applications, health card or driver’s license forms, etc., the standard format of these applications request the documentation of one’s height, weight, hair, and eye colour. Therefore, these formulaic self-descriptions develop into a type of script of self-portrayal which often reappears in self-descriptions found in personal advertisements.

The salience of physical attractiveness is not supported in the present study. Whether examined by the sample population, or whether examined by gender and sexual orientation, attractiveness never emerges as the characteristic most often sought and offered in personal advertisements. Attractiveness becomes the most important characteristic sought and offered only when a comprehensive attractiveness category is employed.

**Hypothesis #2**

The second hypothesis is twofold and asserts that: men will offer financial security and seek physical attractiveness more than women, and women will offer physical attractiveness and seek financial security more than men. Previous research consistently reports the existence of such an ‘attractiveness/financial security’ exchange (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Deux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). Overall, the present research findings for all the men and
women in the sample support the hypothesis (p=.01) that men were more likely to offer financial security (34.7%-5.7%=29%) and seek physical attractiveness (48%-33%=15%) than women; and women were more likely to offer physical attractiveness (52.7%-38.7%=14%) and seek financial security (19%-4%=15%) than men.

**TABLE 20**

PERCENTAGE OF ADVERTISERS WHO OFFERED AND SOUGHT FINANCIAL SECURITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Female Heterosexual</th>
<th>Female Homosexual</th>
<th>Male Heterosexual</th>
<th>Male Homosexual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Financial Security      |                     |                   |                   |                 |
| Offered                 | 5                   | 7                 | 49                | 6               |
| Sought                  | 25.5                | 7                 | 4.5               | 3               |

An examination of the heterosexual and the gay/lesbian contexts indicates that the data for heterosexual men and women support (p=.01) the exchange hypothesis. Table 20 shows that heterosexual men seek physical attractiveness and offer financial security more than heterosexual women. It is disappointing to find gender role stereotypes for heterosexuals still entrenched in 1999. Changes in women’s workforce participation held the promise that the attractiveness/financial security exchange would be altered to a pattern in which women would decrease their dependence on men’s economic stability and men would find women’s economic resources more attractive.

It is reasonable to suspect that the attractiveness/financial security exchange might not be the prominent exchange characteristics for gay men and lesbian women.

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According to Peplau (1981), the lesbian and gay couples in her research espoused an ideal of egalitarianism for their relationships, wanting partners to share power equally and support each other financially. When examining homosexual men and women’s exchange patterns, radically different results emerge in comparison to heterosexual men and women. In order for the existence of an attractiveness/financial security exchange to be found within lesbian women’s and gay men’s relationships, offers for attractiveness and financial security should be similar, and requests for attractiveness and financial security should be similar. Table 20 demonstrates that lesbian women do not offer attractiveness (42%) and financial security (7%) and do not seek attractiveness (33%) and financial security (7%) with similar frequencies. Similarly, gay men do not offer attractiveness (39%) and financial security (6%) and do not seek attractiveness (33%) and financial security (3%) with similar frequencies. Thus, the attractiveness/financial security exchange is not upheld in gay men and lesbian women contexts.

An examination of sexual orientation within gender has been conducted by previous researchers (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Laner, 1978; Laner & Kamel, 1977). Their findings report that offers of attractiveness are more important to heterosexual women than to lesbian women and the requests for attractiveness were more important to heterosexual men than to gay men. In terms of financial security, Laner (1978) reported that lesbians offer characteristics that promote their financial independence more than heterosexual women. According to Laner (1978: 54), these differences between heterosexual women and lesbians suggest that “in seeking relationships, lesbians tend to emphasize qualities suggestive of stability and social
embeddedness, whereas non-lesbian women emphasize more often ephemeral appearance qualities for which women are typically rewarded in the ‘straight’ world.” Upon comparison of heterosexual men and gay men, Laner and Kamel (1977) found that heterosexual men offered financial status more than gay men, again supporting the existence of a financial power imbalance structuring heterosexual rather than gay men’s mate selection practices.

Table 20 demonstrates that heterosexual women are more likely than lesbian women (25.5%-7%=18.5%) to seek financial security from a potential mate (p=.01); and heterosexual women are also more likely than lesbian women (58%-42%=16%) to offer attractiveness to a potential mate (p=.01). Also, heterosexual men were more likely than gay men (55.5%-33%=22.5%) to seek attractiveness from a potential mate (p=.01); and heterosexual men were also more likely than gay men (49%-6%=43%) to offer financial security to a potential mate (p=.01). These findings reflect the inequality in heterosexual relationships compared to the more egalitarian relationships of gay men and lesbian women in terms of financial security and attractiveness characteristics. This attractiveness/financial security exchange pattern echoes the conclusion of a 1977 study with respect to heterosexual individuals in which “The continuing operation of some very old bargaining and exchange mechanisms in the area of mate selection are still prevalent (Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977:30).
**Hypothesis #3**

The third hypothesis in the present research is also twofold and asserts that: men will seek expressive traits and offer instrumental traits more than women, and that women will seek instrumental traits and offer expressive traits more than men. Unlike research on attractiveness and financial security, previous research examining the role of personality traits in the mate selection process has been inconsistent. According to Spence, Deux, and Helmreich (1985) and Buss and Barnes (1986), men highly value expressive traits in women, whereas women highly value instrumental traits in men. Contrary to the above findings, Koestner and Wheeler (1988) report that women were more likely than men to request an expressive partner, and men were more likely than women to request an instrumental partner.

The current research findings yield yet even further incompatible results in comparison to previous research and with respect to the present hypothesis.

**TABLE 21**

**PERCENTAGES OF ADVERTISERS WHO SOUGHT AND OFFERED EXPRESSIVE AND INSTRUMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertiser</th>
<th>Expressive Sought (%)</th>
<th>Expressive Offered (%)</th>
<th>Instrumental Sought (%)</th>
<th>Instrumental Offered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all subjects</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all men</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all women</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual men</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heterosexual women</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay men</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesbian women</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 21 presents the percentages for which advertisers sought and offered expressive and instrumental traits in the personal advertisements. Although expressiveness is not considered a masculine trait, women requested expressiveness in a partner with a greater frequency than instrumental traits (55%-18%=37%). In fact, expressiveness was the second most sought characteristic for women while instrumental traits were found to be sought by less than one-fifth of all the female advertisers (see Table 3). Although the women in the sample did significantly (p=.01) surpass men in their requests for expressiveness (55%-40%=15%), it was also a highly ranked (4th) characteristic sought by men. Men sought instrumental partners (20.3%) with half the frequency in which they sought expressive partners (40%). Overall, concerning characteristics offered, it was found that both men and women offered expressive traits more than they offered instrumental traits. Therefore, in terms of overall gender differences for expressive and instrumental traits, these findings do not support the present hypothesis. Rather, the findings indicate that expressiveness can be deemed as an essential attribute sought and offered in the mate selection process for both men and women.

Peplau (1981) has stated that even when heterosexual couples strive for equality, gender based differences in interests, abilities, and personality traits make it difficult to 'break out' of traditional male/female sex-role patterns. Therefore, an examination to determine the existence of sex-typed heterosexual gender differences in personality traits was conducted. Heterosexual women seek expressiveness in a potential mate (p=.01) significantly more than heterosexual men (58%-39%=19%); and both heterosexual men (21%) and women seek instrumental traits in a partner with minimal difference and with
low frequencies. In offering personality traits, women offer expressiveness with a greater frequency than men (55.5%-47%=8.5%) plus, women also offer instrumental qualities significantly (p=.05) more than men (26.5%-17%=9.5%).

A persistent myth about lesbian and gay relationships is the belief that one partner adopts the role of ‘husband/male’ and the other the role of ‘wife/female’. This myth about lesbian and gay relationships has often been translated into gender role stereotypes in which the ‘butch/femme’ stereotype is applied to lesbian women and the ‘dominant/submissive’ stereotype is applied to gay men. Even though these gender stereotypes are applied to lesbians and gay men, they are structured by the dichotomous masculine/feminine or expressive/instrumental gender stereotypes applied to heterosexual men and women. Many studies discredit these stereotypes (Laner, 1978; Laner & Kamel, 1977). With respect to characteristics sought, gay men and lesbian women seek expressive traits with little difference (50%-42%=8%) and, they seek instrumental traits with very low frequencies and only a 2% difference. Concerning characteristics offered, again, there was no significant difference found between lesbians and gay men for expressive traits (51%-42%=9%) and instrumental traits (17%-13%=4%).

Upon comparison of heterosexual men and gay men, there was minimal difference found for requests of expressive traits (42%-39%=3%) and instrumental traits (21%-19%=2%) and, offers of expressive (47%-42%=5%) and instrumental traits (17%-13%=4%). Mirroring male sexual orientation results, no significant differences were found between heterosexual women and lesbian women for offers of expressive traits (55.5%-51%=4.5%) and instrumental traits (26.5%-17%=9.5%). Therefore, these results
discredit the 'butch/femme' and 'dominant/submissive' sex-role myth for lesbian women and gay men and support the findings documented by Laner (1978) indicating that rigidity of sex-role preferences is uncharacteristic of the vast majority of homosexual advertisers.

Overall, when examining personality characteristics, one outstanding feature that summarizes the findings for expressive and instrumental traits, is that regardless of gender or sexual orientation, expressiveness is the characteristic most often sought and offered in comparison to instrumental traits. Hence, expressiveness is an essential characteristic to possess and seek in the mate selection process. The essentiality of expressiveness for both men and women reflects a change from past research results in which women were to possess expressive traits and seek instrumental traits and men were to possess instrumental traits and seek expressive traits in a mate.

**Hypothesis #4**

The final hypothesis asserts that there will be a similarity between characteristics offered and characteristics sought in the personal advertisements. Specifically, individuals seek characteristics in a prospective mate that they possess in themselves. A global analysis of characteristics offered and sought indicates that characteristics offered differ from the characteristics sought. Previous researchers have asserted that tendencies toward homogamy have been observed along many dimensions including religion (Johnson, 1980), race (Schoen & Wooldredge, 1985), socioeconomic background (Blau & Duncan, 1976), occupation (Blau, Blum, & Schwartz, 1982) and ethnicity (Alba & Golden, 1986; Blau, Blum, & Schwartz, 1982).
The current study created a ‘similar’ category for each characteristic to record every instance that an advertiser requested a characteristic in a prospective mate that was offered in oneself. Table 16 presents the frequencies and rank order for this similar category. This table indicates that at most, similar characteristics were offered and sought by approximately a third of the advertisers. Although ranked first, only 35.3% of advertisers offered and sought the characteristic friendship.

According to Kalmijn (1994), homogamy between partners with respect to cultural resources leads to mutual confirmation of worldviews and the opportunity to participate in joint activities and mutual understanding. The characteristics in this study related to cultural resources include race, religion, cultural, academic, sports, domestic and values. Of these characteristics, race ranked fifth with nearly one-third of advertisers seeking a prospective mate of similar race. The remaining cultural resource characteristics had frequency ratings of 20% and below indicating a low frequency of cultural matching in the personal ad mate selection process.

Matching of physical feature characteristics was not evident in the personal ads. Twenty-six percent of the advertisers matched attractiveness and less than 10% matched on body type, height, weight, hair colour, and eye colour.

One might believe that an advertiser would desire a potential mate with similar family values when seeking a long-term commitment. Matching of family values occurred in 26% to 31% of the sample which included relationship status (26.3%), family oriented (28.8%), and presence of children (30.8%).
Matching of personality characteristics, including expressiveness, instrumental, stability and humour, was found to be strongest for expressiveness and humour. Therefore, the ability for partners to be affectionate with each other and to put a smile on each others’ faces seems to be essential matching components.

**Additional Research Outcomes**

Although the framework for my discussion was structured around the examination of four hypotheses, the results that emerged provided the opportunity to extend the analysis beyond these hypotheses. The most outstanding feature emanating from the current data is that age, not attractiveness, hailed as the characteristic most often offered (97.2%) and sought (77%) in the personal advertisements (see Table 1). Since age served as the characteristic most frequently used to describe oneself and an ideal mate, a more in-depth analysis of age was conducted. My findings on age support the results reported by Baker (1982), who examined both age and attractiveness, as well as other characteristics. She reported that “the most frequent way in which advertisers described themselves was in terms of age” (p. 139) and “the most frequently used category to describe an ideal mate was age (p. 141) however, “both sexes were less likely to refer to the age of their ideal mate than to their own age.” An examination of previous researchers’ assertions that men are more likely than women to desire a younger mate, while women are more likely than men to desire an older mate (Bolig, Stein, & McKenry, 1984; Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Rajecki, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991) was confirmed in the present study. According to the present data, of the men who stipulated
an age preference, 19% requested an older mate, 13% requested a mate of the same age, and 68% requested a younger mate; of the women who stipulated an age preference, 11% requested a younger mate, 31% requested a mate of the same age, and 58% requested an older mate.

The present research demonstrates that advertisers emphasize characteristics offered in themselves rather than characteristics sought in an ideal mate. Table 1 demonstrates that for all characteristics, excluding values, intelligence and stability, the frequencies for characteristics offered exceed characteristics sought. Thus, it would seem that personal advertisements provide a forum for self-presentation rather than identifying potential partners. Therefore, the onus lies on potential respondents to read and make a decision as to whether they will respond based on the advertisers’ self-descriptions. Advertisers are essentially selling themselves in order to be the object of pursuit rather than being the active pursuer.

One outstanding feature that emerged when comparing heterosexual men’s and women’s with gay men’s and lesbian women’s mate selection patterns was the striking difference between these two groups with respect to sexuality. Sexuality, defining any sexual reference to sexual behaviour, erotic fantasies or sexual physical characteristics, was offered and sought significantly (p=.01) more by gay men and lesbian women than by heterosexual men and women (see Tables 5&6). These findings are supported by Lee’s (1976: 403) statement that “among homosexuals the search for a suitable mate becomes that for a partner with an appropriate love style.” According to Laner and Kamel (1977: 160), “gender implies preferred sex role or activity for heterosexuals . . . , but among
homosexuals such matters must be made specific in advance, or a rewarding encounter will be less likely.” The overall findings for gay men and lesbian women in the current study suggest that concerns about attractiveness, the attractiveness/financial security exchange, and rigidity of sex roles are uncharacteristic of the vast majority of homosexual male and female advertisers, but that sexual activity type and style is of somewhat greater interest.

As documented earlier, during the periods of arranged and supervised courtship practices, race was a social barrier least likely crossed when selecting prospective mates. Even though we live in a day and age where interracial marriages are increasingly accepted, one-third of advertisers still sought mates of similar race demonstrating the persistence of importance placed on racial similarity in the mate selection process today.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Hypotheses and Future Research Directions

The purpose of the current study was to determine whether the characteristics deemed essential in the mate selection practice have changed or remained stable from past to present times. Although methods and mediums employed in the dating process have altered considerably throughout history, individuals have retained a constant image of an ideal mate. Thus, many of the characteristics deemed essential have persisted.

In an overview of the four hypotheses guiding the discussion, interesting findings arose. First of all, attractiveness was not the characteristic most often offered or sought. The discussion of the operationalization of attractiveness alerts readers to exercise caution in integrating the previously reported consistent pattern of findings of the central
role of physical attractiveness in the mate selection process. The consistent findings that attractiveness, more than any other characteristic, is offered and sought profiles advertisers as being superficial human beings and contributes to the supremacy of attractiveness in everyday life and its negative consequences. Future research should develop a standard practice for an operationalization of an attractiveness definition.

Secondly, the existence of an attractiveness/financial security exchange between men and women is supported by the data in the present study, but only with respect to heterosexual men and women. Heterosexual gender differences in mate selection preferences are consistent with the social exchange theory. Men place more value than women on the physical attractiveness in an ideal mate and, women place more value than men on the financial status of an ideal mate. Attractiveness and economic considerations as an exchange process are irrelevant in gay men’s and lesbian women’s selection of a mate. The implications of this finding elicits the conclusion of financial dependence of heterosexual women and financial independence of lesbians on their partners. Also, attractiveness was found to be an attribute bound in defining heterosexual exchange patterns rather than gay or lesbian exchange patterns. Thus, a market-based mentality which views individuals as commodities is more indicative of heterosexual mate selection practices.

Thirdly, in an attempt to confirm the pattern of offers and requests of expressive and instrumental traits by men and women, unexpected results prevailed. Even though expressiveness is equated with femininity and instrumentality is equated with masculinity, the offers and requests of these attributes are not differentiated by gender. Instead, characteristics which define expressiveness which include interpersonally-oriented, emotive qualities such as being considerate, warm, loving, thoughtful, etc. were found to be valuable for both women and men to possess and in turn request.

Fourthly, according to the matching hypothesis, when individuals select a mate
with similar characteristics as oneself, there is an assurance of a common basis of
conversation, a confirmation of one's norms and values, and a reduction of friction that
may arise from dissimilarity in tastes (Kalmijn, 1994). The systems of offers and requests
devising the similar category in the present study lends limited support to the existence of
the matching hypothesis. Since advertisers sell themselves more than advertise for a
partner the data are limited and the respondents are unknown making it difficult to
determine the existence of the matching of traits between advertiser and respondent.
Future research examining the mate selection process may need to examine whether the
matching process generalizes beyond the realm of personal advertisements (Koestner &
Wheeler, 1988: 159). Researchers may need to go one step further and determine who
responds to the personal ads in order to interview them. This information may be able to
shed more light on whether the respondents respond to advertisements placed by
advertisers who offer attributes similar to themselves. The opportunity to interact with a
diverse composition of individuals from the confines of home may effectively serve to
facilitate a mate selection process that transcends racial, economic or cultural differences
or simply reflect the market mentality of present day society.

Finally, to reiterate a statement asserted by Turkle (1995), personal advertisements
found on the Internet may link millions of people in new spaces that are changing the way
we think and the nature of our sexuality. However, the current research demonstrates that
the Internet and society today have altered some of the characteristics deemed essential,
but has not eliminated many of the parameters set up throughout history and by society
that effectively serve to guide the characteristics we seek in an ideal mate and offer to a
mate in the mate selection process.
ENDNOTE

1. In this study all significant chi square tests were further explored through Cramer’s V. Relationships significant at $p=.01$ were found to be moderate to strong whereas relationships significant at $p=.05$ were found to be weak. In the results section, both levels of significance are identified. In the discussion of the results, however, only findings at the $p=.01$ supported by moderate to strong values of Cramer’s V are discussed. The values of Cramer’s V are available upon request via my e-mail address at: Sleiman1@wincom.net.
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Vicinus, M.

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Whyte, M.K.
1990  
## APPENDIX A

### CODING SHEET FOR CHARACTERISTICS OFFERED AND SOUGHT IN THE PERSONAL ADVERTISEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>OFFERED</th>
<th>SOUGHT</th>
<th>SIMILAR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
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<td>Physique</td>
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<td>a) height</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) weight</td>
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<td>c) eye colour</td>
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<td>d) hair colour</td>
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<td>e) body type</td>
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<td>Sexuality</td>
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<td>Financial Security</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
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<td>a) professional</td>
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<td>b) nonprofessional</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>a) high school</td>
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<td>b) college</td>
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<td>c) university</td>
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<td>Intelligence</td>
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<td>Personality Traits</td>
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<td>a) stability</td>
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<td>b) humour/fun</td>
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<td>c) instrumental</td>
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<td>d) expressive</td>
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<td>Values</td>
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<td>Relationship Status</td>
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<td>a) single</td>
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<td>b) separated</td>
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<td>c) divorced</td>
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<td>d) widowed</td>
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<td>e) rel't dissolution</td>
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<td>Presence of Children</td>
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<td>a) number</td>
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<td>Family Oriented</td>
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<td>a) yes</td>
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<td>b) no</td>
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<td>Friendship</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>a) advertiser's age</td>
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<td>b) younger</td>
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<td>c) older</td>
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<td>Hobbies/interests</td>
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<td>a) sports</td>
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<td>b) academic</td>
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<td>c) cultural</td>
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<td>d) domestic</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td>Length</td>
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</table>
VITA AUCTORIS

Name: Mona Sleiman

Place of Birth: Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Date of Birth: June 2nd, 1972

Education: Completed Highschool from Leamington District Secondary School, Leamington, ON

Completed B.A. Honours in Psychology and B.A. Honours in Sociology from the University of Windsor, Windsor, ON

Currently working towards her Master of Arts Degree in Sociology at the University of Windsor, Windsor, ON