

Of these three forms of the matching hypothesis, the least amount of support has been found for the first version (people yearn for the ideal, regardless of the possibility of attaining it), the most support has been found for the third version.

More Complex Matching

Although the original matching hypothesis proposed that people would pair up with someone as “socially desirable” as themselves—choosing people who are equal in a panoply of assets—over time, the matching hypothesis has come to be associated specifically with matching on *physical attractiveness*. However, people come to a relationship offering many desirable characteristics. A person may compensate for a lack of physical attractiveness with a charming personality, kindness, status, money, and so forth. The notion that individuals can sometimes compensate for their lack of attractiveness by offering other desirable traits has been termed “complex matching.” As social psychologists point out, a traditional type of pairing is gender-linked: An older, wealthy, successful man pairs with a younger, attractive woman—known in popular culture as the “trophy wife”—a testament to a businessman’s success.

Third-Party Assistance and the Matching Principle

Today, most people make their own dating and mating choices. The original matching hypothesis was proposed as an explanation for individuals’ decisions about their own mating and dating choices. Nonetheless, matching is sometimes assisted by third parties—friends, families, and by Internet dating sites. It is likely that friends, families, and matching services also consider physical attractiveness and other desirable traits as they determine who will make suitable matches.

Conclusions

Many years ago, sociologist Erving Goffman observed that in the United States, a proposal of marriage occurred when a man calculated his own social worth and suggested to a woman that her

assets weren’t so much better as to “preclude a merger.” Goffman and social psychologists who proposed and tested the matching hypothesis were keen observers of the dating and mating marketplace. Today, compelling evidence indicates that although men and women may yearn for the ideal mate, when the time comes to make a choice they generally settle for the “art of the possible.”

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See also Assortative Mating; Equity Theory; Exchange Processes; Physical Attractiveness, Role in Relationships

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MATE GUARDING AND POACHING

Like most birds and many other species, most people employ a socially monogamous mating strategy. At any given time, a person maintains a romantic relationship with only one other person in which both members of the relationship cooperate to maintain the relationship. This social relationship, however, does not guarantee sexual exclusivity. Although it may be socially undesirable, men and women sometimes engage in sexual behavior with people other than their partners. Keeping one’s long-term mate from being sexually unfaithful is as much of a problem for people today as it was for our ancestors hundreds of thousands of years ago. Because this has been such a costly problem throughout human evolutionary

history, people today have evolved a series of cognitive and affective mechanisms that motivate behaviors intended to guard against such infidelities, as well as behaviors intended to circumvent the mate guarding behaviors of a potential mate's current partner. This entry discusses findings from recent research in the area of human romantic relationships suggesting how and why people keep their own mates from being sexually unfaithful and how and why other people evade those attempts.

Having one's mate be unfaithful can be costly for both men and women. Men whose partners are sexually unfaithful run the risk of being cuckolded—unwittingly investing time, energy, and material resources in genetically unrelated offspring. In addition, a man whose partner has been unfaithful also risks permanently losing his partner to another man, effectively losing all previous investment in his partner and in the relationship, as well as all possibility of future reproduction with her. He must then expend effort finding another mate and developing a new relationship. Women, on the other hand, are never at risk for cuckoldry. When a woman has a child, she knows that the child is hers. However, women still are subject to negative consequences of their partner's infidelity. A woman whose partner defects the relationship, even temporarily, risks losing her partner's investment in herself and her offspring. If she is interested in establishing a new romantic relationship, she must expend effort finding another mate who is willing to invest in her and any children she may have. Given the reproductively costly consequences of a partner's infidelity, then, people in romantic relationships perform a variety of behaviors intended to discourage their mates from defecting from the relationship in the form of an infidelity.

Mate Guarding

People use a variety of behaviors to guard their mates and attempt to keep them from being unfaithful. Studies have reported dozens of different behaviors that people use as part of their mate guarding efforts. These behaviors have been categorized into five general tactics: direct guarding, intersexual negative inducements, intrasexual

negative inducements, positive inducements, and public signals of possession.

Direct Guarding tactics include some of the more overt forms of mate guarding behaviors—for example, snooping through a partner's personal belongings, insisting that a partner does not go out without oneself, and monopolizing a partner's time to keep him or her from interacting with potential affair partners. Intersexual Negative Inducement tactics focus on the manipulation of one's partner. For instance, a woman may flirt with another man in front of her partner to make him jealous, or a man may yell at or be physically violent toward his partner when he catches her flirting with someone else. Intrasexual Negative Inducements are similar to Intersexual Negative Inducements except that they include behaviors aimed at same-sex rivals rather than one's partner. Instead of hitting one's partner for flirting with another man, for example, a man may hit the man who flirted with his partner. He may also tell other men negative things about his partner to keep them from being interested in her.

Not all mate retention behaviors are negative, however. Some behaviors, such as those tactics categorized within Positive Inducements, are aimed at enticing one's partner to stay in the relationship rather than punishing a partner's defection. These tactics include behaviors such as presenting a partner with gifts, enhancing one's own appearance to look nice for a partner, and offering a partner help, support, and affection. The fifth category of mate retention tactics, Public Signals of Possession, also includes behaviors that amount to bestowing benefits on a partner rather than inflicting costs on a partner. These tactics can include being physically affectionate in public and bragging about one's partner to others. Regardless of which category of tactics is used, and whether or not they are consciously associated with the goal of guarding one's partner, all mate retention behaviors are ostensibly aimed at keeping one's partner invested in the current relationship.

Just as mate guarding tactics differ, people differ in their use of these tactics. For instance, men are more likely than women to attempt to retain partners by displaying their resources, such as by spending a lot of money on their partners. This is not surprising given that women are particularly attracted to men who have resources and are

willing to offer access to those resources. Men are also more likely than women to threaten other men who show interest in their partners. Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to keep their partners invested in the relationship by enhancing their own appearance, telling other people that their partner is taken, and punishing men's threats to be unfaithful.

In addition to differences between men and women in the use of mate retention behaviors, there are also individual differences that vary from one relationship to another. For example, men perform more mate retention behaviors with younger partners. This is because younger women are perceived to be "higher quality" mates than older women, although there is as yet no research investigating mate guarding by male partners of postmenopausal women. Men's perceptions of their partner's physical attractiveness also influences mate retention behaviors. Men who believe that their partners are more attractive perform more mate retention behaviors than do men who believe their partners are less attractive. Age discrepancy in a relationship is also associated with mate retention behaviors, with men who are significantly older than their partners performing more mate retention behaviors. Mate retention behaviors also increase with the perceived risk of partner infidelity. The more likely a man thinks that his partner will be sexually unfaithful, the more mate retention behaviors he uses, suggesting that mate retention behaviors are indeed enacted to thwart anticipated infidelities.

Not all women perform mate retention behaviors to the same degree either. Younger and more attractive women are more likely than are older and less attractive women to enact mate retention behaviors. Women in general perform more mate retention behaviors with husbands who have higher incomes and who display greater status striving. In contrast to men, women who believe that their partners are more attractive perform fewer mate retention behaviors.

Mate Poaching

Mate guarding behaviors function to keep one's partner from deserting the current relationship. Mate poaching, one reason for leaving an existing

relationship, occurs when a person attempts to attract someone who is already involved in a committed relationship with another person. Although the percentages vary across cultures, about 50 percent of men and women report having made at least one attempt at poaching someone from a relationship at some point in their lives. Roughly 70 to 85 percent of men and women report that someone else has tried to poach either themselves or their partner out of a relationship.

The particular tactics that people use to poach potential mates are not unlike the tactics people use to attract and then to guard their own mates against poaching. Women enhance their own physical appearance to attract the attention of an already-mated man and then provide him with easy sexual access. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to display resources and generosity (i.e., a willingness to invest in a woman and any possible offspring) and by making a woman question her current partner's fidelity and commitment to the relationship.

As with mate guarding, all poaching behaviors are not equal. Not all people are poachers, and some people are more likely to receive poaching attention than others. Agreeable and conscientious people are less likely to be poachers than are unreliable and self-described erotophilic people (i.e., people who have positive feelings and responses to sex and sex-related stimuli). Extraverts and those open to new experiences are more likely to receive poaching attempts, whereas neurotic, unloving, and masculine people are more likely to be successfully poached away from an existing relationship. Characteristics of the existing relationship are also important to consider in the use of poaching tactics. Poaching tactics are perceived to be less effective when used on men and women in established, long-term, committed relationships, compared with people who are just starting or just ending a relationship.

The benefits of mate poaching mirror the benefits of nonpoaching relationships: Men gain access to physically and sexually attractive women and women gain access to men who have resources and who display a willingness to invest those resources in her and possibly her children. The potential costs of mate poaching, however, are substantial. A poacher must be concerned with competing against a current partner and with retribution by the

current partner, should he or she discover the poaching. In addition, most relationships include some amount of fidelity uncertainty. In a relationship in which one of the members has been poached from a previously existing relationship, the risk of infidelity is exacerbated. That person might still be sexually involved with the partner from the earlier relationship, and he or she might be susceptible to further poaching from other sources.

Being poached is not a passive process, and some relationships are subject to poaching enticement. Poaching enticement occurs when a person in a relationship encourages poaching by a partner's rivals. Women who desire to be attracted away from their current partners are more likely to display physical beauty and offer sexual access to desirable men other than her current partner. Men who want to be poached are more likely to display resources and dominance behaviors to potential poachers.

Poaching enticement is not without costs, however. A person whose poaching enticement efforts have been detected by his or her current partner may be at risk for more severe and most likely unwanted mate guarding behaviors. Consequently, people who engage in poaching enticement also engage in behaviors intended to disguise such enticement, often by overtly giving their current partners what they want most. For example, women may increase the frequency of sexual activity with their current partners in addition to maintaining their daily routines and keeping atypical behaviors to a minimum. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to display overly pronounced commitment to their current partner.

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See also Attraction, Sexual; Evolutionary Psychology and Human Relationships; Jealousy; Mate Preferences; Mate Selection

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MATE PREFERENCES

Romantic relationships are everywhere—people in all cultures engage in various forms of mating, including short-term, casual sexual relationships on the one hand and committed partnerships and marriage on the other. This entry looks at people's mate preferences, including the characteristics that people desire in long- and short-term relationships, how selective people are in choosing a mate, and trade-offs individuals make. Some important ways in which men and women are alike and differ are described; these mate preference phenomena are explained from two major theoretical perspectives.

Short-term relationships, including one-night stands, casual sex, and sexual affairs, tend to lack commitment and revolve around sexual or physical relations. Conversely, long-term relationships, including marriage and exclusive, steady relationships, tend to involve commitment and investment between partners, and endure for a while. Although people may sometimes find themselves in relationships that have characteristics of both types, a general division of relationships as either committed, long-term, or casual, short-term is nonetheless useful in characterizing the various nuances of mate preferences, and is used in this entry.