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The Predictive Validity of Ideal Partner Preferences: A Review and Meta-Analysis

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A central element of interdependence theory is that people have standards against which they compare their current outcomes, and one ubiquitous standard in the mating domain is the preference for particular attributes in a partner (*ideal partner preferences*). This article reviews research on the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences and presents a new integrative model that highlights when and why ideals succeed or fail to predict relational outcomes. Section 1 examines predictive validity by reviewing research on sex differences in the preference for physical attractiveness and earning prospects. Men and women reliably differ in the extent to which these qualities affect their romantic evaluations of hypothetical targets. Yet a new meta-analysis spanning the attraction and relationships literatures (k = 97) revealed that physical attractiveness predicted romantic evaluations with a moderate-to-strong effect size (r = ~.40) for both sexes, and earning prospects predicted romantic evaluations with a small effect size (r = ~.10) for both sexes. Sex differences in the correlations were small ($r_{difference}$ = .03) and uniformly nonsignificant. Section 2 reviews research on individual differences in ideal partner preferences, drawing from several theoretical traditions to explain why ideals predict relational evaluations at different relationship stages. Furthermore, this literature also identifies alternative measures of ideal partner preferences that have stronger predictive validity in certain theoretically sensible contexts. Finally, a discussion highlights a new framework for conceptualizing the appeal of traits, the difference between live and hypothetical interactions, and the productive interplay between mating research and broader psychological theories.

Keywords: ideal partner preferences, sex differences, traits, close relationships, attraction

People have standards in nearly every domain of life. We expect our food to be tasty, our homes to be dry, our streets to be safe, and our coworkers to be dependable. Interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) proposes that people compare these mental representations of the outcomes that they expect with their actual experiences. When people's actual experiences are inconsistent with their standards, they may become upset and take action, perhaps by sending a meal back to the kitchen, fixing the leak in the roof, imposing a curfew on the children, or gossiping about Gary in accounting. In essence, people's standards are important because they are functional: They encourage people to evaluate and (if possible) alter situations that provide inadequate outcomes. This core tenet of interdependence theory has both an intuitive appeal and a pervasive reach.

In the romantic domain, scholars have studied expectations about partners' traits and attributes for decades, referring to these

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standards using terms such as mate preferences, ideal standards, and ideal partner preferences. The interesting grist for psychological study is not simply that people have preferences for particular attributes in a romantic partner, but rather that these preferences differ across people: One person might place a high value on physical attractiveness, whereas another person might value intelligence. Furthermore, these preferences differ across groups—notably biological sex—and the existence of sex differences in ideal partner preferences has served as a cornerstone of the evolutionary psychological perspective on human mating and informed high-profile debates regarding origin theories of human sex differences (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). This research on individual differences and sex differences in the content and structure of ideal partner preferences has stretched from the mid-20th century (e.g., Christensen, 1947; R. Hill, 1945) to the present day.

In the last 10–15 years, scholars have devoted increased efforts to studying the functional, interpersonal implications of ideal partner preferences (e.g., Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). This functional literature examines how ideal partner preferences affect the manner in which people evaluate and regulate their behavior in romantic contexts—the very "downstream" consequences implied by interdependence theory. The simplest hypothesis within this perspective is that people should negatively evaluate romantic partners who do not match their ideals and positively evaluate those who do. Although this hypothesis may seem self-evidently true, this emerging literature suggests that the effect of ideal partner preferences on romantic evaluations is not so straightforward and requires diverse explanatory perspectives beyond interdependence theory alone. Indeed, the recent work in this domain extends beyond standards, carrying implications for the examination of evolutionary hypotheses, the way that people perceive traits in others, and the merits of common methodological and statistical conventions in psychology.

This article reviews research that addresses how ideal partner preferences intersect with the process of initiating and maintaining a romantic relationship. As part of the conceptual foundation of this review, we rely on Levinger and Snoek's (1972) intersection model of pair relatedness (see Figure 1), a model that identifies three relationship levels or stages. The first is *awareness*; in this stage, two individuals (e.g., A and B) form impressions of each other but have not yet interacted. The second is *surface contact*; in this stage, two individuals have interacted and have shared some information with each other at a minimum. The third is *mutuality*; in this stage, two individuals are in a mutually recognized relationship and have achieved some level of closeness. Interdependence increases between two partners as they progress through these three stages, and although the two partners presumably acquire additional information about each other at each stage, degree of interdependence is the key feature that separates the three stages (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).

Levinger and Snoek's (1972) framework is useful because the three stages roughly correspond to three distinct methodologies used to study ideal partner preference predictive validity. Specifically, scholars have examined whether the match between ideal partner preferences and a partner's qualities predicts romantic outcomes when participants either (a) evaluate hypothetical others (awareness), (b) evaluate face-to-face interaction partners in initial attraction contexts (surface contact), or (c) evaluate a current romantic partner (mutuality). In fact, nearly every study discussed in this review fits cleanly into one of these three categories, and in light of this framework, the literature achieves a pleasing coherence.

This article is organized into three major sections: a section on sex differences in ideal partner preferences, a section on individual differences in ideal partner preferences, and a concluding section with an integrative model. Within each section, we review predictive validity evidence deriving from studies that correspond to all three of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) stages. In the first major section, we review research on sex differences in the ideal partner preference for *physical attractiveness* and *earning prospects/ambition*—two classic sex differences that continue to inspire considerable interest and debate (Schmitt, 2012; Zentner & Mitura, 2012). Prior work consistently reveals that physical attractiveness and earning prospects affect men's and women's romantic evaluations differently when participants are evaluating hypothetical targets (awareness), yet some recent work has questioned whether these attributes have sex-differentiated effects on romantic evaluations once a live face-to-face interaction has taken place (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). To address this controversy, we present a new meta-analysis that documents, across both attraction (surface contact) and relationship (mutuality) paradigms, the lack of a sex difference in the association of physical attractiveness and earning prospects with romantic evaluations.

In the second major section, we review research that has examined the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences using an idiographic approach. Sex may not moderate the association between physical attractiveness/earning prospects and romantic evaluations because participant sex is merely a crude proxy for the ideal partner preference for these attributes. Therefore, a fairer test of the predictive power of such preferences entails the use of each participant's own ideal partner preference as a moderator in lieu of his or her sex. Although this individual differences literature is smaller than the sex differences literature, it addresses with greater precision the theoretical rationale for why ideals affect romantic evaluations in some contexts but not in others. This section also highlights how the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences may improve when researchers use alternative methods of assess-

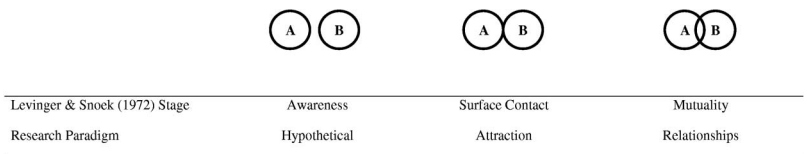


Figure 1. Levinger and Snoek's (1972) intersection model of pair relatedness.

ing either ideal partner preferences or the match between ideals and a partner's traits.

The third section of the article introduces an integrative extension of Levinger and Snoek's (1972) model that can serve as a useful guide for future research. Specifically, this model considers current evolutionary perspectives on ideal partner preferences (i.e., the ideal standards model; Fletcher et al., 1999) along with social psychological perspectives that emphasize the psychological difference between evaluating a live and a hypothetical person (Eastwick, Hunt, & Neff, in press). Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the myriad implications of this work that extend beyond sex and mating.

A brief note on terminology: In this article, we adopt the term *ideal partner preferences* to refer to the traits and attributes that people desire in their ideal romantic partner. We use the terms *trait* and *attribute* interchangeably to refer to any quality of a romantic partner that exhibits interpersonal variability (i.e., some partners have it more than others) and intrapersonal stability (i.e., partners who have it at one point in time will tend to exhibit it at other points in time). Although people surely vary in their ideals for other, more dyadic aspects of romantic relationships (e.g., similarity, interaction style, family structures, shared values; Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985), the research at the intersection of ideals and these topics is sparse and is not reviewed in this article. Our conceptual dependent variable is encompassed by the term *romantic evaluation*. We use this term to refer to any positive or negative attitude about a romantic partner or romantic relationship, such as romantic desire for a potential partner, relationship satisfaction with a current partner, or any of the myriad, correlated evaluative constructs that permeate the relationships literature (e.g., passion, love, commitment, trust; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000b).

Section 1: Sex Differences in Ideal Partner Preferences

Historical and Theoretical Background

The key theoretical principle that underlies the concept of the ideal partner preference is that personality traits have interpersonal consequences (Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1979). Some early ideal partner preference studies were indeed guided by this then-nascent discipline of personality psychology (Langhorne & Secord, 1955), but most studies on this topic instead derived from the marriage and family studies tradition. In the late 1930s, sociologists Reuben Hill and Harold Christensen intuitively generated a list of 18 items that people generally looked for when choosing a marriage partner, including "education and general intelligence," "desire for home and children," and "refinement, neatness, etc." Their studies (Christensen, 1947; R. Hill, 1945) marked an initial attempt to document the extent to which people rate certain traits as important or unimportant in a mate; for example, "dependable character" and "emotional stability and maturity" received the highest ratings in both studies. Furthermore, both studies revealed sex differences such that men placed more importance than women on "good looks" and women placed more importance than men on "good financial prospect." Over the subsequent decades, sociologists who studied marriages and families adopted the Hill–Christensen questionnaire (Hoyt & Hudson, 1981; Hudson & Henze, 1969; Liston & Salts, 1988; McGinnis, 1958; Wakil, 1973), and the consistent use of this measure permitted a comprehensive examination of change in the importance of these items over 50 years (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001).

In the 1980s, David Buss adopted the Hill–Christensen questionnaire for a study of ideal partner preferences across 37 cultures worldwide (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990). In the wake of this ambitious study (and a separate study by Buss & Barnes, 1986, which used a similar measure), the study of ideal partner preferences found renewed zeal among psychologists. One reason for this enthusiasm was the emergence of evolutionary psychology, a theoretical framework proposing that people's mating behaviors might reflect mental adaptations that were honed by natural selection in humans' ancestral past (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992; Cosmides, 1989). Ideal partner preferences proved to be a productive domain for the testing of evolutionary hypotheses: For example, the evolutionary perspective generated possible explanations for—and new hypotheses about—the physical attractiveness and earning prospects sex differences documented in the early Hill–Christensen studies. Specifically, Buss (1989, 1992) suggested that these findings reflected sex-differentiated mental adaptations that had evolved for their reproductive benefits, and he interpreted the pervasiveness of these sex differences across cultures as evidence that they might be typical of the human species. In the years that followed, ideal partner preferences research became one of the foundational topics of evolutionary psychological inquiry (e.g., Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002; Regan, 1998) and supported the ascendance of this theoretical perspective throughout the 1990s (Eastwick & Tidwell, in press).

Buss (1989, 1992) grounded these sex differences in the evolutionary theorizing of Trivers (1972), Williams (1975), and Symons (1979). According to these perspectives, there are sex differences in the level of parental investment required for the successful conception, gestation, and nurturance of offspring, and these sex differences in parental investment cause males and females to evolve different reproductive strategies. As a male's reproductive success is primarily limited by the availability of fertile mates, Buss (1989) hypothesized that men have evolved the preference to mate with women possessing indicators of fertility, such as youth and related features that connote physical attractiveness (e.g., lustrous hair, clear skin, muscle tone). Women also need to secure fertile mates if they are to reproduce, but male fertility is not associated with youth to the same extent (Williams, 1975), and therefore women's preference for youthful, physically attractive partners should be weaker than men's. In contrast, a female's reproductive success is primarily limited by her ability to secure a mate who is able and willing to invest material resources in her offspring. Therefore, Buss (1989) hypothesized that women have evolved the preference to mate with men who have the ability and motivation to provide such resources. Men might also desire women who can provide for their offspring, but to the extent that men exhibit greater variance than women in their ability to monopolize resources, men's preference for partners with good earning capacity and ambition should be weaker than women's.

Subsequent research has documented sex differences in participants' stated ideal partner preferences for physical attractiveness and earning prospects in meta-analyses, with effect sizes in the $d = 0.50–0.70$ range (Feingold, 1990, 1992), and among representative samples in the United States (Sprecher, Sullivan, &

Hatfield, 1994). Furthermore, these sex differences also emerge when participants describe their ideal long-term and ideal short-term partner (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher, & Cate, 2000), although the sex differences may be larger in long-term than in short-term contexts (Kenrick et al., 1993; Li & Kenrick, 2006). Finally, the size of the sex difference for earning prospects varies predictably across cultures according to features of the local environment. For example, the sex difference is smaller in nations with greater levels of gender equality (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Zentner & Mitura, 2012) and lower levels of pathogen stress (Gangestad, Haselton, & Buss, 2006). Although these sex differences may not emerge in foraging, preagricultural societies (Marlowe, 2004; Pillsworth, 2008; W. Wood & Eagly, 2002), it is currently uncontroversial that these sex differences describe the average stated preferences of men and women in complex modern societies.

Predictive Validity of Sex Differences

Like the interdependence perspective, the evolutionary perspective also proposes that ideal partner preferences are functional: These preferences would have improved reproductive success because they directed ancestral men and women to prefer and pursue mates who possessed the appropriate characteristics. Therefore, the sex differences should be reflected in evaluations of actual romantic partners such that (a) the physical attractiveness of a partner inspires men's romantic evaluations more than women's, and (b) the earning prospects of a partner inspires women's romantic evaluations more than men's. Presumably, this functionality would apply to all three of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) stages—perhaps especially the surface contact and mutuality stages, which could have reproductive consequences.

Research paradigms that assess stated preferences in isolation cannot address these questions of interpersonal predictive validity. Even in the 1950s, scholars noted that "there is no way of knowing the extent to which check-marks on paper correspond to actual values," but they simply proceeded under the assumption that "there is a positive relationship of at least moderately high magnitude" (McGinnis, 1958, p. 368). Buss (1989) also recognized the importance of such validity checks and even provided some evidence regarding people's preferred age in a mate: In nations where the size of the sex difference in preferred age of marriage is large, the size of the sex difference in people's actual age at marriage is also likely to be large (see also Bereczkei & Csanaky, 1996; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Yet for attractiveness and earning prospects, most of the predictive validity evidence that exists to date comes from contexts that correspond to the awareness (i.e., hypothetical) stage of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) typology.

Hypothetical contexts. A number of scholars have examined the appeal of physical attractiveness and earning prospects by asking men and women to rate descriptions or photographs of opposite-sex individuals. In these designs, the evolutionary perspective predicts that the attractiveness of the opposite-sex target should be associated with men's romantic evaluations of the target more than women's. Similarly, the earning prospects of the opposite-sex target should be associated with women's romantic evaluations of the target more than men's; in fact, earning prospects might even be negatively associated with men's romantic interest (e.g., Greitemeyer, 2007). On the whole, this literature has marshaled considerable support for sex differences in these two associations.

Part 5 of the Feingold (1990) meta-analysis reviewed studies that varied the physical attractiveness of a bogus stranger depicted in a photograph (e.g., Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971). In these studies, physical attractiveness was associated with romantic interest for both men and women, but the association was stronger for men (sex difference $d = 0.35$; see also Feingold, 1991). Similar studies conducted after the Feingold meta-analysis have revealed comparable effects. For example, several studies have consistently found that the physical attractiveness of photographic stimuli affected men's romantic evaluations more than women's (Townsend, 1993; Townsend & Levy, 1990a, 1990b; Townsend & Roberts, 1993). Many of these same studies also manipulated the earning potential of opposite-sex stimuli by varying the target's income, occupation, ambition, or costume (e.g., professional vs. blue-collar clothing); these manipulations affected women's evaluations more than men's (Townsend, 1993; Townsend & Levy, 1990a, 1990b; Townsend & Roberts, 1993; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998). Other laboratories have documented these sex differences as well using similar paradigms (e.g., Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004; Greengross & Miller, 2008; Greitemeyer, 2007; Wenzel & Emerson, 2009). One highly cited study did not find these two sex differences to be significant (Sprecher, 1989), but both sex differences were in the expected direction.

There is also a substantial research literature examining personal advertisements (Harrison & Saeed, 1977) and online dating (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012), and several of these studies address the predictive validity of physical attractiveness and earning prospects. Although meta-analyses have documented the expected sex differences in how often ad placers mention that they desire physical attractiveness and earning prospects (Feingold, 1990, 1992), studies of personal ad content are best conceptualized as a naturalistic extension of the stated preference sex differences discussed in the section above. In other words, if physical attractiveness is more likely to characterize men's ideal partner than women's ideal partner, then it follows that men should be more likely to advertise this preference in a personal ad. More relevant to the present discussion of predictive validity are studies demonstrating that physical attractiveness and earning prospects have differential effects on personal ad response rates for men and women. In one study, more male respondents replied to (i.e., were more interested in) the attractive/low-income female ad than the unattractive/high-income female ad, whereas more female respondents replied to the unattractive/high-income male ad than the attractive/low-income male ad (Goode, 1996). Other studies have looked at these two qualities independently and found that attractiveness tends to have a more positive effect on men's than on women's responses (Baize & Schroeder, 1995; Colwell, 2007; de Sousa Campos, Otta, & de Oliviera Siqueira, 2002; de Vries, 2010; de Vries, Swenson, & Walsh, 2008; Ha, van den Berg, Engels, & Lichtwarck-Aschoff, 2012; Lynn & Shurgot, 1984). Similarly, earning prospects tend to have a more positive effect on women's than on men's responses (Baize & Schroeder, 1995; de Vries et al., 2008; Pawlowski & Koziel, 2002).

In the online dating realm, Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely (2010) conducted the definitive study of the extent to which different

profile features generate opposite-sex contact requests. This study examined how 6,483 participants responded to the attractiveness and earning prospects of online dating profiles and documented the expected sex differences. That is, when participants browsed online dating profiles, the potential partner's physical attractiveness was a stronger predictor of the decision to send an initial contact e-mail for men than for women (~1.3 times stronger), and the potential partner's income was a stronger predictor for women than for men (~1.9 times stronger). Other online dating studies have also provided evidence consistent with these two sex differences (L. Lee, Loewenstein, Ariely, Hong, & Young, 2008; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfeld, 2011). In summary, nearly all the published evidence suggests that when men and women evaluate hypothetical opposite-sex targets (e.g., photographs, text-based descriptions), the two sex differences emerge: The attractiveness of the target affects men's romantic evaluations more than women's, and the earning prospects of the target affect women's romantic evaluations more than men's.

Attraction and relationship contexts. The predictive validity evidence is weaker for attractiveness and earning prospects in attraction and relationship contexts, although the published literature directly addressing these sex differences is far less extensive than the literature on hypothetical contexts. Three classic sociological studies are commonly cited as evidence that the sexes engage in a marriage "trade-off" between women's attractiveness and men's earning prospects, a trade-off that would emerge if men desired attractiveness more than women and women desired earning prospects more than men. These studies found that attractiveness in women was associated with having a high-status husband (Elder, 1969), a husband with occupational prestige (Taylor & Glenn, 1976), and greater household income (Udry & Eckland, 1984). Upon a first glance, these studies do seem to support the functional perspective on sex differences: If men care about attractiveness more than women, women can use their attractiveness to obtain a mate with earning potential, which is a quality that matters more to them. However, upon closer inspection, all three of these studies have two crucial shortcomings. The first is that none of them assessed the husband's attractiveness, so these studies cannot address hypotheses about sex *differences*. The second is that this trade-off correlation could emerge as an artifact of the fact that (a) attractive people achieve greater occupational success (Langlois et al., 2000) and (b) people tend to marry partners who are of similar levels of attractiveness and socioeconomic status (i.e., assortative mating; Burley, 1983). Therefore, even if attractive women are more likely than unattractive women to marry men of high status, this association could emerge simply because attractive women are drawn to attractive men. One study dealt with both of these shortcomings by assessing the attractiveness and education level of recently married men and women (Stevens, Owen, & Schaefer, 1990). This study replicated the zero-order association between women's attractiveness and men's education level, and it also found strong evidence of assortative mating on both physical attractiveness and education. Indeed, after accounting for these assortative mating correlations, neither sex appeared to trade attractiveness for a spouse's education or vice versa.

Two other studies purport to find functional evidence for the hypothesis that women desire earning prospects in a partner more than men (Hopcroft, 2006; Pérusse, 1994). In these studies, men's income was positively associated with their self-reported number of sexual partners (Pérusse, 1994) and frequency of sex (Hopcroft, 2006), but women revealed no such associations. These data are consistent with the functional perspective: Men with strong earning potential may have more sex because women find them to be more desirable than men with weak earning potential. However, this evidence is somewhat indirect, as there are many other avenues by which income and social status could be associated with self-reported sexual partners and frequency of sex that have little to do with the ability of status to inspire romantic desire. For example, like other forms of power, income and status could inspire the high-status person to approach potential romantic partners; indeed, recent research suggests that power causes people to (a) believe that others are sexually interested in them and subsequently (b) make more sexual overtures (Kunstman & Maner, 2011). If power and status inspire people to approach sexual rewards (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), then status might be more strongly associated with total number of sex partners for men than for women because men find the pursuit of casual sex partners to be especially rewarding (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Clark & Hatfield, 1989). Although the Pérusse (1994) and Hopcroft (2006) studies are intriguing, they do not provide strong functional evidence; better functional evidence would come from studies that examined the association of a target's physical attractiveness or earning prospects with an opposite-sex participant's romantic evaluation of that target.

Speed-dating is a new paradigm with the potential to provide such evidence (Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007), and thus the functional perspective on sex differences in ideal partner preferences has received considerable attention from speed-dating studies in recent years. At a typical heterosexual speed-dating event, a number of men and women who are eager to meet new potential partners attend an event where they have brief dates (3–10 min) with each member of the opposite sex. The organizers of the speed-dating event provide participants with a method of indicating which of their opposite-sex dates they would ("yes") or would not ("no") like to see again, and mutual yeses can contact each other to arrange a subsequent (presumably longer) date. Speed-dating is highly amenable to the empirical study of attraction and relationship initiation because it enables researchers to collect data before, during, and after an initial meeting between two individuals who have the potential to form an actual relationship (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008b; Finkel & Eastwick, 2008).

Many published speed-dating studies include data that speak to sex differences in the association of physical attractiveness and earning prospects with romantic interest. One study found a sex difference in the association of participants' judgments of a speed-dating partner's attractiveness with their decision to say "yes" to that partner (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2006). These regression weights were $\beta = .14$ for men and $\beta = .12$ for women—a small but significant difference—although no such sex difference emerged for ambition in this study ($\beta = .01$ for both sexes). Other speed-dating studies failed to find a sex difference in the association of attractiveness with participants' decision to say "yes" to a speed-dating partner (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005) and with participants' romantic attraction to a partner (Luo & Zhang, 2009). Eastwick and Finkel (2008a) conducted a speed-dating study to examine the physical attractiveness and earning prospects sex differences in detail, and their 17 dependent measures of romantic interest were assessed both immediately after the speed

date (e.g., romantic desire, romantic chemistry, the "yes" vs. "no" decision) and during the subsequent month (e.g., romantic passion, date initiation, date enjoyment). Although Eastwick and Finkel replicated the Fisman et al. (2006) sex difference for the effect of attractiveness on the "yesing" dependent variable alone, both the physical attractiveness and earning prospects sex differences were nonsignificant when analyzed across all the dependent measures they sampled.

Taken together, the extant speed-dating studies suggest that the sexes may not differ in the association of either physical attractiveness or earning prospects with romantic interest. Yet there are many other studies bearing on this question that did not use speed-dating methods. For example, Part 4 of Feingold's (1990) meta-analysis examined several studies in which participants met and evaluated a live potential romantic partner on a traditional, longer date (e.g., the classic Computer Dance Study; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). All of these studies assessed physical attractiveness and a measure of romantic liking, and the meta-analysis did not reveal a significant overall sex difference in the association between these two constructs. Furthermore, scholars in the close relationships tradition routinely assess romantic partners' physical attractiveness, income, and romantically themed dependent measures such as satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy. A priori, all of these studies are relevant to establishing whether attractiveness positively predicts men's romantic evaluations more than women's and whether earning prospects/ambition positively predicts women's romantic evaluations more than men's. This insight led us to conclude that a meta-analysis was required to achieve a more definitive answer to the question of whether these associations differ by sex in the attraction and relationships domains.

Meta-Analysis

We conducted a meta-analysis that sampled from a body of work spanning the attraction and close relationships literature, the marriage and family studies literature, and the evolutionary psychological literature. If a study assessed data that could be used to calculate (a) the association between physical attractiveness and a romantic evaluation for both sexes and/or (b) the association between earning prospects and a romantic evaluation for both sexes, it was deemed appropriate for the meta-analysis. These inclusion criteria presented a unique challenge: From the outset, we suspected that many scholars had collected relevant measures but had never actually reported these associations in an article. In an attempt to obtain as much data for the meta-analysis as possible, we reached out to a large number of scholars, many of whom were willing to perform these previously unconducted analyses for us.

Method.

Selection criteria. To merit inclusion in the meta-analysis, the study must have assessed the dependent variable (DV) of interest (i.e., a romantic evaluation) and at least one of the two independent variables (IVs) of interest (i.e., physical attractiveness, earning prospects). Throughout this meta-analysis, we use the term *participant* to refer to the individual making the DV report. The DV had to be provided by the participant about a *partner*—defined herein as an opposite-sex individual whom the participant has (at least) met face to face. (Given that the evolutionary perspective on these two attributes pertains to heterosexual relationships, only heterosexual reports were included in the meta-analysis.) Thus, all the studies in this meta-analysis correspond to either the surface contact or the mutuality stage of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) typology. The IV had to refer to the physical attractiveness/earning prospects of the partner (not the participant) and could be a participant report, a partner report about him- or herself, or an objective measure (e.g., independent observers' ratings of the partner, the partner's personal income).

We selected IV measures that were similar to the original Buss (1989) sex-differentiated items good looks, good financial prospect, and ambitious and industriousness, and we selected DV measures that corresponded to (or closely approximated) the myriad facets of relationship quality documented by Fletcher et al. (2000b). Specifically, relevant physical attractiveness IVs were the items physically attractive (regarding the face or body), attractive, physical appearance, nice body, good-looking, sexy, sensual, and validated multi-item measures of physical attractiveness (e.g., the physical attraction scale; McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006; the estimating physical attractiveness scale; Swami, Furnham, Georgiades, & Pang, 2007). Relevant earning prospects IVs were the items financially secure, good job, successful, good earning/financial prospects/potential, ambitious, career-driven, the target's personal (not household) income, and validated multi-item measures of earning prospects (the financial dominance scale; Bryan, Webster, & Mahaffey, 2011). Relevant romantic evaluation DVs were measures of romantic liking, attraction, satisfaction (relationship or sexual), commitment, trust, intimacy, love, passion, wanting to date/get to know someone better, reporting a good connection/interaction with someone, feeling emotionally bonded to someone, and including the other in the self. Studies that included straightforward variants of these items and measures (e.g., potential for a good job) were also included.

In accordance with our definition of *partner* above, we excluded studies where participants reported a DV about a target whom they had not met face to face. With respect to the IVs, we did not include studies with items that assessed relative IV measures requiring a comparison between the participant and the partner (e.g., "What is your partner's physical attractiveness relative to your own?"). Such items are essentially difference scores and confound the IV of the participant with the IV of the partner. Thus, any associations produced by such items could be biased up or down by associations between the participant's IV report and the DV (Edwards, 2001; Griffin, Murray, & Gonzalez, 1999). In addition, we excluded body mass index as an attractiveness IV because a partner's body mass index is not monotonically related to attraction for women (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005), rendering sex differences with this IV ambiguous. Finally, we excluded studies assessing IV measures of status, leadership ability, education, and intelligence (e.g., Pillsworth, 2008). We made these exclusions to remain as faithful as possible to the original Buss (1989) report (which found large sex differences for good financial prospect and ambition/industriousness but not favorable social status or education and intelligence).

Selection of studies. We used three complementary methods to search for relevant studies. The primary method was a search of the PsycINFO and Web of Science databases by means of keywords. In each database, we conducted two searches. In the first (broad) search, we searched for the keywords *mate preferences*, *mate selection*, *interpersonal attraction*, and *mate choice*. In the

second (specific) search, we conjoined a list of DV terms (*liking*, *attraction*, *commitment*, *satisfaction*, *love*, *intimacy*, and *trust*) with a list of IV terms (*physically attractive*, *physical attractiveness*, *attractiveness*, *attractive*, *financial prospects*, *earning prospects*, *earning ability*, *ambition*, *ambitious*, *salary*, and *income*). In the PsycINFO search, we limited the search to *all journals* and *dissertation abstracts*, population group *human*, and we excluded APA class codes 2220–2229 (testing) and 3200–4290 (e.g., clinical psychology, industrial and organizational psychology). In the Web of Science search, we limited the search to the topics *behavioral sciences*, *psychology*, *evolutionary biology*, *sociology*, *social sciences (other topics*), *women's studies*, *family studies*, *anthropology*, and *communication*, and we limited the search to *articles*. Even with these exclusions, these two searches (conducted on January 11, 2012) combined to produce 12,398 unique documents.

We evaluated the title and abstract of these 12,398 documents to determine whether each merited inclusion in the meta-analysis. Of these articles, 43.7% dealt with mating-irrelevant topics, 31.5% dealt with animals or plants rather than humans, 8.5% dealt with stated mate preferences or ratings of pictures or bogus stranger profiles, 7.3% were about mating but not relevant to the meta-analysis, 5.2% dealt with employment and job satisfaction, and 0.7% were book reviews. The remaining 3.1% (383 documents) survived this first round of exclusions and were deemed potentially relevant. Next, we obtained and read each of these 383 documents except for 13 dissertations that could not be located and 16 articles not published in English. Of the remaining 354 documents, 139 met the criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis.

The secondary search method involved a detailed inspection of (a) previously published studies by researchers who were commonly cited for their work using the relevant IV and/or DV measures, (b) the reference sections of commonly cited articles in this literature, and (c) all articles that cited a popular measure in the self and relationships literature that incidentally includes a single-item measure of physical attractiveness (Pelham & Swann, 1989). This search identified an additional 46 articles (published and unpublished) not included in the primary PsycINFO and Web of Science search.

The tertiary search method involved sending e-mail to the Society for Personality and Social Psychology listserv with a description of the inclusion criteria and a request for relevant data. This search identified an additional three articles (published and unpublished) that were not produced by the primary and secondary searches. Thus, our three search methods produced a total of 188 relevant articles.

As described above, our inclusion criteria did not require that the authors actually report the associations of interest in the article; we only needed to find evidence that the authors had *collected* the relevant measures. Indeed, in only 27 of the 188 relevant articles did the authors actually provide (at least one of) the associations of interest separately for both sexes. Of the remaining 161 articles, six used publicly available data sets and eight used data in the possession of one of the authors of the present article, and so we calculated the associations from these 14 data sets ourselves. Furthermore, in an effort to obtain as much data from the remaining 147 relevant articles as possible, we reached out to 74 teams of researchers, who collectively accounted for 128 of these 147 articles. (For the remaining 19 articles, we could not find a current e-mail address for the authors after extensive searching or the authors were deceased.) We sent an initial e-mail asking for the associations once we determined that the researcher had collected the relevant measures, and on June 1, 2012 (1 month before submitting the article), we sent a second reminder to all research teams that had not yet provided the associations. Also, between September 29 and October 4, 2012, we sent a final reminder to the authors who had not yet provided the associations.

In general, these 74 research teams were responsive to our e-mail; we received replies from 64 of them (85%). Of these 64 replies, seven noted that they had possession of the data but did not get the required information to us by the submission of the revised article; furthermore, 19 indicated that the original data or the codebooks were no longer available, and one declined to participate in the meta-analysis. The remaining 37 research teams provided us with an impressive 51 articles or data sets for the meta-analysis. Thus, the total number of articles included in the meta-analysis reported below is 95 (27 published articles that reported the associations of interest, 3 from the listserv solicitation, 14 from our/public data, and 51 from directly reaching out to research teams). For physical attractiveness, 79 articles produced $k = 97$ samples consisting of $N = 29{,}414$ (14,237 men and 15,177 women). For earning prospects, 48 articles produced $k = 56$ samples consisting of $N = 50{,}113$ (25,215 men and 24,898 women).

Potential moderators. We examined seven potential moderators of the central meta-analytic associations reported below. First and foremost, we examined the relationship stage of the sample. Two of the authors independently coded each study as belonging to one of 10 study paradigms: married (i.e., at least 85% of participants reported on a marital partner), married/dating (i.e., a mixture of participants reporting on a marital or a dating partner), dating (i.e., at least 85% of participants reported on a dating partner), dates (i.e., single dates lasting from 30 min up to a full evening), speed-dating (i.e., dates lasting a few minutes), lab interaction (i.e., meeting another participant in a laboratory setting), confederate interaction (i.e., meeting a confederate in a laboratory setting), desired partner (i.e., participants reporting on someone with whom they desired but did not have a relationship), opposite-sex peer (i.e., participants reporting on an opposite-sex person they know from their daily life), and zero acquaintance (i.e., a participant meets a partner face to face but does not interact verbally or nonverbally). The coders' agreement was strong (free-marginal Cohen's $K = .90$); disagreements were resolved by discussion. For analyses reported below, we recoded the 10 paradigms in two ways: as a two-level predictor (coded 1 = not in a relationship with the partner, 2 = married, married/dating, and dating) and as a three-level continuous predictor (coded 1 = not in a relationship with the partner, 2 = dating and married/dating, 3 = married). Thus, the two-level moderator approximated the Levinger and Snoek (1972) distinction between surface contact and mutuality, and the three-level variable assigned a higher level of interdependence to married than to dating samples.

Another moderator was the source of the data: published versus listserv solicitation versus our/public data versus other research team generated (see above). With this moderator, we could examine, for example, whether unpublished associations were more likely than published ones to be nonsignificant.

Given that sex differences in the importance of physical attractiveness and earning prospects could be more pronounced among

participants who are considering a long-term (rather than a short-term) relationship partner (Kenrick et al., 1993; Li & Kenrick, 2006), we assessed the best available study-level variables that conceivably tap the maturity of the sample. Two such moderators were the average age of the men and women in the sample and the relationship length of participants in the sample. Age was coded as the average age in years for men and women (i.e., a separate age estimate for men and women in each study). We reached out via e-mail to authors who did not report participant age separately for men and women; if the authors did not respond, we assigned the sample average for both sexes. Also, we assigned an age of 19 for both sexes if age was not collected but the participants were undergraduate students (Malle, 2006). Relationship length was coded as the mean relationship length (in years) for participants in a dating or marital relationship. If the article reported only marriage length, we added 2.5 years to create a relationship length estimate (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). This variable was coded as missing for studies that did not examine dating or married participants.

We also examined whether publication year, country, and sample type (community vs. college student) moderated the findings. Regarding publication year, the publications included in the meta-analysis ranged from Walster et al.'s (1966) Computer Dance Study to the present. For references that included a range of years, we used the median year for the analysis; in-press or unpublished data sets were coded as 2012. With this moderator we can examine whether the hypothesized sex differences were larger in prior decades, which would be consistent with some other work on sex differences in mating (e.g., Boxer, Noonan, & Whelan, in press).

The studies included in the meta-analysis came from 15 countries: Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States. For the purposes of the moderator analyses, we coded these countries in two ways that achieved a (somewhat) balanced *k* across groups: studies conducted in the United States versus other countries, and studies conducted in English-speaking versus non-English-speaking countries.

Finally, two of the authors examined the method section of each study and coded whether the sample was drawn from a college population or the general community. Any recruitment strategy that involved a college or university (e.g., recruiting in public spaces on a campus, recruiting couples where one partner was a current undergraduate or graduate student) was coded in the college category. Interrater agreement was strong (free-marginal Cohen's K = .93), and disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Analysis strategy. All effect sizes were correlations between an IV (i.e., physical attractiveness, earning prospects) and a DV (i.e., a romantic evaluation). We used Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005) to perform the basic analyses and David Wilson's SPSS macros (http://mason.gmu.edu/~dwilsonb/ma.html) to perform the moderator analyses. In both cases, correlations were transformed with the Fisher z_r transformation, and the inverse variance weight was $N - 3$ (Hedges & Olkin, 1985; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). We used mixed-effects models in all cases (restricted maximum-likelihood estimation for the macros) because we assumed that the wide array of measures and contexts sampled in this meta-analysis would produce correlations that differed in both systematic and random ways beyond ordinary sampling error (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001).

This meta-analysis included two IV traits (physical attractiveness and earning prospects) and three ways of measuring the IVs (participant report, partner report, objective). Given that many studies assessed more than one of these six IVs, each study contributed between one and six correlations to the six separate meta-analyses reported below. (Occasionally, a study contributed multiple data points to the same analysis when the authors reported results for different samples separately.) Many studies assessed more than one relevant DV item; wherever possible, all available DV items were combined into a single DV romantic evaluation construct. In cases where the original data could not be reanalyzed for this purpose but the intercorrelations between DV items were available, we used the Ghiselli, Campbell, and Zedeck (1981) composite formula to estimate the correlation between the IV and the composite DV. If the intercorrelations between DV items were not available, we simply averaged the correlations between the IV and each DV. For the 27 published articles that actually presented the correlations of interest, values herein do not match published correlations in two cases where the research team supplied additional DVs (Fisman et al., 2006; McNulty, Neff, & Karney, 2008) and in one case where the research team supplied results without the statistical controls used in the article (Asendorpf, Penke, & Back, 2011).

All items were assessed cross-sectionally; that is, participants completed the IV and DV items at roughly the same point in time. Many studies assessed the relevant IVs and DVs at multiple time points, so in these cases, we took an average of all the available cross-sectional associations. Finally, to investigate publication bias, we employed the Duval and Tweedie (2000) trim and fill analysis on the funnel graphs.

Results.

Sex differences. The first three rows of Table 1 present the results of the six meta-analyses separately by sex; sex always refers to the sex of the participant who is reporting the DV (i.e., the person who is experiencing the attraction or relationship outcome). In general, physical attractiveness and earning prospects tended to inspire positive romantic evaluations: All 12 correlations were positive, and 11 of them significantly differed from zero. The evolutionary perspective predicts that (a) the physical attractiveness correlations should be larger for men than for women and (b) the earning prospects correlations should be larger for women than for men. However, these predictions were not supported. In all six meta-analyses, the sex difference was between $r = .01$ and .06, values that are considerably smaller than Cohen's (1988) "small" effect size. Furthermore, none of the *Q* statistics (which test the significance of the difference between the male and female correlations) approached significance ($ps > .205$). The fourth row of Table 1 presents the physical attractiveness and earning prospects meta-analytic results averaging across the available IVs within each study. Again, the sex differences were very small ($rs = .03$) and nonsignificant ($ps > .212$).

Of relevance to the Levinger and Snoek (1972) distinction between the surface contact and mutuality stages, these correlations also did not differ by sex if we examined attraction studies separately from relationship studies (i.e., if we separated studies according to the two-level relationship stage predictor). Averaged across the available IVs, the correlations for physical attractiveness

Table 1
Meta-Analyzed Correlations

	Physical attractiveness						Earning prospects					
		Men		Women				Men		Women		
IV measurement type	*k*	*r*	95% CI	*r*	95% CI	Q_{sex}	*k*	*r*	95% CI	*r*	95% CI	Q_{sex}
Participant report	75	.53***	[.47, .58]	.50***	[.45, .56]	0.35	26	.27***	[.22, .31]	.28***	[.23, .33]	0.23
Partner report	31	.11***	[.06, .15]	.09***	[.04, .13]	0.30	13	.03	[−.02, .08]	.08**	[.03, .13]	1.60
Objective	32	.32***	[.24, .40]	.26***	[.17, .34]	1.25	34	.03*	[.00, .06]	.05**	[.01, .08]	0.78
Averaged within study	97	.43***	[.37, .48]	.40***	[.35, .45]	0.52	56	.09***	[.06, .12]	.12***	[.08, .15]	1.55

Note. Correlations reflect the association between the participant's romantic evaluation and the opposite-sex partner's physical attractiveness/earning prospects. The headings "Men" and "Women" refer to the sex of the participant who is reporting the romantic evaluation. IV = independent variable; CI = confidence interval; Q_{sex} = *Q* statistic testing the significance of the sex difference.
* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

were .49 and .49 for men and women, respectively, in attraction contexts and .37 and .32 in relationship contexts; for earning prospects, the correlations were .11 and .14 in attraction contexts and .08 and .11 in relationship contexts (all sex difference *p*s > .348). Appendices A and B contain summary information for the studies included in the meta-analysis.[1]

Moderator analyses. Given that the primary focus of the meta-analysis was on sex differences in the associations of physical attractiveness and earning prospects with romantic evaluations, we began by examining whether any of the moderators we assessed could explain why these sex differences might be larger or smaller. In total, we calculated 54 moderator analyses (six each for data source, age, relationship length, sample type, and publication year and 12 each for relationship stage and country). None of these 54 moderator analyses significantly differed by sex. In other words, there was no evidence that the sex differences in the physical attractiveness or earning prospects correlations were larger or smaller depending on data source, relationship stage, age, relationship length, publication year, country, or sample type.

In a subsidiary set of 54 analyses, we explored whether the moderators significantly predicted the physical attractiveness and earning prospects associations, sex differences notwithstanding. First, we examined relationship stage as a moderator using David Wilson's METAREG macro. With the two-level predictor, relationship stage negatively predicted the physical attractiveness association for the participant report IV ($\beta = -.35$, $z = -4.31$, $p < .001$; attraction $r = .59$, relationship $r = .45$), partner report IV ($\beta = -.40$, $z = -3.04$, $p = .002$; attraction $r = .15$, relationship $r = .07$), and objective IV ($\beta = -.50$, $z = -4.72$, $p < .001$; attraction $r = .37$, relationship $r = .08$). In other words, the association between physical attractiveness and romantic evaluations was stronger when participants were not yet in a relationship with the partner relative to when they were dating and/or married to the partner. The three-level continuous predictor also revealed a negative effect of relationship stage on the physical attractiveness association for the participant report IV ($\beta = -.21$, $z = -2.52$, $p = .012$) and the objective IV ($\beta = -.43$, $z = -3.84$, $p < .001$).

With the two-level predictor, relationship stage positively predicted the earning prospects association (albeit marginally significantly) when calculated with the participant report IV ($\beta = .23$, $z = 1.66$, $p = .096$; attraction $r = .25$, relationship $r = .29$) and the partner report IV ($\beta = .41$, $z = 1.90$, $p = .057$; attraction $r = .00$, relationship $r = .08$), but it negatively predicted the earning prospects association when calculated with the objective IV ($\beta = -.22$, $z = -1.79$, $p = .074$; attraction $r = .07$, relationship $r = .03$). That is, the effect of earning prospects on romantic evaluations increased with relationship stage when the participant or the partner was making the earning prospects evaluation (typically assessed as a judgment of the partner's earning prospects or ambition), but the effect of earning prospects on romantic evaluations decreased with relationship stage when the earning prospects measure was objective (typically assessed as personal income). The three-level continuous predictor revealed similar effects for participant report IV ($\beta = .24$, $z = 1.77$, $p = .077$), partner report IV ($\beta = .58$, $z = 2.72$, $p = .007$), and objective IV ($\beta = -.25$, $z = -2.05$, $p = .040$). In summary, physical attractiveness and income seem to predict romantic evaluations more strongly in the initial attraction stage rather than after a relationship has been established. On the other hand, subjective judgments of earning potential seem to predict romantic evaluations more strongly after (rather than before) a relationship has formed.

Next, we examined data source as a potential moderator. There were four possible sources of data (published vs. listserv solicitation vs. our/public data vs. other research team generated), and so we analyzed this variable as a categorical predictor using David Wilson's METAF macro for SPSS. Out of six analyses (three IVs each for physical attractiveness and for earning prospects), the *Q* statistic testing the between-source difference was significant in

[1] Many of the data sets used in the meta-analysis exhibit nonindependence between the men and women in the sample: That is, when a man was reporting on a woman, that woman also happened to be a participant reporting on the man. The published reports almost never account for this statistical nonindependence, yet it is possible that its presence could affect the associations reported above. To examine this possibility, we coded whether each study exhibited nonindependence between men and women (i.e., did the participant also serve as a target?). Collapsed across the available IVs, the physical attractiveness correlation was .39 for studies without the nonindependence issue and .42 for studies with the nonindependence issue. For earning prospects, the correlation was .14 for studies without the nonindependence issue and .09 for studies with the nonindependence issue. Of particular relevance to the present article, the nonindependence code was not moderated by sex; that is, there was no evidence that sex differences were any more or less pronounced depending on whether there was nonindependence in the data (all sex difference *p*s > .641). In short, the fact that the associations compiled for this meta-analysis rarely accounted for nonindependence between men and women is unlikely to account for the results.

two cases. For partner report measures of physical attractiveness, the correlations tended to be stronger for published studies ($r = .16$) than for other research team-generated studies ($r = .07$) or for our/public data ($r = .03$), $Q(2) = 9.52$, $p = .008$. In addition, for objective measures of earning prospects, the correlations tended to be stronger for published studies ($r = .10$) than for other research-team-generated studies ($r = .04$) or for our/public data ($r = .02$), $Q(2) = 8.06$, $p = .018$. Overall, there was a modicum of evidence that correlations were stronger in published analyses than unpublished ones.

We also analyzed participant age as a continuous moderator. Out of six moderator analyses, only one was significant: When the IV was a partner report, physical attractiveness correlations were stronger to the extent that participants were older ($\beta = .41$, $z = 3.00$, $p = .003$); for every year of age, this correlation increased .006.

Next, we analyzed relationship length as a continuous moderator for samples where participants reported on a dating or marriage partner. In this case, three of six moderator analyses were significant: Physical attractiveness correlations were stronger to the extent that individuals had been in their relationship for a longer period when the IV was a participant report ($\beta = .31$, $z = 2.82$, $p = .005$), a partner report ($\beta = .59$, $z = 3.41$, $p < .001$), and objective ($\beta = .58$, $z = 3.04$, $p = .002$). For every year that couples were together, this correlation increased .014, .009, and .009, respectively, for each IV measure.

For publication year, two of six possible moderator analyses were significant. The participant report association for physical attractiveness was weaker in recently conducted (vs. older) studies ($\beta = -.30$, $z = -3.66$, $p < .001$), whereas the participant report for earning prospects was stronger in recently conducted (vs. older) studies ($\beta = .31$, $z = 2.26$, $p = .024$). The association with the participant report of attractiveness decreased $-.007$ with each year, whereas the participant report of earning prospects increased .015 with each year. Over time, subjective judgments of attractiveness seem to have become a weaker determinant—and subjective judgments of earning prospects have become a stronger determinant—of romantic evaluations.

Country was coded in two ways (United States vs. other and English-speaking vs. not English-speaking), yielding 12 moderator analyses. One significant difference emerged: For the partner report of physical attractiveness, the association was higher in non-English-speaking than English-speaking countries ($\beta = -.31$, $z = -2.22$, $p = .027$; non-English $r = .24$, English $r = .09$).

Finally, we coded sample type as 0 = community sample, 1 = college sample. This moderator was significant in two out of six cases: For physical attractiveness, the association was stronger for community than college samples with the partner report ($\beta = -.64$, $z = -5.65$, $p < .001$; community $r = .20$, college $r = .06$), and for earning prospects, the association was weaker for community than college samples with the objective report ($\beta = .32$, $z = 2.73$, $p = .006$; community $r = .03$, college $r = .13$).

Missing studies. To test for evidence that our meta-analysis had inappropriately failed to include studies demonstrating evidence of sex differences, we inspected the funnel plots and used the trim and fill procedure (Duval & Tweedie, 2000). The trim and fill procedure iteratively tests whether the funnel plot is symmetrical around the mean effect size; if asymmetry exists, the procedure imputes the "missing" studies and recalculates the overall effect. Given that the main purpose of this meta-analysis was to examine sex differences in correlations, we conducted the trim and fill analysis on the within-study difference between the male and female correlation (coded so that positive values indicated a stronger correlation for men and negative values indicated a stronger correlation for women).

For physical attractiveness, we first calculated the trim and fill analysis on the overall sex difference in the correlation averaged across all three IV types (see Figure 2A). The analysis imputed no missing studies. We also conducted the trim and fill analysis on each of the three IV types separately. For the participant report IV, trim and fill imputed six studies to the right of the mean effect (i.e., six studies favoring a larger male correlation were missing), and this procedure changed the difference between the correlations

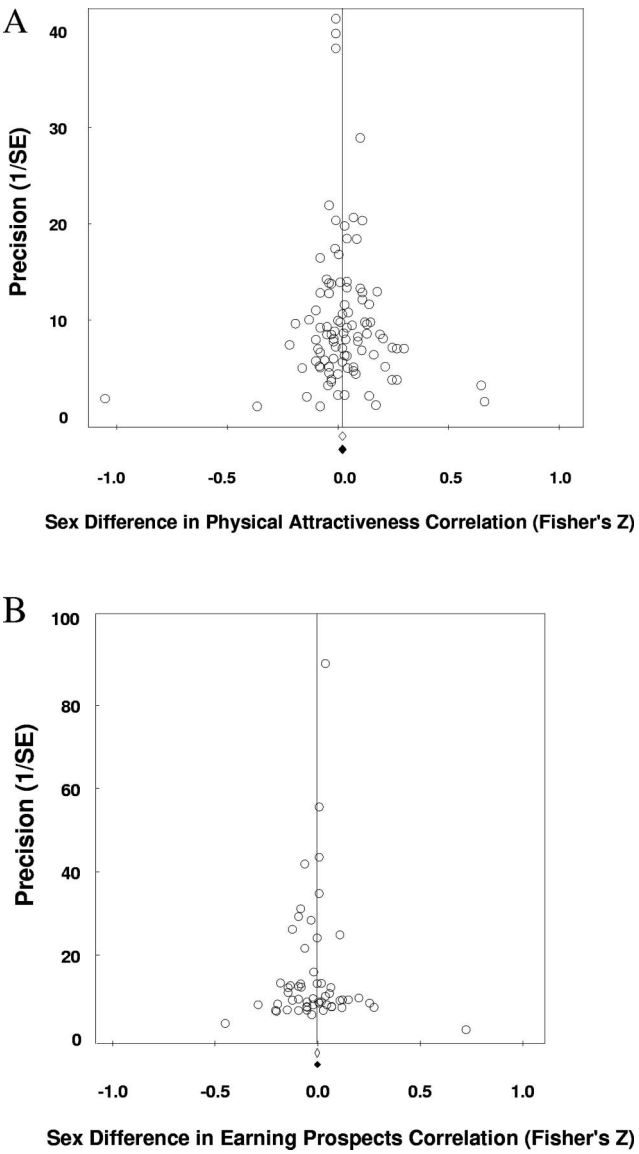


Figure 2. Funnel plots of precision for the sex difference in the physical attractiveness correlation (A) and the earning prospects correlation (B). Positive *x*-axis values indicate a stronger correlation for men than women.

.012. For the partner report IV, trim and fill imputed two studies to the left of the mean effect (i.e., two studies favoring a larger female correlation were missing), and this procedure changed the difference between the correlations −.006. For the objective IV, trim and fill imputed one study to the left of the mean effect, and this procedure changed the difference between the correlations −.003.

For earning prospects, the trim and fill analysis on the overall sex difference in the correlation averaged across all three IV types imputed no missing studies (see Figure 2B), nor were any missing studies imputed for the participant report IV. For the partner report IV, trim and fill imputed one study to the right of the mean effect, suggesting that one study favoring a larger male correlation was missing, and this procedure changed the difference between the correlations .008. For the objective IV, trim and fill imputed one study to the right of the mean effect, and this procedure changed the difference between the correlations .004. In short, there was little evidence that missing studies would substantially change the outcome of the sex differences documented in this meta-analysis, and the missing studies that were imputed by the trim and fill analysis changed the overall difference in the correlation very little.

Discussion. A meta-analysis indicated that participants' romantic evaluations of a partner whom they had (at least) met face to face tended to be more positive to the extent that the partner was physically attractive (N = 29,414) and had good earning prospects (N = 50,113). Importantly, however, these associations did not significantly differ by participant sex; that is, physical attractiveness tended to inspire positive romantic evaluations about equally for men (r = .43) and women (r = .40), and earning prospects tended to inspire positive romantic evaluations about equally for men (r = .09) and women (r = .12). Although the sex differences were trending in the direction consistent with participants' ideal partner preferences, the differences were minuscule and nonsignificant, even with Ns in the tens of thousands. In fact, had these sex differences been included in Hyde's (2005) review of meta-analyses on sex differences, they would have fallen in approximately the bottom quartile in terms of effect size, and they would have tied with sexual satisfaction for the smallest difference in the sexual domain. Furthermore, the funnel plots and trim and fill procedure revealed no evidence that missing studies might reveal evidence of the sex differences.

The moderator analyses provided no evidence that the sex differences differed depending on the source, relationship stage, age, relationship length, publication year, country, or the type of sample (i.e., community vs. college). If sex differences are more likely to emerge in long-term than short-term contexts (Kenrick et al., 1993; Li & Kenrick, 2006), then it was conceivable that the sex differences would have been larger at advanced relationship stages or in more mature samples (e.g., older participants, participants in long-lasting relationships). The moderator analyses did not support this hypothesis, although given that all meta-analytic moderators exist at the study level of analysis, the moderational tests we performed were somewhat crude by necessity. Better tests of this possibility would examine whether sex differences in these associations are moderated by the short-term versus long-term mindset of the specific participant (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a).

Nevertheless, the moderator analyses did reveal a handful of interesting findings, sex differences notwithstanding. Especially intriguing was that physical attractiveness seemed to be more important when participants were reporting on partners with whom they were not yet romantically involved rather than dating and marriage partners, yet physical attractiveness actually increased in importance as relationship length increased among participants reporting on dating and marriage partners. In conjunction, these two findings suggest a possible curvilinear relationship between attractiveness and romantic evaluations over time: When people initially consider someone as a potential romantic partner, attractiveness is very important, and the association between attractiveness and romantic evaluations drops once the relationship has been formed. Yet as two people remain together in a relationship, the association of attractiveness with romantic evaluations slowly begins to increase again. Of course, longitudinal studies that follow participants from the attraction stage of a relationship through to the establishment of a long-term relationship would offer a more appropriate test of this novel curvilinear possibility.

Section 2: Individual Differences in Ideal Partner Preferences

Men and women consistently reveal differences when asked to rate the importance of physical attractiveness and earning prospects in an ideal romantic partner (Feingold, 1990, 1992). Furthermore, the sexes also differ in the extent to which these two traits predict romantic evaluations of hypothetical targets (i.e., opposite-sex individuals whom one has not met face to face; Hitsch et al., 2010; Townsend & Levy, 1990a). Yet, as the present meta-analysis demonstrated, the associations of physical attractiveness and earning prospects with romantic evaluations are not sex differentiated in attraction contexts and relationship contexts. Thus, the meta-analytic data indirectly suggest that ideal partner preferences might not affect how people evaluate romantic partners once a face-to-face interaction has taken place.

However, ideal partner preferences could predict relational evaluations in ways that do not involve sex differences. Sex differences notwithstanding, it is possible that participants' own idiosyncratic preferences for particular attributes predict how strongly those attributes affect their romantic evaluations. In some ways, this individual differences hypothesis is a fairer test of the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences than the examination of sex differences. Sex may not moderate the association between physical attractiveness and romantic interest because sex is a modest proxy for ideal partner preference ratings of physical attractiveness. Perhaps predictive validity effects would emerge if scholars examined the individual differences hypothesis directly, ignoring participant sex in favor of the participant's own ratings of his or her ideal partner preferences.

A literature has emerged in the last 10–15 years that addresses this exact question. Although this literature is smaller than the very large literature meta-analyzed in the previous section, it draws from several theoretical perspectives and methodological traditions to converge on two clear conclusions. First, paralleling the sex differences literature, ideal partner preferences demonstrate predictive validity when participants evaluate hypothetical targets but not face-to-face targets in attraction settings. Second, in contrast to the sex differences literature, ideal partner preferences do demonstrate predictive validity when participants evaluate established relationship partners. However, this latter finding emerges only when researchers examine one particular source of variance

in ideal partner preferences (i.e., pattern variance)—a source of variance that happened not to be the variance of interest in the sex differences literature (i.e., level variance). This section integrates this literature on the predictive validity of individual differences in ideal partner preferences, emphasizing the theoretical models that help to explain why predictive validity differs across the three Levinger and Snoek (1972) stages.

Historical and Theoretical Background

The ideal standards model. As reviewed above, family studies scholars initiated research on ideal partner preferences in the first half of the 20th century, and the evolutionary theorists who followed adapted these questionnaires to examine how ideals and standards changed across different evolutionarily relevant contexts (e.g., Kenrick et al., 1993; Regan, 1998). However, by the end of the 1990s, few studies had examined how people used trait information about romantic partners to form and maintain actual relationships. Just as in the 1930s, research paradigms typically required participants to report what kinds of qualities they would find appealing in an abstract ideal partner or a hypothetical minimally acceptable partner. But since that time, the family studies tradition had merged with scholarly traditions from psychology and other disciplines to form a strong relationship science that employed experimental, observational, and longitudinal methods (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Although this perspective had not yet been sufficiently integrated with evolutionary theories, relationships researchers had long been examining how people's mental schemas (of which ideal partner preferences are one example) affected the way that they form and maintain actual relationships (Baldwin, 1992; Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992; Fletcher & Thomas, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Rusbult, Onizuka, & Lipkus, 1993).

A major merger between relationship science and evolutionary psychology arrived with the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001). This model generated predictions about both the content and function of people's ideal partner preferences. First, drawing from evolutionary psychology (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000), the ideal standards model suggested that the content of people's ideals should reflect different evolved routes to reproductive success; for example, some people might place a premium on partner characteristics that indicate a capacity for intimacy and commitment, whereas others might place a premium on partner characteristics that indicate good genetic quality. Second, drawing from interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and other social cognitive perspectives (Baldwin, 1992; Higgins, 1987), the ideal standards model further suggested that ideal partner preferences should function as a standard that people use to explain, evaluate, and regulate their romantic relationships.

To address the content component of the model, Fletcher et al. (1999) conducted the defining descriptive study of people's ideal partner preferences by asking participants themselves to list the characteristics of their ideal dating or marital partner. Participants nominated 49 traits, and consistent with evolutionary hypotheses, these traits coalesced into three broad categories: warmth/trustworthiness (e.g., "understanding," "supportive"), attractiveness/vitality (e.g., "nice body," "adventurous"), and status/resources (e.g., "good job," "financially secure"). This research was the first to derive traits from participants' own beliefs about relationship partners rather than the intuition of the survey creators, and it has become the standard ideal partner preference instrument in the psychological literature.

To address the functional component of the model, Fletcher and colleagues conducted the first studies that directly examined the predictive validity of the match between participants' ideals and the characteristics of a current romantic partner (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000a; Fletcher et al., 1999, Study 6). Their "ideal-perception consistency" measures predicted both concurrent relationship satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2000a, 1999) and the likelihood of breakup 2 months later (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Below, we revisit these findings in detail, along with several other studies inspired by the functional component of the ideal standards model (e.g., L. Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001; Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Lackenbauer & Campbell, 2012; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006; Zentner, 2005).

The ideal standards model primarily addressed the ways in which people evaluated their existing romantic relationships—that is, the mutuality stage of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) model (cf. Tran, Simpson, & Fletcher, 2008). In fact, there is a strong theoretical rationale for suspecting that ideal partner preferences would have stronger predictive validity in established rather than fledgling relationships (i.e., the surface contact stage). When two individuals are romantically interested in each other but have not formed a romantic relationship, interdependence between them is typically low, and they may not yet be especially motivated to compare the partner or the relationship against their ideal standards because the relationship to be evaluated does not actually exist (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011). However, upon forming a romantic relationship, interdependence typically increases between two partners as their day-to-day lives and ultimately their futures become enmeshed, and people must make costly sacrifices to maintain and protect their relationship (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Van Lange et al., 1997). This increased interdependence may motivate partners to compare their relationship against their ideals, especially as they encounter choice points (e.g., the decision to move in together or to get married) that demand careful evaluation of the relationship (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). This perspective suggests that the match between ideals and the characteristics of a partner could be especially likely to predict relational outcomes in established relationship contexts.

Live person perception processes. In recent years, other perspectives have proven useful for understanding why ideals might or might not predict romantic evaluations in the awareness and surface contact stages of relationships. Historically, social psychological and evolutionary scholars alike have not made strong theoretical distinctions between hypothetical and face-to-face paradigms when testing hypotheses. However, there is accumulating evidence that psychological processes can differ dramatically depending on whether people are engaged in a live or a hypothetical interaction, as suggested by recent studies of classic attraction principles (Reis, Maniaci, Caprariello, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2011a, 2011b; Tidwell, Eastwick, & Finkel, in press), experiences with outgroup members (Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009; Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008), and even evaluations of consumer products (R. W. Hamilton & Thompson, 2007). Furthermore, strong theoretical explanations for the disconnect between live and hypothetical evaluations are beginning to emerge as well (for a review, see Eastwick et al., in press).

Construal-level theory provides one such explanation (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Construal-level theory proposes that people tend to represent psychologically distant (e.g., past, future, hypothetical) events and objects using high-level, abstract construals, whereas they tend to represent psychologically near (e.g., directly experienced in the "here and now") events and objects using low-level, concrete construals. One prediction that follows from the construal-level theory perspective is that people's judgments are more likely to be informed by traits when in an abstract, high-level construal than a concrete, low-level construal (Nussbaum, Trope, & Liberman, 2003; Rim, Uleman, & Trope, 2009). On average, traits and dispositions are examples of abstract, decontextualized schemas because they imply that the person possessing the trait will exhibit consistent behaviors across situations and time (Henderson, Fujita, Trope, & Liberman, 2006; Trope & Liberman, 2010). As ideal partner preferences (nearly always) refer to traits or other stable attributes, it is plausible that participants' ideal partner preferences are relevant to the evaluations they generate when in a high-level mindset (e.g., when considering hypothetical potential partners), but participants instead defer to specific contextualized behaviors when making evaluations in a low-level mindset (e.g., when considering actual live potential partners).

How might the contextualized behavior of a live interaction interfere with participants' comparison between their abstract ideals and the traits possessed by a potential romantic partner? One possibility draws from Asch's (1946) classic studies of person perception: A live interaction could give participants the opportunity to contextualize the partner's attributes as part of a whole person. According to this perspective, traits do not have fixed meanings; rather, people interpret a person's traits differently depending on that person's overall constellation of attributes. For example, participants may reinterpret a positive trait as providing the means for achieving the goals associated with a negative trait (e.g., appearing generous only to achieve vindictive ends), and vice versa (e.g., being strict in order to be kind in the long run; Asch & Zukier, 1984; Read & Miller, 1993). In a live interaction, the additional context, detail, and complexity could cause participants to shift their interpretation of the meaning of the partner's traits, and thus the comparison between participants' ideals and a partner's traits would not be as straightforward as when they examine traits listed on a profile. This prediction is reminiscent of the change-of-meaning hypothesis (D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974), which suggests that participants shift the connotative (i.e., positive vs. negative) meaning of a trait to be consistent with their impression of an individual. Thus, consistent with construal-level theory, abstract ideal partner preferences may not predict romantic evaluations in concrete face-to-face attraction settings if people incorporate the additional contextual details of a potential partner and reinterpret the meaning of his or her traits (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011). This change-of-meaning mechanism proves relevant not only to the distinction between hypothetical and live interactions, but also to the utility of alternative ideal partner preference measurement strategies that consider traits in the context of other traits (see below).

Measurement considerations. Before reviewing the evidence that addresses whether individual differences in ideal partner preferences exhibit predictive validity, we first consider what it means psychometrically for the traits of a partner to match one's ideals. The extent to which a partner matches ideals can be computed in two ways by drawing on two independent sources of statistical variance, which Cronbach (1955) called elevation and accuracy. We call the matching metric that draws from elevation variance the *level metric*, and we call the matching metric that draws from accuracy variance the *pattern metric* (Eastwick & Neff, 2012).

The level metric is a calculation of the match between (a) the high versus low level of a participant's ideal partner preference rating and (b) the high versus low level of a target's trait rating for a particular trait. A match in level occurs when a potential or current romantic partner possesses traits that the participant rates highly in an ideal partner. For example, if a man rates physical attractiveness in an ideal partner more highly than others do, then the partner matches his ideals if she is especially attractive and mismatches his ideals if she is not.

For the level metric to demonstrate predictive validity, a positive statistical interaction between the ideal partner preference for a trait and the relative presence versus absence of that same trait in a romantic partner (i.e., an Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interaction) must significantly predict a romantic evaluation. Figure 3 presents three possible forms of such a positive interaction. The first form (Figure 3A) is a crossover interaction that supports a pure matching hypothesis: If a participant's ideal for a trait is high, he is satisfied with a partner who has high levels of the trait, and if a participant's ideal for a trait is low, he is satisfied with a partner who has low levels of the trait. In the case of a mismatch (i.e., high ideals with low levels of the trait, low ideals with high levels of the trait), the partner is evaluated negatively. The second form (Figure 3B) has the same interaction term as in Figure 3A but adds a positive main effect of the trait. In this case, the trait positively predicts relationship satisfaction for participants on average, but this association is stronger for participants with high rather than low ideals. The third form (Figure 3C) has the same interaction term and main effect of partner trait from Figure 3B but adds a main effect of ideals. The illustrated main effect is negative, which could emerge if people who are romantically selective tend to report higher ideals on average (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001). In this case, the high-ideals/low-partner-trait cell experiences little relationship satisfaction (because the participant strongly desires a trait that the partner does not have), and the other three cells experience higher relationship satisfaction. The main effect of ideals could conceivably be positive in a situation where, for example, some participants are more likely than others to give high ratings to both partners and ideals—that is, actor variance in scale usage. All of these patterns would demonstrate significant predictive validity for ideal partner preferences because of the element that they share in common: the statistically significant positive Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interaction. The main effects of ideals and the main effect of the partner's traits simply shift between the various patterns.[2]

[2] Some scholars have used a partner's trait to predict a participant's romantic evaluation controlling for the participant's ideal for that trait (e.g., Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001; Overall et al., 2006, Footnote 3). However, such analyses do not test the level or pattern metric logic: If the ideal were a random value, the residual trait score would predict the DV just as strongly as the main effect of the trait alone. In other words, this residual method offers an appropriate test of the predictive validity of the trait, but this method does not test the predictive importance of ideals. In addition, some scholars have used difference scores to compute the match between ideals and a partner's traits (Knee et al., 2001; Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997). The difference score logic is similar to the level metric (as long as the researcher controls for the underlying main effect of trait and ideal), but the plotting of traits and ideals (as in Figure 3) as separate variables offers the clearest interpretation of the underlying data (see Griffin et al., 1999, for an extended example that involves the use of difference scores to understand traits and ideals).

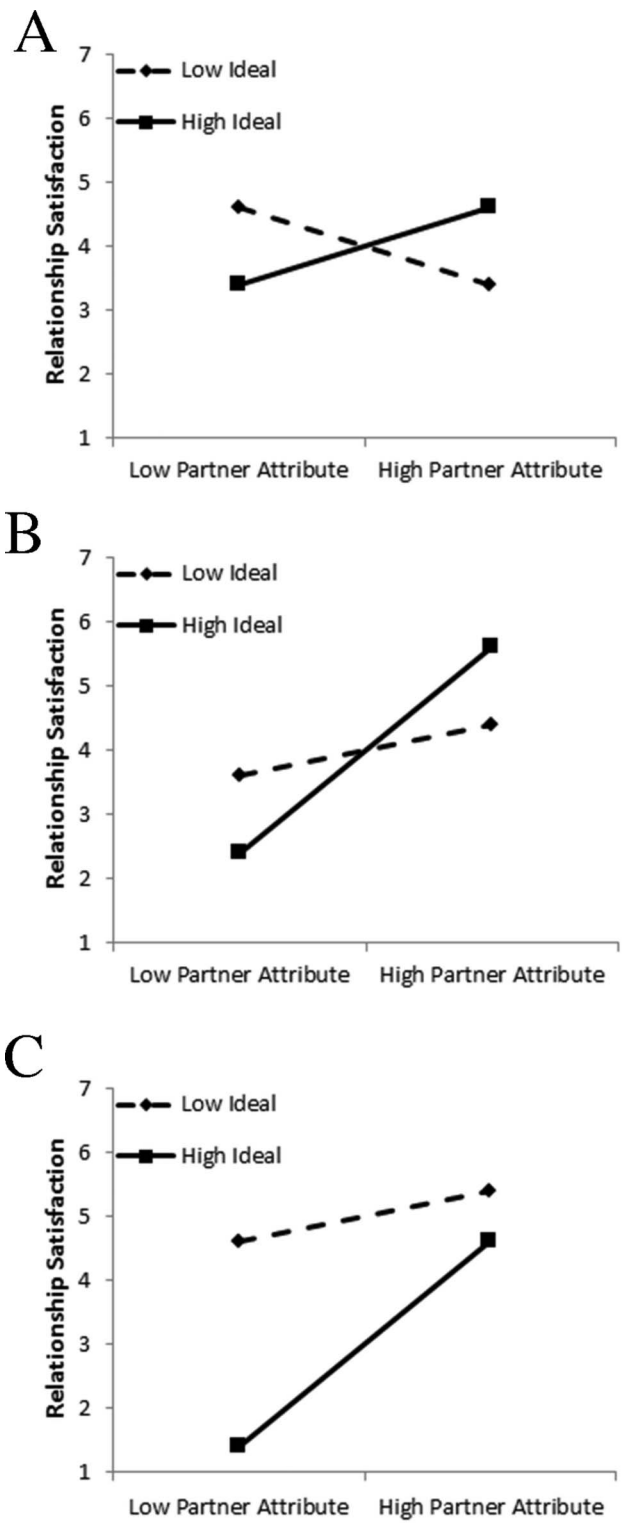


Figure 3. Three hypothetical forms of a significant Ideal Preference × Attribute (i.e., level metric) interaction. Figure 3A depicts the interaction alone. Figure 3B depicts the same interaction plus a positive attribute main effect. Figure 3C depicts the interaction, positive attribute main effect, and negative effect of ideals. All three patterns would demonstrate predictive validity.

In essence, the level metric is the individual differences extension of the sex differences examined in the meta-analysis. As outlined above, given that men report higher ideal ratings for physical attractiveness than women, physical attractiveness should affect romantic evaluations more strongly for men than for women. This moderational hypothesis—that participant sex moderates the association of physical attractiveness with romantic evaluations—was not supported in attraction and relationship contexts, yet participants' idiosyncratic ideals could serve as a significant moderator in place of participant sex. For example, the association between a potential partner's intelligence and participants' romantic interest in that partner could be stronger for participants who give high rather than low ratings to intelligence in an ideal partner.

In contrast to the level metric, the pattern metric is a calculation of the match between (a) the relative ratings of a participant's ideal partner preferences and (b) the relative ratings of a target's traits across several trait dimensions (see Figure 4). A match in pattern occurs when the pattern of one's ideal partner preferences tracks the pattern of a partner's traits, regardless of whether the ideals or the traits are high or low. For example, if a man desires intelligence more than physical attractiveness in a partner, then the partner matches his ideals if she is more intelligent than she is attractive, and she mismatches his ideals if she is more attractive than she is intelligent. Thus, for the pattern metric to demonstrate predictive validity, the within-person correlation between a participant's ideals and a partner's traits (after a Fisher *z* transformation) must predict the participant's romantic evaluation of the partner. Although pattern variance in ideal partner preferences was not examined in the literature on sex differences, it is nevertheless a potentially meaningful source of statistical variance.

Predictions. Given this theoretical and empirical backdrop, how should the match between a participant's ideal partner preferences and the traits of a potential romantic partner predict romantic evaluations across the three Levinger and Snoek (1972) stages? First, the level metric should exhibit predictive validity in awareness (i.e., hypothetical) contexts where participants have not met opposite-sex targets face to face. Ideal partner preferences are shaped in part by people's beliefs and schemas about the kinds of interpersonal qualities that a partner should possess (Eagly, Eastwick, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2009). Thus, when evaluating an abstract, hypothetical partner, people should be able to apply such beliefs and schemas, and their evaluations of the partner should be consistent with their ideals. Second, the level metric should not predict romantic desire in surface contact (i.e., initial attraction) contexts once a live interaction with the partner has taken place. That is, the concrete context of a live interaction should interfere with the effect of the ideal-perceived trait match, and thus the romantic desire that participants experience in these situations should be unrelated to the extent to which they ideally desired the partner's attributes. Third, given the lack of sex differences documented in the meta-analysis, the level metric may fail to exhibit predictive validity in mutuality (i.e., established relationship) contexts as well. Yet there is no precedent for the pattern metric in the sex differences literature, and consistent with the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Simpson et al., 2001), it is entirely possible that the pattern metric will reliably exhibit predictive validity in relationship contexts. After all, participants should be especially able and motivated to compare an existing relationship against their ideal standards (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011), and the pattern metric may be better suited for live person perception because it captures how traits take on new meanings in the context of other traits (Asch, 1946; D. L.

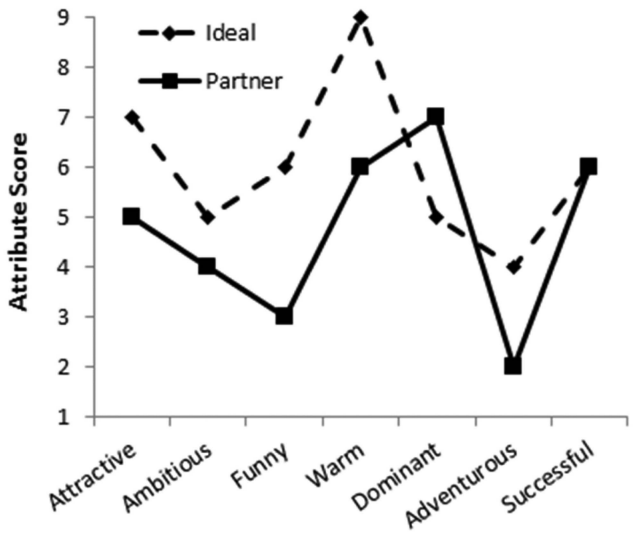


Figure 4. Hypothetical pattern match between a participant's ideals and a partner's traits across seven attributes. The depicted ratings correlate .45, yielding a pattern metric Fisher $z = .49$.

Hamilton & Zanna, 1974). Thus, even if level variance is irrelevant to relationship evaluations, pattern variance could reflect the interpersonal information that people actually use.

Predictive Validity of Individual Differences

This subsection reviews studies that have tested the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences. We begin by reviewing studies that tested predictive validity within each of the three Levinger and Snoek (1972) stages, and we conclude by reviewing findings that directly compared the predictive validity of ideals across multiple stages within the same study (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).

Hypothetical contexts. To our knowledge, only one study has examined the predictive validity of individual differences ideal partner preferences in a context where participants had not met (and did not eventually meet) the targets of their attraction (D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009). In this study, a team of coders rated the extent to which individuals depicted in photographs exhibited 12 attributes, such as confident, conventional, and intelligent (i.e., the partner trait rating). In the experimental sessions, participants first rated the extent to which they found these same 12 qualities to be attractive in a partner (i.e., the ideal partner preference). Then, the participants viewed 98 of the coded opposite-sex photographs and rated how much they were attracted to and interested in dating the person depicted in the photograph (i.e., the romantic evaluation DV). The researchers constructed 12 *revealed preference* measures for each participant by correlating the coder ratings of each attribute with the participant's DV rating. Each of these revealed preference correlations indicates the extent to which the attribute inspired the participant's romantic evaluations across all 100 targets: The higher the revealed preference, the more the participant evaluated partners positively to the extent that the partner possessed the trait.

Participants' ideal partner preferences for each trait significantly predicted the revealed preference for that trait (average $r = .18$). Furthermore, the correlation was stronger for qualities that could be discerned easily from the photographs, like thinness ($r = .35$) and having a toned or curvaceous body ($r = .27$). These correlations are consistent with the level metric moderational logic because each participant's revealed preference is essentially his or her personal regression slope as illustrated in Figure 3, and a positive correlation between an ideal preference and a revealed preference would mean that participants' slopes were steeper the greater their ideals—in other words, a statistical interaction. Thus, just as with the sex difference predictive validity findings reviewed above, the findings of D. Wood and Brumbaugh (2009) imply that ideal partner preferences have predictive validity in contexts where people are evaluating descriptions of potential romantic partners with whom they have not yet had a live face-to-face interaction. (To our knowledge, no tests of the pattern metric have been conducted in hypothetical contexts.)

Attraction contexts.

Data from speed-dating studies. Two speed-dating studies examined the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences. One study reported very weak associations between participants' ideal partner preferences and the qualities that influenced their actual choices at a speed-dating event (Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). As an indicator of the extent to which an attribute influenced a participant's actual choices in this study, these researchers calculated a "choice score" that consisted of the average attribute level of the speed-dating partners to whom a participant said "yes." For example, the choice score for physical attractiveness would be the average physical attractiveness of the speed-dating partners whom the participant "yesed." The correlation between ideal partner preferences and the corresponding choice score in this study was quite small on average ($r = .06$). Importantly, the choice score metric is different from both the level metric logic and the analyses conducted by D. Wood and Brumbaugh (2009), as this procedure confounds the effect of interest (the association of the attribute with yesing; the revealed preference) with participants' selectivity. That is, a participant could receive a high value for the choice score either because he or she actually valued the attribute in a partner or because he or she said "yes" to only a few exceptionally desirable people.[3] If ideal partner preferences are positively cor-

[3] Consider the following example: A participant who reports that she has high ideals for physical attractiveness and a participant who reports that she has low ideals for physical attractiveness attend a speed-dating event with 10 speed-dating partners, each of whom differed from the others on physical attractiveness. One partner was a "10," one was a "9," one was an "8," and so forth down to "1." If the participant with high ideals also happens to be selective, she might say "yes" to the 9 and the 10 (average choice score of 9.5), whereas the participant with low ideals might say "yes" to the 7, 8, 9, and 10 (average choice score of 8.5). Thus, the high-ideals participant would seem to actually value physical attractiveness more than the low ideals participant by 1 scale point. But now calculate the choice score as the average of the speed daters to whom the participant said "no." This value is 4.5 for the high-ideals participant and 3.5 for the low-ideals participant: The high-ideals participant also dislikes physical attractiveness 1 scale point more than the low-ideals participant. Thus, this method of calculating the extent to which an attribute influences actual choices corresponds to the level metric only if participants' ideals are uncorrelated with selectivity. For this reason, correlations between ideals and attributes of a current romantic partner (analogous to a chosen partner at speed-dating event) would be similarly inconclusive (e.g., Burriss, Welling, & Puts, 2011). In general, any test that fails to examine a DV (as illustrated in Figure 3) remains open to alternative explanations that do not require ideals to have predictive validity.

related with selectivity (as in Figure 3C), then the Todd et al. (2007) choice score calculation could have overestimated the association between stated and actual preferences, despite the fact that these authors concluded that any such association was tiny.

A second speed-dating study that examined the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences drew from the moderational, level metric logic (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). These researchers calculated revealed preferences (which they called "in-vivo" preferences) for physical attractiveness, earning prospects, and personability for each participant. In-vivo preferences were operationalized as the association (i.e., unstandardized regression beta) of a participant's judgment of each speed-dating partner's trait with the participant's romantic evaluation (e.g., romantic desire) of each partner calculated across the participant's nine to 13 speed dates. On average, participants' in-vivo preferences correlated negligibly with their ideal partner preferences ($r = .03$). These nonsignificant correlations even emerged when the traditional ideal preference items (e.g., "How much would you want your ideal partner to possess each of the following characteristics?") were substituted for items that specifically referenced the speed-dating event (e.g., "How much do you think the following characteristics will matter in your decision to 'yes' or 'no' someone after your 4-min date?"). Thus, the nonsignificant correlations between ideal and in-vivo preferences in the work of Eastwick and Finkel (2008a) imply that the data do not conform to any of the Figure 3 patterns but rather consist of parallel slopes for people with high and low ideal partner preferences. Although not published in the original Eastwick and Finkel article, the pattern metric match between ideals and each speed-dating partner's qualities also failed to reliably predict romantic interest at the speed-dating event (average $r = .06$).

Data on opposite-sex peers. However, the in-vivo/revealed preference approach is potentially limited because it condenses all nine to 13 of participants' data points into a single score, which could remove meaningful within-person variability (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). (In a different portion of the Results section, Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a, reported that zero out of the nine Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interactions that they examined were significant.) Eastwick (2009b, Study 2) used both the in-vivo and statistical interaction approach in the same study to examine whether the two approaches revealed similar conclusions. In this study, participants reported not on a set of opposite-sex speed-dating partners but instead on a set of opposite-sex peers whom they knew personally. Thus, these data tested whether the results of Eastwick and Finkel (2008a) and Todd et al. (2007) would generalize beyond speed-dating: If ideal partner preferences affect how people evaluate potential romantic partners in their everyday lives, then participants (on average) should be more attracted to opposite-sex friends and acquaintances who happen to match their ideals than to those who mismatch their ideals. In the Eastwick (2009b) study, single participants nominated 10 opposite-sex peers, some of whom were romantic interests and some of whom were not. However, as in the speed-dating studies reviewed above, ideal partner preferences exhibited little predictive validity. A representative analysis is presented in Figure 5A: This figure plots the results of the regression predicting romantic desire from participants' ideal partner preference for physical attractiveness, participants' judgments of each peer's physical attractiveness, and their interaction. The figure reveals that the regression lines for participants with high and low ideals were positive and parallel to each other, which indicates that physical attractiveness predicted romantic desire regardless of participants' stated ideals. Across six analyses, the stated and in-vivo correlations were −.03 on average and the Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interaction betas were −.01 on average. Consistent with these level metric findings, the pattern metric also revealed a nonsignificant and small correlation in this study ($r = .04$). In other words, participants' ideal partner preferences appeared to be unrelated to the traits that inspired their romantic interest in the opposite-sex individuals whom they encountered in their daily lives.

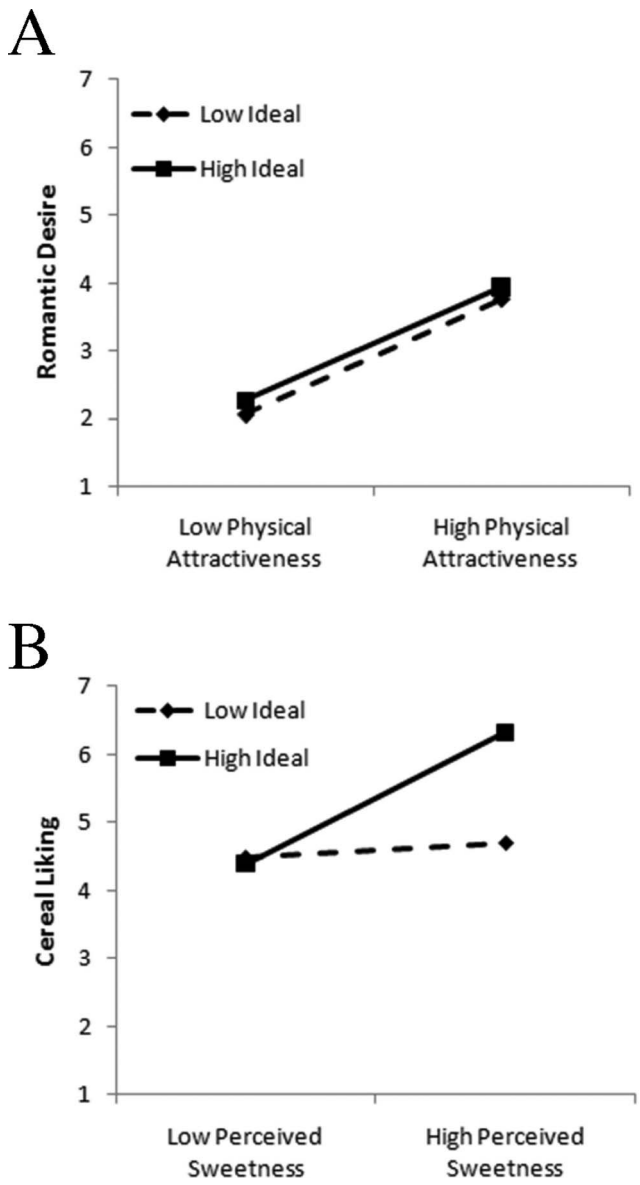


Figure 5. Actual data used to test for Ideal Preference × Trait interactions. Figure 5A depicts the positive association of physical attractiveness with romantic desire; this association does not vary by physical attractiveness ideals. Figure 5B depicts the association of cereal sweetness with cereal liking; this association is stronger for participants who ideally prefer sweet cereals than for those who do not.

The Eastwick (2009b) study also tested whether preferences have predictive validity in a different, simpler domain: liking for breakfast cereals. Participants reported the extent to which they ideally liked sweet, sugary breakfast cereals, and they also provided perceived sweetness ratings and liking ratings for 10 specific cereals with which they were familiar (e.g., Kix, Raisin Bran, Frosted Flakes). In this case, participants' stated and in-vivo preferences were highly correlated ($r = .65$), and the Perceived Sweetness × Ideal Sweetness interaction was positive and significant. This interaction is presented in Figure 5B. Participants who reported scores 1 standard deviation below the mean on ideal sweetness (low ideal) evidenced no association between the perceived sweetness of the cereal and their liking for the cereal. However, participants who reported scores 1 standard deviation above the mean on ideal sweetness (high ideal) indeed liked cereals more to the extent that they were sweet.

The cereal data offer two implications for the present discussion. First, consider that sugar content is one of the few salient characteristics of a breakfast cereal, whereas potential romantic partners can vary on a tremendous variety of traits, and the meaning of one trait depends on the presence or absence of other traits (Asch, 1946; D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974). Therefore, people may have greater insight into the noninterpersonal domain of breakfast cereals than the interpersonal domain of romantic partners because cereals are comparably simple and vary on relatively few dimensions. Second, participants' ideals revealed predictive validity for cereals but not for potential partners even though the two studies used nearly identical methods (e.g., participants reported their liking for 10 targets). Therefore, poor reliability or insufficient power are unlikely to (completely) explain why the ideal partner preference data have reliably failed to reveal predictive validity in attraction contexts (cf. D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009).

Relationship contexts. Several studies have examined the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences in established relationships. As reviewed above, the ideal standards model generates predictions about the functional utility of ideal partner preferences (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000). Specifically, this model proposes that people use their ideal partner preferences to evaluate their romantic relationships and to regulate their behavior in relationships. In one study, participants in established relationships (mainly dating relationships) reported their ideal partner preferences for several desirable traits, rated the extent to which their current partner possessed those traits, and provided a dependent measure of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 1999, Study 6). In a second study, participants in dating relationships provided similar measures of ideals and partner perceptions on three occasions over a 3-month period, and the researchers obtained several different assessments of relationship quality as well as relationship status (broken up vs. still dating) during the 3rd month (Fletcher et al., 2000a). In both studies, the pattern metric significantly predicted relationship quality: $r = .40$ in Fletcher et al. (1999) and $r = .28$ (on average) in Fletcher et al. (2000a). Furthermore, pattern metric scores at the 2-month assessment predicted a reduced likelihood of breakup among participants in the Fletcher et al. (2000a) sample. Finally, similar findings have emerged in other work that predated (Murray et al., 1996) and was inspired by (Zentner, 2005) the ideal standards model; in these dating samples, pattern metric measures predicted both satisfaction and likelihood of breakup. This evidence collectively suggests that, consistent with the ideal standards model, participants whose dating partners matched their ideal partner preferences were happier with their relationships and were less likely to break up with their partners.

The ideal-perception consistency measure that revealed significant predictive validity in these four studies was the pattern metric, not the level metric. Indeed, given that the physical attractiveness and earning prospects correlations did not differ by sex in the meta-analysis in relationship contexts, it seems plausible that the level metric would not exhibit predictive validity in these studies either. One of the four studies described above reported tests of the Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interaction (Fletcher et al., 1999, Footnote 7), with two out of five possible interactions significant. Another recent study examined both the level and pattern metrics in a sample of newlyweds, all of whom reported their ideal partner preferences and rated their partner on several traits in the first few months of their marriage (Eastwick & Neff, 2012). Consistent with the findings reviewed above, the pattern metric significantly predicted the probability that the couple would get divorced over a 3.5-year period with an effect size of $r = .20$. The pattern metric measure even remained robust when controlling for the main effects of ideals and the partner's traits, which allays concerns that normative patterns of trait desirability could be responsible for the association of the pattern metric with relationship stability (cf. Humbad, Donnellan, Iacono, McGue, & Burt, 2013). However, just as with the speed-dating and opposite-sex peer findings, the level metric findings were consistently nonsignificant (average interaction $\beta = .00$); that is, the data did not conform to any of the Figure 3 patterns. Furthermore, the level metric still failed to approach significance when all Trait × Ideal interactions were included in the predictive analyses simultaneously, suggesting that the superior performance of the pattern metric is not due to the fact that the pattern metric accounts for more information (i.e., more traits) than the level metric.

In summary, the level metric approach demonstrates predictive validity in hypothetical contexts but not attraction or relationship contexts—a set of predictive validity findings that is identical to that of the sex differences literature. However, consistent with the ideal standards model, the pattern metric demonstrates predictive validity in relationship contexts (but not attraction contexts). Nevertheless, to achieve greater confidence that these varying findings are due to Levinger and Snoek (1972) stage differences and not other cross-study differences, it would be useful to compare predictive validity findings across relationship stages but within the same study using the same measures. In other words, stronger evidence would come from studies that demonstrate that the predictive validity of ideals *significantly* differs by relationship stage (i.e., is moderated by relationship stage). The following section reviews several studies testing such differences.

Does predictive validity significantly differ across hypothetical versus attraction contexts? A recent laboratory study examined the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences in the awareness and surface contact stages (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011, Study 1). In this study, single participants evaluated an opposite-sex potential partner (actually a confederate) in the context of both a paper-based description and a live interaction. First, a participant viewed a "partner profile" of the confederate that contained three traits, such as "ambitious," "generous," and "spontaneous." The confederate had supposedly selected these traits out of a larger list of traits (taken from Fletcher et al., 1999) as the

three that best described him or her. In reality, the participant had reported several weeks earlier which traits mattered most and mattered least in an ideal romantic partner, and the profile contained either (a) two of the three traits that the participant had rated as most important (ideal condition) or (b) two of the three traits that the participant had rated as least important (nonideal condition). After viewing this profile, the participant then reported his or her romantic desire for the confederate; in line with predictions (and the findings of D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009), participants indeed desired the confederate more in the ideal than in the nonideal condition. Next, the participant had a brief (4–5 min) live interaction with the confederate. This interaction was heavily constrained to minimize the likelihood that the participant would learn any information that would confirm or contradict what he or she had read on the profile. Specifically, the participant and the confederate took turns describing a set of pictures for each other, and the confederate's responses were entirely scripted. After this brief interaction, the participant again reported his or her romantic desire for the confederate; now, the ideal versus nonideal condition had no effect, and the interaction of ideal condition by stage (i.e., profile vs. live interaction) was significant. In other words, participants' romantic desire for the confederate was related to the extent to which the potential partner matched his or her ideals before but not after a brief live interaction had taken place. This finding suggests that the initial face-to-face interaction may be a "point of disconnect" after which participants' ideals cease to have predictive power in attraction contexts.

A second study attempted to identify a possible mechanism underlying this pattern (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011, Study 2). As discussed above, one possibility consistent with construal-level theory is that ideals predict hypothetical but not live partner evaluations because people tend to approach these two contexts using high- and low-level mindsets, respectively. Specifically, the evaluation of a profile depicting an opposite-sex partner is largely a high-level, abstract exercise, and participants should have an easy time matching their abstract ideals to the hypothetical partner's traits in such a setting. However, in a live interaction, participants encounter myriad low-level contextual cues and experiential information (e.g., nonverbals, rapport; Frost, Chance, Norton, & Ariely, 2008). According to the change-of-meaning hypothesis, participants will shift the meaning of a trait to align with this additional extraneous information (Asch, 1946; D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974). Therefore, the live interaction could change participants' interpretations of whether a trait has a negative or positive meaning, thus interfering with the direct comparison between ideals and the partner's traits. To examine change-of-meaning as a possible mechanism, Eastwick, Finkel, and Eagly (2011) adapted the Hamilton and Zanna (1974) procedures for use in a second confederate study.

Single participants again attended a laboratory session where they reported their romantic desire for an opposite-sex confederate twice: once after viewing traits describing the confederate and once after a live interaction. Replicating the findings described above, participants desired the ideal more than the nonideal confederate after viewing the profile, but this effect disappeared after the live interaction. Furthermore, the data revealed a similar interaction pattern when participants reported the meaning of the partner's traits (D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974). For example, if participants saw that the confederate described him- or herself as "outspoken" on the profile, they tended to interpret the meaning of outspoken to be consistent with their ideals: Participants who ideally desired outspoken partners interpreted outspoken to mean "frank," whereas participants who did not desire outspoken partners interpreted outspoken to mean "tactless." However, after the live interaction, participants interpreted the meaning of outspoken to be similar regardless of whether they were in the ideal or the nonideal condition. For example, participants in the nonideal condition now tended to believe that the confederate's trait "outspoken" meant that she was "frank," not "tactless." As predicted, this change-of-meaning variable significantly mediated the interaction of ideal condition by evaluation context (profile vs. face to face) on romantic desire: Participants desired the ideal more than the nonideal confederate before but not after the live interaction because participants shifted the meaning of the confederate's traits after that interaction. In other words, participants subjectively interpreted identical traits as having different meanings depending on whether they rated them with respect to a hypothetical romantic partner or with respect to the live confederate whom they had just met, and this mismatch interfered with the ability of ideals to predict romantic desire after the live interaction.

In summary, when participants' evaluations of potential romantic partners take place in abstract, hypothetical contexts (e.g., viewing a description of a potential partner), those evaluations tend to be consistent with the extent to which those partners match their ideal partner preferences. However, in the concrete context of an actual face-to-face interaction, participants' evaluations do not appear to be associated with their ideal partner preferences. One empirically validated explanation for this pattern is that traits, like the kind typically assessed in research on ideal partner preferences, have flexible meanings that shift depending on a person's overall constellation of attributes (Asch, 1946). In a live interaction, participants incorporate the myriad complex features of the potential partner into their evaluations, and this additional information changes the meaning of a partner's traits and muddies participants' comparisons between those traits and their ideal partner preferences. In general, these findings are consistent with construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) and add to the corpus of recent studies that have revealed differences in interpersonal processes between hypothetical and live face-to-face interactions (Eastwick et al., in press).

Does predictive validity significantly differ across attraction versus established relationship contexts? The preceding review of the ideal standards model literature suggests that ideal partner preferences will predict romantic evaluations (a) for established relationship partners but not partners in initial attraction settings and (b) when the match between ideals and traits is calculated with the pattern metric but not the level metric. One study tested all of these possibilities in a sample of 502 middle-aged adults (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011, Study 3). These participants initially reported their ideal partner preferences for seven trait dimensions at a time when they were single and registering online for a dating service. Then, the researchers caught up with these participants 2–3 years later; many of these participants were single at this second time point, and many of them were now dating, engaged, or married to a romantic partner whom they were not dating when they initially reported their ideal partner preferences. At this second time point, participants completed a number of items about either their current romantic partner, if they

had one, or their most desired romantic partner, if they were single. They rated this partner on the same seven trait dimensions for which they had earlier reported their ideals, and they also reported several different romantic evaluations of the partner (e.g., passion, commitment, satisfaction).

The level metric again fared poorly in this study. For participants who were currently in a relationship ($N = 281$), participants rated their partner on seven trait dimensions and seven romantic evaluation DVs, which permits the calculation of 49 Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interactions. However, only two of these 49 interactions were significant, and the average interaction beta was very small ($\beta = .02$). Participants reporting on a desired romantic partner ($N = 221$) completed three of the DVs, resulting in 21 possible Ideal Partner Preference × Partner Trait interactions. However, none of these 21 interactions were significant, and the average beta was .01.

The pattern metric revealed a different set of findings. For participants who were reporting on a current romantic partner, the pattern metric predicted six of the seven romantic evaluation DVs with an average correlation of .19. However, the pattern metric failed to predict romantic evaluations for participants reporting on a desired romantic partner (average $r = -.06$); these correlations were significantly weaker than the correlations for participants reporting on romantic partners. In short, it seems likely that researchers will successfully document predictive validity for ideal partner preferences (outside hypothetical contexts) when two key ingredients are both in place: the presence of a sample of participants reporting on established relationship partners and the use of the pattern match metric. The predictive validity findings for participants reporting on partners in attraction contexts (e.g., desired partners) and the findings for the level match metric have consistently revealed nonsignificant effects.

Why would the pattern metric reveal greater predictive validity than the level metric? We remain unsure, and we are unaware of any systematic investigations that have compared the predictive validity of metrics that match on pattern versus level variance. One possible explanation is that for the level match metric to demonstrate significant predictive validity, participants would need to complete the difficult task of taking between-person considerations into account when making their ideal ratings. That is, participants who provide a high ideal partner preference rating for a trait must be more inspired by that trait than other participants are, and participants may not have easy access to this extrapersonal information. However, participants may have some insight about the extent to which they prefer one trait relative to other traits—the intrapersonal information captured by the pattern metric. In fact, it might be possible to retrofit the pattern metric for the sex differences literature if, for example, researchers developed hypotheses about the appeal of physical attractiveness in contexts where it was (or was not) accompanied by other traits. A second possible explanation is that the pattern metric may assess ideal-perception consistency better than the level metric because traits take on new meanings in the context of the whole person (Asch, 1946). The meaning of a trait can shift depending on a person's overall constellation of attributes (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974), and because the level metric essentially computes similarity between ideals and perceptions on a trait-by-trait basis, the pattern metric may better capture the contextualization that accompanies complex, real life, face-to-face person perception. Finally, a psychometric explanation for the better performance of the pattern metric is that the level metric interaction term could be especially nonrobust; that is, the interaction term could be highly sensitive to a handful of targets at the very high and very low ends of the attribute scales. Future research that systematically examines the pattern and level sources of variance is sure to prove enlightening, both within the ideal partner preference domain and beyond.

Alternative Assessments of Ideal Partner Preferences

The primary focus of this review is on the predictive validity of a particular (and especially ubiquitous) instantiation of the ideal partner preference: ratings for attributes on rating scales. To be sure, the scales have used a variety of ranges (e.g., 0–3, 1–7, 1–9), and some studies have encouraged participants to make trade-offs between different traits by forcing them to rank the importance of traits (Buss, 1989) or to allocate their limited "mate dollars" to different traits (Li et al., 2002). Yet across all of these methods of assessing ideal partner preferences, the psychological construct of interest is the same: the extent to which a participant consciously reports that he or she values a particular attribute in an abstract ideal partner, without reference to a specific individual. Nevertheless, there are two other measures of ideal partner preferences that are somewhat removed from this particular operationalization: metrics that assess ideal partner preferences implicitly and metrics that ask participants to calculate mentally the extent to which a specific partner embodies their ideal. These two alternative assessment strategies are theoretically and empirically distinct from the classic ideal partner preference, yet we briefly review studies using these measures below, as their considerably stronger predictive validity extends the discussion in fruitful new directions.

Implicit partner preferences for physical attractiveness. When participants report their ideal partner preferences using rating scales, they have access to their consciously held propositional beliefs about whether it is true or false that a particular trait is valuable in a romantic partner—the hallmark of an explicit measure (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007, 2011). However, people are also likely to have spontaneous affective reactions to the traits that romantic partners can possess, and such reactions are best assessed by implicit measures. In fact, explicit and implicit measures often correlate only weakly (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009); people's spontaneous affective reactions frequently do not coincide with their consciously validated beliefs as assessed on explicit measures. Given that most people in contemporary Western cultures make romantic decisions based largely on affective experiences (e.g., passionate love) and gut-level reactions (Shaver, Wu, & Schwartz, 1991; Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986), it is plausible that implicit measures of ideal partner preferences are more successful than traditional explicit preferences at predicting romantic desire in attraction settings. One recent line of research examined this possibility with respect to the preference for physical attractiveness (Eastwick, Eagly, Finkel, & Johnson, 2011).

The primary implicit measure of physical attractiveness used in these studies derived from Nosek and Banaji's (2001) go/no-go association task. On this task, a computer briefly presented words that were either traits (e.g., attractive) or attitude objects (e.g., tequila) in the middle of a screen; for some words, participants

were instructed to hit the space bar extremely quickly (i.e., within 750–1,000 ms), whereas for other words, they were instructed to refrain from hitting the space bar. For all trials, the participants were told to hit the space bar when the flashed words were synonymous with physical attractiveness (e.g., sexy) and to refrain from hitting the space bar for other traits (e.g., trustworthy). In addition, the task was divided into compatible and incompatible blocks. In the compatible block, participants had to hit the space bar when the word was an attitude object that they happened to like (e.g., football), and they had to refrain from hitting the space bar when presented with an attitude object that they did not like (e.g., motorcycles; Olson & Fazio, 2004). In the incompatible block, participants had to hit the space bar for disliked attitude objects and refrain from hitting the space bar for liked objects. The extent to which participants are faster at the compatible than the incompatible block indicates the strength of their mental association between the concept of physical attractiveness and attitude objects that they like—that is, the strength of their implicit liking for physical attractiveness.

Across five studies (Eastwick, Eagly, et al., 2011), this implicit preference revealed an average correlation of .00 with the explicit preference for physical attractiveness (assessed with rating scales). In other words, people's spontaneous affective reactions to physical attractiveness in a romantic partner were entirely independent of their conscious judgments about whether they believed physical attractiveness to be a valuable attribute in a partner. As noted previously, implicit–explicit correlations tend to be weak on average (Greenwald et al., 2009), a tendency that is especially likely to emerge when explicit reports reflect reasons and not feelings (Gawronski & LaBel, 2008). Thus, the low implicit–explicit correlation in the partner preference domain is consistent with the suggestion that people's explicit ideal partner preferences for attributes can be conceptualized as beliefs about the reasons why they might like or dislike someone (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a; Nisbett & Bellows, 1977). Furthermore, although men exhibited consistently higher ratings than women on the explicit measure of the preference for physical attractiveness, scores on the implicit measure were approximately identical for men and women.

Data also suggested that the explicit and implicit preference measures predicted participants' romantic desire in different contexts (i.e., a double dissociation). In line with the evidence reviewed above (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009), participants' explicit preferences for physical attractiveness moderated the extent to which the physical attractiveness of a person depicted in a photograph inspired their romantic desire for that person. Again, however, this explicit preference was not relevant to participants' romantic desire for potential partners at a speed-dating event or in a laboratory interaction with a confederate. However, the implicit preference for physical attractiveness exhibited the opposite pattern: Participants' implicit preferences were irrelevant to their romantic desire for photographed partners but did moderate the association between physical attractiveness and romantic desire for live potential partners. Specifically, participants on average desired speed-dating partners and laboratory interaction partners more to the extent that they found those partners to be attractive, and this association was especially robust among participants who had a strong implicit preference for physical attractiveness, a pattern reminiscent of Figure 3B.

The predictive validity moderational findings for implicit preferences have two implications for the present discussion. The first implication is that it is possible to predict a priori which participants will experience stronger versus weaker romantic desire in response to the presence or absence of a particular attribute in a partner. This conclusion may not appear earth-shattering on the surface—no relationship scientist would conclude that romantic desire is fundamentally unpredictable—yet the association between partners' attributes and romantic desire often reveals very little random variability. For example, the positive association between partners' physical attractiveness and a participant's romantic desire for each partner (i.e., the in-vivo preference) varies little across participants; that is, physical attractiveness tends to inspire positive romantic evaluations to approximately the same extent for each participant in a given sample (Eastwick, 2009b). The fact that the implicit measure moderated this association, despite the weak variability of the association across participants, is a testament to the power of the implicit measure.

The second implication is that participants may be especially likely to use affective or gut-level reactions to make decisions in the romantic domain, at least in the early stages of a relationship. In fact, implicit measures correlate with measures of participants' spontaneous gut reactions to a stimulus, even when those gut reactions are self-reported (Ranganath, Smith, & Nosek, 2008). Participants' romantic desire reports for live potential partners could be based largely on their emotional gut reactions, especially in contemporary Western contexts (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995; Simpson et al., 1986), but their romantic desire reports for photographed partners could be based on their consciously accessible propositional beliefs (Sritharan, Heilpern, Wilbur, & Gawronski, 2010). In other words, people's emotional reactions may be especially relevant to judgments about a potential romantic partner after (rather than before) a face-to-face meeting. Therefore, people's explicit ideal partner preferences might exhibit poor predictive validity in attraction settings because the schemas that people draw upon when reporting their ideals do not properly account for the influence of hot emotional processes that affect people's romantic judgments (Loewenstein, 1996, 2005; Robinson & Clore, 2002).

Ideal-perception consistency direct-estimation items. A second alternative measure assesses the consistency between ideal partner preferences and a romantic partner using items that ask participants to estimate ideal-perception consistency directly. For example, participants might complete an item such as "To what degree does your current romantic partner match your ideal partner for the characteristic 'sexy'?" with the anchors *does not match my ideal at all* and *completely matches my ideal*. This procedure differs considerably from the studies reviewed above, all of which assessed consistency using two separate items for each trait—a perceived partner trait item (e.g., "my partner is sexy") and an ideal partner preference item (e.g., "my ideal partner is sexy")—and the similarity between these two constructs was then calculated by the researcher using either the level or pattern matching metric. With a direct-estimation item (or a collection of such items), the calculation of similarity presumably takes place in the mind of the participant.

These ideal-perception consistency direct-estimation items have predicted important relationship outcomes in three prior reports. In a pair of studies, L. Campbell et al. (2001) found that direct-

estimation items for all three of the Fletcher et al. (1999) ideal preference dimensions (i.e., warmth/trustworthiness, vitality/attractiveness, and status/resources) predicted greater self- and partner reports of relationship quality. Another set of studies replicated the L. Campbell et al. findings and also found that ideal-perception consistency was negatively associated with attempts to change one's partner with respect to the relevant dimension (Overall et al., 2006). For example, participants who felt that their partner did not match their ideals for vitality/attractiveness made greater efforts to change their partner's vitality/attractiveness. Finally, a recent set of studies found that the direct-estimation items (a) positively predicted reports of commitment, satisfaction, and inclusion of the other in the self and (b) negatively predicted reports of dejection-related emotions (e.g., miserable, low) in the relationship (Lackenbauer & Campbell, 2012). The predictive validity associations across the three reports were strong, with correlations ranging from .2 to .7 (average $r = \sim.40$). Thus, the predictive validity of this method is much stronger than the null level metric findings reviewed above, and it is somewhat stronger than the pattern metric predictive validity findings (which ranged from $r = .2$ to $r = .4$).

Why does this direct estimation method of assessing ideal-perception consistency produce such strong evidence for predictive validity? Perhaps these items are successful because, like the pattern metric, participants do not need to accurately assess whether their ideals are high or low relative to other participants; this variance could be irrelevant to the match versus mismatch judgment that takes place in the mind of the participant. A related possibility is that these items force the participant to think of each attribute in concrete terms as exhibited by the partner. In answering these items, the participant is not comparing the trait of a partner with an abstract, disembodied ideal, but is instead rating the extent to which the partner exhibits the trait in a way that the participant finds appealing. Thus, these measures might be capturing exactly the sort of contextualization process that proved to be one source of the disconnect between hypothetical and attraction contexts as discussed above (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).[4]

Nevertheless, we would caution readers against concluding that predictive validity evidence derived from the direct-estimation items contradicts or qualifies any of the null predictive validity findings for the classic ideal partner preference construct reviewed above. The distinction between actual and perceived similarity in the attraction literature is apropos (Tidwell et al., in press). Researchers can generate similarity metrics by either computing the similarity between two sets of attribute reports using some form of level or pattern metric (i.e., actual similarity) or asking participants to rate how similar they perceive themselves to be to another person (i.e., perceived similarity). The former strategy produces similarity metrics that weakly predict romantic evaluations, whereas the latter strategy produces similarity metrics that strongly predict romantic evaluations. In the present case, the direct-estimation items are analogous to perceived similarity—they assess participants' perception of a partner's similarity not to the self but to an ideal—whereas the level and pattern metric findings reported above all tested the predictive validity of actual similarity to an ideal. Unless the researcher is interested in perceived similarity per se, statisticians typically caution against asking participants themselves to make such perceived similarity judgments, as participants do not systematically consider both elements (i.e., the trait and the ideal in this case) of the "double-barreled" question (Edwards, 2001). Although it is surely meaningful that ideal-perception consistency items predict relational outcomes, we suggest that these measures are an entirely different animal than "classic" ideal partner preferences.

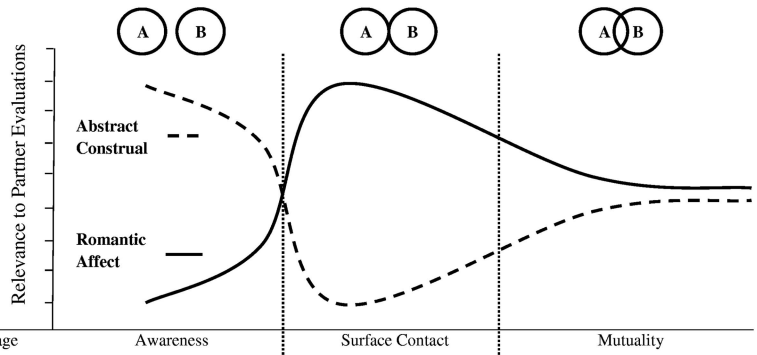
Section 3: Integrative Model and Discussion

In this article, we have attempted to provide a comprehensive review of research on the functional properties of ideal partner preferences—when and how do they affect relationship initiation and maintenance? As is the case with many psychological phenomena, the answer to this question is a resounding "it's complicated." Figure 6 expands upon the Levinger and Snoek (1972) model in an attempt to achieve a more complete and satisfying answer to this question.

The bottom portion of Figure 6 summarizes the preceding review. The first row contains the name of the Levinger and Snoek (1972) stage, and the second row indicates which stages reveal sex differences in the associations of physical attractiveness and earning prospects with romantic evaluations (Section 1 of this article). Although sex differences in these associations consistently emerge in the awareness stage (e.g., Hitsch et al., 2010; Townsend & Levy, 1990a), the present meta-analysis revealed no evidence of sex differences in the surface contact or mutuality stages. The remaining rows indicate how individual differences in ideal partner preferences predict romantic evaluations at each of these three stages, along with example publications (Section 2 of this article). The results for the first two stages (awareness and surface contact) are fairly straightforward: Explicit (but not implicit) preferences predict relational outcomes at the awareness stage, whereas implicit (but not explicit) preferences predict relational outcomes at the surface contact stage (Eastwick, Eagly, et al., 2011; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a; Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Todd et al., 2007; D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009). Results for the mutuality stage are more nuanced: Explicit preferences predict relational outcomes in this stage when examined as a pattern but not when examined with the moderational (level) logic (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2000a, 1999; Murray et al., 1996; Zentner, 2005), and implicit preferences have not yet been examined at this stage to our knowledge.

Finally, the top of Figure 6 presents two curves that correspond to two theoretical perspectives that, in conjunction with the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000), may have the greatest potential to inform future research on ideal partner preferences. The first is construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010), which proposes that people evaluate psychologically distant objects in a high-level construal and psychologically near objects in a low-level construal. When people are directly experiencing an event or object in the here and now, they tend to conceptualize it

[4] One study that predated the ideal standards model assessed participants' ideals specifically with respect to their current partner (i.e., "how they would ideally like their partners to be on each characteristic . . . whether or not the partners are like that now"; Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997, p. 231). This study found some predictive validity evidence for wives (but not husbands) using a discrepancy metric that appropriately controlled for the ideal and attribute main effects (Griffin et al., 1999). These findings are consistent with the current theoretical rationale given that ideals in this study assessed participants' perception of the way that their current partner should embody each particular attribute.



Levinger & Snoek (1972) Stage	Awareness	Surface Contact	Mutuality
Sex Differences[a]	Yes	No	No
Explicit Predictive Validity	Yes	No	No (level) and Yes (pattern)
Implicit Predictive Validity	No	Yes	Untested
Example Predictive Validity Publications	D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009 Eastwick, Finkel, et al., 2011	Todd et al., 2007 Eastwick, Eagly, et al., 2011	Fletcher et al., 2000a Eastwick & Neff, 2012

[a] Predictive validity of physical attractiveness and earning prospects sex differences

Figure 6. Predictive validity of ideal partner preferences by relationship stage. Graph depicts the extent to which A's romantic judgments (e.g., romantic desire) of B are affected by A's abstract construal of B (dotted line) and A's romantic affect toward B (solid line) across Levinger and Snoek's (1972) three major relationship stages. The *y*-axis is a covariance: High *y*-axis values indicate that variation in abstract construal (e.g., partner matches vs. mismatches ideals) or romantic affect (e.g., partner inspires gut-level feelings of passion vs. repulsion) is relevant to romantic evaluations, whereas low *y*-axis values indicate little or no relevance to romantic evaluations.

in low-level, concrete terms, and thus they incorporate all the informationally rich, contextualized detail that is currently available (Trope et al., 2007). However, when people consider a hypothetical event or object at some point in the past or future, they conceptualize it in high-level, abstract terms, and thus they extract only the gist of the event or object while incorporating information from relevant schemas, stereotypes, and ideologies (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010).

The dashed line in Figure 6 indicates the extent to which abstract (e.g., high level) construals regarding a romantic partner are likely to affect romantic evaluations of the partner or the relationship across the three stages. As described earlier, we propose that participants are more likely to evaluate partners using abstract information (e.g., ideal partner preferences for traits) before (awareness) rather than after (surface contact) they have met the partner face to face. We also speculate that after a relationship has formed and two partners establish interdependence (mutuality), the relationship itself becomes an abstract concept that can be evaluated in a hypothetical future. In other words, romantic partners may rely primarily on how it feels in the here and now (i.e., low-level construal information) to evaluate relationship partners in the surface contact stage, but the relevance of abstract construals to romantic evaluations will likely increase as partners progress into the mutuality stage (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).

The second theoretical perspective draws from research on affective forecasting (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003) and empathy gaps (Loewenstein, 1996, 2005), two literatures suggesting that people have difficulty predicting the magnitude of their emotional experiences in some situations. When people report on their emotions in the moment, they are able to access the experiential information associated with their current emotional state (Robinson & Clore, 2002). However, when people report on their anticipated future emotions, they do not have access to this experiential information, and so they make judgments using semantic knowledge about the emotion and other schematic cues. Given that these two types of emotional reports make use of two types of information, the emotions that people expect to experience and the emotions that they actually experience often differ. Indeed, recent work has revealed affective forecasting errors and empathy gaps at the intersection of hypothetical and live interactions; people's predictions about how they will react in an emotionally evocative live interaction differ from their actual reactions (Kawakami et al., 2009; Mallett et al., 2008). In some ways, an ideal partner preference could be like an affective forecast—it is (in part) a prediction about the extent to which one will respond favorably to the presence of an attribute in a partner (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). Therefore, ideal partner preferences should be less likely to predict romantic evaluations in situations, such as live face-to-face interactions, where people rely on their experience of gut-level romantic affect (Eastwick, Eagly, et al., 2011).

The solid line in Figure 6 indicates the extent to which positive and negative affect regarding a romantic partner is likely to predict evaluations of the target or the relationship. For example, feelings of passion are likely to be irrelevant to judgments about a partner in the awareness stage (to the extent that such feelings even exist at this stage), but the relevance of this affect will increase as partners meet each other in the surface contact stage. Passionate feelings can remain strong as a relationship progresses, but we propose that these feelings take on a less prominent role in deter-

mining partner or relationship judgments (e.g., the decision to get married or to terminate the relationship) over time as couples negotiate interdependence and intimacy and make life decisions that affect each other (Rusbult, 1983).

Thus, these two factors—abstract construals and romantic affect—likely exhibit approximately reciprocal effects as people evaluate their relationships and their relationship partners. In other words, the relevance of these two factors naturally covary: When people's evaluations of a romantic partner are affected by their abstract construals of the partner (e.g., match vs. mismatch with ideals), their evaluations are not as affected by their momentary feelings about the partner (e.g., passion vs. repulsion). Yet these are conceptually independent factors, and future research could benefit by independently manipulating the relevance of abstract construals or romantic affect. In summary, Figure 6 can serve as a useful theoretical guide for future research on ideal partner preferences, a literature that to date has underappreciated construal-level theory and affective forecasting perspectives.

Unanswered Questions

Although the past 15 years of research have provided many (partially overlapping) answers to the questions of when and how ideal partner preferences affect relational outcomes, our understanding of the relevant set of psychological processes remains incomplete. For example, scholars have yet to identify promising individual difference or state-like moderators of the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences. One theoretically sensible hypothesis is that ideal partner preferences would demonstrate greater predictive validity for participants more interested in long-term than short-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). However, previous work has not produced much support for this hypothesis (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). Unsupported moderators include individual differences in chronic emphasis on long- versus short-term mating (e.g., sociosexuality), individual differences in current emphasis on long- versus short-term mating (e.g., "These days, how much would you like to have a serious relationship?"), and target-specific differences in the desire to form a long-term relationship (e.g., "I would like to have a serious relationship with [name]"). Other plausible individual difference moderators, such as participants' self-assessments on the attribute in question, self-assessments of mate value, and self-reported pickiness about romantic partners (e.g., "When I enter into a serious romantic relationship, I carefully consider whether his/her qualities match those that I desire in a romantic partner"), have also proven irrelevant to ideal partner preference predictive validity (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a; Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).

We do not wish to discourage the search for significant self-report moderators, but our suspicion is that this pursuit is unlikely to be the most fruitful direction for future research. After all, consider that any significant moderator of the level metric would likely produce a somewhat unusual pattern of data: Participants on one end of the moderator dimension would exhibit significant predictive validity, whereas participants at the other end of the dimension would exhibit significant antipredictive validity (i.e., participants desire the opposite of their ideals). Such a pattern would be necessary given that the average level metric predictive validity effect appears to be approximately zero. Although it is easy to generate hypotheses that participants who are high on a particular dimension should be especially likely to pursue partners who match their ideals, it is not easy to simultaneously generate a theoretically sensible hypothesis that participants who are low on the same dimension should pursue partners who are the opposite of their ideals. Perhaps scholars could generate a theoretically sound case for an individual difference like authenticity (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997) or self-concept clarity (J. D. Campbell et al., 1996), but to our knowledge, these sorts of moderators have not yet been examined.

We are more sanguine that researchers will discover significant contextual moderators that identify whole samples of participants with relatively strong ideal partner preference predictive validity. One possibility is that cultural differences in the romantic partner selection process could affect how participants make use of their ideal partner preferences. As reviewed above, participants in the contemporary United States tend to rely on their gut reactions when making decisions about romantic partners (Eastwick, Eagly, et al., 2011); in fact, most Americans claim that they would not marry someone whom they did not love, even if that person had all the qualities that they desired (Simpson et al., 1986). Yet it is not culturally or historically ubiquitous that people consider romantic feelings to be a necessary ingredient in choosing a romantic partner (Coontz, 2005; G. R. Lee & Stone, 1980). For example, participants in Eastern cultures are more likely than those in Western cultures to report that they would marry someone whom they did not love but who had all the other qualities they desired (Levine et al., 1995). Although our meta-analysis contained very few studies from Eastern countries, if we calculate the physical attractiveness associations for men and women separately in these studies ($k = 3$, all from China), the correlations were .53 and .36 for men and women, respectively. Although this sex difference did not approach significance, it is the largest difference that we documented, and it could suggest that Eastern participants are more likely to consult their ideals at many stages of the relationship initiation process and place less emphasis on affective, gut-level responses to potential partners. To date, research that directly compares relationship initiation processes across cultures is sparse, although one study has demonstrated that attraction principles associated with the desire to feel good about oneself (e.g., reciprocity, similarity) have a larger effect on romantic partner selection in Western than Eastern cultures (Heine & Renshaw, 2002). Thus, it is possible that there exists more of an emphasis on careful deliberation (in lieu of good feelings) in the romantic domain in Eastern cultures (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), and thus researchers might find stronger predictive validity for ideal partner preferences in such samples.

Another possibility is that researchers might document stronger predictive validity for ideal partner preferences if they relied less heavily on traits and attributes. If people use low-level construal information when they evaluate potential romantic partners face to face (see Figure 6), and if traits are more accessible when people are in high-level rather than a low-level construal (Rim et al., 2009), then traits are not a promising source of ideal partner preference predictive validity in attraction settings. As an alternative, researchers could instead assess the extent to which low-level construal information (e.g., concrete behavior) is important to participants in a romantic partner. After all, people can be characterized not only by their traits but also by their pattern of "if . . .

then" situation-behavior signatures (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Shoda & Mischel, 1993), and the integrative model outlined in Figure 6 predicts that people's preferences for such contextualized behaviors would exhibit predictive power in live interactions. For example, instead of assessing the extent to which the abstract trait construct "supportive" characterizes participants' ideal romantic partners, researchers could ask participants to rate the extent to which specific behaviors characterize their ideal partner (e.g., "My ideal partner will defend my career choices to his/her parents when they criticize me"). In moving beyond traits, researchers might also consider exploring other types of ideals that are more dyadic in nature, such as ideals for different kinds of interaction styles or for similarity in attitudes and values (Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992).

Throughout this article, we have tested a model that casts the ideal partner preference as the IV—a standard that causes people to evaluate a partner as good or bad. This particular model is best supported by predictive validity studies that assess ideals before participants meet a potential partner or begin a relationship with a current partner (e.g., Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011, Study 3). Nevertheless, ideals are unlikely to remain static, and there is some evidence that participants shift their ideals to conform to the positive qualities of a current partner (Fletcher et al., 2000a; Murray et al., 1996; Neff & Karney, 2003). As relationships develop, people should be motivated to balance their ideal partner preferences, their perceptions of their partner's attributes, and their evaluations of the relationship; in fact, ideal partner preferences might be the most malleable of these different types of perceptions (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Yet only a handful of studies has examined how ideals shift in response to experimental manipulations (Eagly et al., 2009; Kille, Forest, & Wood, 2013; Nelson & Morrison, 2005), and there is a need for additional experimental and longitudinal research that identifies how participants achieve (or fail to achieve) balance between their pattern of ideals and their perceptions of a partner's traits.

Finally, given the lack of research examining shifts in ideal partner preferences, the extant literature offers little insight into how men and women form their ideal partner preferences for attractiveness and earning prospects in the first place. Where do men get the idea that they desire physical attractiveness so much, and where do women get the idea that they desire earning prospects so much? These are perplexing questions without conclusive answers. However, let us propose one simple (albeit untested) possibility: These sex differences are artifacts of the sex difference in the preference for a younger or older partner. As reviewed above, this age preference has exhibited predictive validity (Buss, 1989; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992); that is, men are more likely than women to be attracted to younger partners, and women are more likely than men to be attracted to older partners. Furthermore, consider that the age of a potential partner is likely to vary positively with his or her earning capacity and negatively with his or her physical attractiveness in the adult population on average. Thus, men find themselves attracted to some young women who are extremely attractive and have weak earning capacity, and women find themselves attracted to some older men who are unattractive and have strong earning capacity.[5] Even though the age of the target drives this sex difference, over time men and women come to infer that they ideally desire physical attractiveness and earning prospects differently. If such attractions to very young or very old partners were rare, these attractions might not produce sex differences in participants' in-vivo/revealed preferences and yet could be salient enough to affect their self-reports about the qualities that they desired. Ideal partner preference items never ask participants to control for the partner's age in their minds when they make their ratings, but if participants could complete such a difficult mental operation, the sex differences in the preference for physical attractiveness and earning prospects might disappear. This explanation is surely speculative; indeed, scholars' understanding of how people form their ideal partner preferences throughout adolescence and young adulthood is woefully incomplete, and additional research on this topic will likely help explain the origin of these sex differences.

Implications for Mating and Beyond

Despite the persistence of these unanswered questions regarding ideal partner preferences, the research conducted to date does have important implications for psychological research. Of course, even if the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences is (at times) questionable, the material reviewed above does not suggest that such preferences are unworthy of study. On the contrary, by identifying the conditions under which ideals do and do not predict mating-relevant behaviors and evaluations, researchers can build a theoretically coherent account of the relationship initiation and maintenance process in humans. Furthermore, this article (by design) did not comprehensively review the many *intrapersonal* implications of ideal partner preferences. For example, ideals are related to myriad aspects of the self-concept: Participants who endorse strong preferences for a particular attribute also tend to see themselves as possessing that same attribute (Buston & Emlen, 2003; L. Campbell et al., 2001), and participants' ideal partner preferences are less sex typical to the extent that they reject sexist ideologies (Eastwick et al., 2006) and expect women to play more of a provider role in a marriage (Eagly et al., 2009). Also, people are likely to advertise themselves in a way that matches the stated ideals of members of the opposite sex (Schmitt & Buss, 1996), and they may work to improve their own attributes in an attempt to try to live up to their partner's standards (Overall et al., 2006). Furthermore, individual differences in ideal partner preferences may affect nonmating behavior in certain contexts: One set of studies found that women who are primed with romantic concepts perform poorly on math tests to the extent that they prefer their ideal partner to be smarter than themselves (Park, Young, Eastwick, & Troisi, 2012). This finding is an example of predictive validity—a particularly insidious example—but the DV of math test performance lies outside the mating domain. Ideal partner preferences may have many effects that stretch beyond mating per se.

From our perspective, the central lesson for future studies of ideal partner preferences is that researchers should not assume that the interpersonal implications of ideals are straightforward. That

[5] In fact, the original evolutionary explanation for the physical attractiveness sex difference suggested that men would desire physical attractiveness more than women because attractiveness was a cue for youth and hence reproductive capacity (Buss, 1989, 1992). Thus, from the outset, there was little rationale that physical attractiveness should matter more to men than to women independent of youth.

is, just because participants claim to value particular qualities in a mate does not mean that they will preferentially pursue partners who possess such qualities. If the theoretical account of a particular finding contains the assumption (explicit or implicit) that the stated preference for a specific attribute translates into a revealed preference for that same attribute, the theoretical account could be in need of revision. Yet many ideal partner preference findings will have theoretical significance even if the predictive effects of the preference are entirely intrapersonal or affect behaviors outside the mating domain. The distinction between perceived and actual support in the close relationships literature perhaps offers a useful parallel: People who perceive that they have support available to them tend to experience positive outcomes (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1994), but the actual receipt of support tends not to produce positive outcomes on average (Bolger, Foster, Vinokur, & Ng, 1996; Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). The discovery of this latter effect did not cause research on perceived support to cease; rather, researchers have endeavored to identify theoretically coherent explanations for why perceived and actual support produce different effects (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). Yet current perspectives on support do not assume that perceived support and actual support are merely two ways of examining the same phenomenon. A similar lesson could perhaps apply to ideal partner preferences.

The research reviewed herein has relevance to the strategies that people use to initiate relationships in the modern world. Consider that nearly all online dating sites offer access to partners by way of online dating profiles (Finkel et al., 2012); like the lonely hearts advertisements that preceded the Internet, these profiles typically include photographs and textual presentations of a potential partner's traits and attributes. Given the data reviewed above (e.g., Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Hitsch et al., 2010; D. Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009), it seems highly plausible that users of online dating sites choose to initiate contact with potential partners whose profiles match their ideal partner preferences. However, if users' initial face-to-face impressions are irrelevant to the extent to which the potential partner matches the user's ideals, dating sites could generate first dates that are disappointing on average. There is indeed some evidence that online dating sites tend to produce first dates that fail to live up to users' expectations (Frost et al., 2008; M. I. Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2007). In light of the current review, online dating sites' heavy reliance on descriptive profiles could reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the information that people use to evaluate potential partners, at least in contemporary Western cultures. Dating sites that promote face-to-face communication (e.g., webcam-based sites, mobile dating apps) could do a better job of presenting users with information that is relevant to the relationship initiation process (Finkel et al., 2012).

Research on ideal partner preferences also has implications for scholars who wish to understand better how the human mating psyche is connected to the rest of our social psychology. Domain-specific mechanisms, which are distinct psychological mechanisms that evolved to solve specific adaptive problems (Barrett & Kurzban, 2006; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992), characterize many features of the mind (e.g., Duchaine, Yovel, Butterworth, & Nakayama, 2006). Yet scholars of attraction and close relationships frequently find that myriad aspects of our social psychology intersect with the mating domain, thus yielding some evidence of the human mind's domain generality (Eastwick, 2009a). For example, the studies relevant to the present review derived novel insights about mating by drawing from construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), affective forecasting (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), person perception (Asch, 1946), and contemporary theories of attitudes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007), all of which were developed and honed on topics unrelated to mating. In other words, the same change of meaning effects that emerge when people perceive platonic interaction partners (D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974) have relevance to people's evaluations of potential dating partners (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011). Although scholars will surely encounter some adaptive mental mechanisms that are specific to the mating domain, it seems unwise to generally assume a priori that mating processes are domain specific (cf. Confer et al., 2010).

Just as the research reviewed in this article drew from literatures outside the mating domain, the implications of the work extend beyond mating as well. For example, social psychologists routinely ask participants to evaluate other people after live interactions and after hypothetical interactions, but this methodological choice is rarely connected to a theoretical rationale, and the choice may ultimately paint a very different picture of the phenomenon in question (Eastwick et al., in press). In addition, the success of the pattern metric relative to the level metric in predicting relationship outcomes likely has implications in other domains (e.g., the benefits of accurately perceiving others; Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Gagné & Lydon, 2004), but the psychological meaning of level and pattern variance in self-reports remains poorly understood. Future cross-pollination between mating research and research on other psychological topics is sure to be productive and fruitful, especially as research on interpersonal attraction continues to regain the prominence it held in the 1960s and '70s (see Finkel & Baumeister, 2010; Finkel & Eastwick, in press).

Perhaps the most important implication of the current review for the field of psychology writ large derives from the meta-analysis. Despite the fact that men and women consistently exhibit sex differences when rating the appeal of physical attractiveness and earning prospects in an abstract ideal partner, the meta-analysis found no sex differences in the association of these two traits with evaluations of an attraction partner or current romantic partner. These findings beg the question: How much do we really know about the appeal of different personality traits? Do we like our friends better when they are intelligent or fun loving? Do we dislike our bosses more when they are meek or arrogant? Merely asking participants about such traits in the abstract (e.g., "How much do you like the trait 'fun loving' in a friend?") may not capture the actual appeal of the trait; it would be more accurate to calculate the association between the trait and an evaluative outcome. Traits are some of the most ubiquitous constructs in all psychology, yet it is quite possible that the current state of the literature reveals very little about the extent to which a given trait is desirable or undesirable in real life. Additional studies (and meta-analyses) that conceptualize the appeal of traits as associations between the extent to which a target possesses a trait and the target's likability can potentially answer this question better than the traditional method of asking participants to rate traits in the abstract.

Conclusion

Ask people about their standards, and you will receive an earful. But the functional implications of these standards may not be straightforward when it comes to romance. Legends of a shadowy pathway between stated preferences and actual evaluations have existed for some time, at least as long ago as Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) classic treatise on the perils of asking people about the reasons why they might evaluate something positively or negatively. But the answer to the question "What are the functional implications of ideal partner preferences?" is not that such preferences are worthless or that interdependence theory is somehow flawed. The answer is far more interesting than such bleak prognostications. Rather, the answer will depend on people's psychological distance from the target they are evaluating. The answer will depend on how people's ideals are conceptualized and measured. The answer will depend on whether the relationship yet exists as an abstract entity. The answer will depend on whether people are making affective, gut-level judgments or are thinking carefully about their responses. And the answer will depend on the revelations of future research.

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Appendix A

Data Points Used in Physical Attractiveness Meta-Analysis

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Anderson et al. (2012)	1	1	Canada	Commitment, satisfaction	1	1	Dating	2.49	.52	14	24.57	.49	11	21.20
Asendorpf et al. (2011)	1	3	Germany	Yes percent received	3	0	Speed-dating		.44	190	33.58	.47	192	31.96
Back et al. (2011)	1	3	Germany	Desire to get to know, liking	2	1	Zero acquaintance		.49	21	23.00	.28	52	21.94
Barelds & Dijkstra (2009)	2	1	Netherlands	DRQ, MMQ-MA	2	0	Married	22.70	.33	203	48.37	.52	203	46.46
Barelds & Dijkstra (2009)	2	2	Netherlands	DRQ, MMQ-MA	2	0	Married	22.70	.28	203	48.37	.19	203	46.46
Berry & Miller (2001)	1	3	United States	Interaction quality	3	1	Lab interaction		.33	51	19.00	.17	51	19.00
Boyes & Fletcher (2007)	3	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating	2.27	.46	57	24.82	.22	57	23.37
Boyes & Fletcher (2007)	3	2	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating	2.27	−.05	57	24.82	−.02	57	23.37
Brislin & Lewis (1968)	1	1	United States	Desire to date	3	1	Dates		.89	29	19.00	.89	29	19.00
Bryan et al. (2011)	3	1	United States	PRQC	3	1	Dating	2.10	.77	57	20.02	.51	62	20.02
Buck & Neff (2012)	1	1	United States	Commitment, intimacy, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.32	.67	171	29.11	.33	171	27.22
Buck & Neff (2012)	1	2	United States	Commitment, intimacy, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.32	.15	171	29.11	.15	171	27.22
Burriss, Roberts, et al. (2011)	2	2	United States	Commitment, RAS, relationship happiness, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	1.22	.02	112	20.76	−.02	114	20.12
Burriss, Roberts, et al. (2011)	2	3	United States	Commitment, RAS, relationship happiness, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	1.22	−.12	71	20.76	−.05	71	20.12
Byrne et al. (1970)	1	1	United States	Desire to date, desire to marry, liking, sexual desire	3	1	Dates		.60	44	19.00	.61	44	19.00
Byrne et al. (1970)	1	3	United States	Desire to date, desire to marry, liking, sexual desire	3	1	Dates		.25	44	19.00	.36	44	19.00
L. Campbell (2005)	1	1	United States	PRQC	2	1	Dating	1.38	.20	65	19.34	.38	65	18.51
L. Campbell (2005)	1	2	United States	PRQC	2	1	Dating	1.38	−.16	65	19.34	.09	65	18.51
L. Campbell et al. (2008)	1	1	Canada	Commitment, DAS, intimacy, RAS, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	12.52	.45	107	38.56	.45	107	36.70
L. Campbell et al. (2001)	2	2	United States	Commitment, love, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	1.46	−.02	104	20.09	−.03	104	18.94
L. Campbell & Wilbur (2009)	6	1	Canada	Desire to date	2	1	Confederate		.30	35	19.37	.46	35	20.00

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix A (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Cavior et al. (1975)	1–1	1	United States	Desire to date	3	0	Opposite-sex peer		.53	12	15.50	.67	11	15.50
Cavior et al. (1975)	1–2	1	United States	Desire to date	3	0	Opposite-sex peer		.69	12	17.50	.55	12	17.50
Critelli & Waid (1980)	1	1	United States	Love	3	1	Dating	0.50	.11	123	19.60	.08	123	20.20
Critelli & Waid (1980)	1	2	United States	Love	3	1	Dating	0.50	.04	123	19.60	.02	123	20.20
Critelli & Waid (1980)	1	3	United States	Love	3	1	Dating	0.50	.11	123	19.60	.02	123	20.20
Curran (1973)	1	1	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.68	75	19.00	.51	75	19.00
Curran (1973)	1	2	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.21	75	19.00	.08	75	19.00
Curran (1973)	1	3	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.29	75	19.00	−.01	75	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	1	1	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.73	294	19.00	.72	294	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	1	2	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.08	294	19.00	.19	294	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	1	3	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.24	294	19.00	.18	294	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	2	1	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.71	98	19.00	.80	98	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	2	2	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.34	98	19.00	.19	98	19.00
Curran & Lippold (1975)	2	3	United States	Date evaluation	3	1	Dates		.30	98	19.00	.17	98	19.00
DeWall et al. (2011)	6	1	United States	Bonding, commitment, love, PRQC, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	4a	1	Dating	1.41	.60	69	20.70	.51	72	20.24
DeWall et al. (2011)	6	2	United States	Bonding, commitment, love, PRQC, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	4a	(mix)	Dating/married	9.07	−.01	193	33.06	.03	193	31.62
Eastwick (2009b)	2	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Opposite-sex peer		.40	71	18.63	.50	75	18.58
Eastwick (2012)	1–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Opposite-sex peer		.52	39	19.00	.54	110	19.00
Eastwick (2012)	1–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Opposite-sex peer		.60	85	19.00	.65	105	19.00
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		.49	94	19.56	.40	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Desired partner		.25	94	19.56	.33	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4	2	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		.01	94	19.56	.04	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4	3	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		.26	94	19.56	.20	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	5	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Confederate		.75	35	19.31	.83	36	18.44
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.43	82	19.57	.46	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Desired partner		.26	82	19.57	.31	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1	2	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.07	82	19.57	.11	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1	3	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.21	82	19.57	.23	81	19.54
Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly (2011)	3–1	1	United States	Bonding, passion	4a	0	Desired partner		.12	103	42.43	.25	114	41.71
Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly (2011)	3–2	1	United States	Bonding, commitment, satisfaction, passion	4a	0	Dating/married	1.09	.48	124	43.36	.45	156	39.16

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix A (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Ellis et al. (2002)	4	1	United States	Love	2	1	Dating	1.46	.39	104	20.00	.19	104	19.00
Ellis et al. (2002)	4	2	United States	Love	2	1	Dating	1.46	.10	104	20.00	.01	104	19.00
Finkel et al. (2009)	2	1	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, satisfaction, trust	4a	1	Married	8.50	.40	72	34.52	.37	75	32.99
Finkel et al. (2009)	2	2	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, satisfaction, trust	4a	1	Married	8.50	.08	72	34.52	.04	75	32.99
Finkenauer (2006–2010)	1	1	Netherlands	DAS, commitment, intimacy, passion, trust	1	0	Married	5.71	.51	195	31.45	.50	195	28.56
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	1	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		.65	277	26.59	.63	274	26.13
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	2	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		.06	277	26.59	.08	274	26.13
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	3	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		.40	277	26.59	.39	274	26.13
Fletcher (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.11	.53	60	22.67	.51	60	21.88
Glasgow & Arkowitz (1975)	1	1	United States	Desire to date, liking	3	1	Lab interaction		.40	59	19.00	.49	59	19.00
Guéguen (2011)	1	3	France	Yes to date, yes to sex	3	0	Confederate		.25	120	21.50	.23	120	21.50
Hald & Høgh-Olesen (2010)	1	1	Denmark	Yes to date, yes to sex	2	1	Confederate		.10	144	23.50	.14	189	22.10
Hald & Høgh-Olesen (2010)	1	2	Denmark	Yes to date, yes to sex	2	1	Confederate		−.23	11	23.50	.36	10	22.10
Hald & Høgh-Olesen (2010)	1	3	Denmark	Yes to date, yes to sex	2	1	Confederate		−.33	11	23.50	.57	10	22.10
Hesse & Floyd (2011)	1	1	United States	Social attraction	2	1	Lab interaction		.59	42	21.79	.57	42	20.55
C. T. Hill et al. (1976)	1	3	United States	Closeness, liking, love, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	0.67	.14	178	19.00	.04	180	19.00
Houser et al. (2008)	1	1	United States	Predicted outcome value, social attraction, yes to date	2	0	Speed-dating		.61	76	37.48	.52	80	35.91
Kerr & Fletcher (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	Romantic interest	2	1	Lab interaction		.67	46	21.38	.76	46	21.02
Kerr & Fletcher (2012)	1	3	New Zealand	Romantic interest	2	1	Lab interaction		.42	46	21.38	.37	46	21.02
Kniffin & Wilson (2004)	2	1	United States	Liking	2	1	Opposite-sex peer		.57	13	21.30	.57	12	19.40
Kniffin & Wilson (2004)	3	1	United States	Liking	2	1	Opposite-sex peer		.74	3	23.00	.82	11	27.00
Kurzban & Weeden (2005)	1	2	United States	Yes percent received	3	0	Speed-dating		.26	1,460	33.42	.27	1,376	31.23
Laumann (1995–1997)	1	1	United States	Love, sexual satisfaction	4b	0	Dating/married	8.35	.40	639	35.70	.30	895	34.71
Lemay & Clark (2008)	1	1	United States	Satisfaction	2	0	Dating/married	8.32	.54	101	34.20	.38	107	32.30
Lemay & Clark (2008)	1	2	United States	Satisfaction	2	0	Dating/married	8.32	.14	101	34.20	.06	107	32.30
Levesque et al. (2006)	1	1	United States	Desire to see again/date	3	1	Lab interaction		.60	43	18.86	.70	43	18.24
Lewandowski & Aron (2004)	1	1	United States	Attraction	2	1	Lab interaction		.69	29	18.54	.73	31	18.54
Lucas et al. (2004)	1–1	1	United States	Love	2	0	Married	13.00	.63	401	40.00	.56	409	37.00
Lucas et al. (2004)	1–2	1	United Kingdom	Love	2	0	Married	13.00	.73	1,311	40.00	.74	1,316	37.00

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix A (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Lucas et al. (2004)	1–3	1	China	Love	2	0	Married	13.00	.76	393	40.00	.65	393	37.00
Lucas et al. (2004)	1–4	1	Turkey	Love	2	0	Married	13.00	.65	390	40.00	.66	398	37.00
Lucas et al. (2004)	1–5	1	Russia	Love	2	0	Married	13.00	.70	450	40.00	.74	455	37.00
Luo & Zhang (2009)	1	3	United States	Attraction	3	1	Speed-dating		.80	54	19.50	.88	54	19.50
Marks et al. (2001)	1	3	United States	Satisfaction	2	0	Married	2.47	−.04	168	22.41	.04	168	20.46
McClure et al. (2010)	1–1	2	Canada	Yes to date	2	1	Speed-dating		−.03	38	26.62	.06	35	26.11
McClure et al. (2010)	1–1	3	Canada	Yes to date	2	1	Speed-dating		.09	38	26.62	.08	35	26.11
McClure et al. (2010)	1–2	1	Canada	Yes to date, desire to date	2	1	Speed-dating		.60	38	21.66	.66	36	20.69
McClure et al. (2010)	1–2	2	Canada	Yes to date, desire to date	2	1	Speed-dating		−.01	38	21.66	.17	36	20.69
McClure et al. (2010)	1–2	3	Canada	Yes to date, desire to date	2	1	Speed-dating		.32	38	21.66	.33	36	20.69
McNulty et al. (2008)	1	1	United States	QMI, RSEP, SMD	3	0	Married	3.78	.32	82	25.10	.21	82	23.70
McNulty et al. (2008)	1	2	United States	QMI, RSEP, SMD	3	0	Married	3.78	.14	82	25.10	−.02	82	23.70
McNulty et al. (2008)	1	3	United States	QMI, RSEP, SMD	3	0	Married	3.78	.17	82	25.10	−.12	82	23.70
Miron et al. (2009)	1	1	United States	Commitment, love, warm feelings	2	1	Dating	1.44	.71	28	19.00	.67	71	19.00
Miron et al. (2009)	2	1	United States	Love, satisfaction, warm feelings	2	1	Dating	1.67	.80	11	19.00	.23	27	19.00
Miron et al. (2009)	3	1	United States	Caring, liking, love, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	1.80	.67	19	19.00	.59	39	19.00
Murstein & Christy (1976)	1	1	United States	MAT	3	0	Married	17.90	.41	22	39.70	.20	22	37.60
Murstein & Christy (1976)	1	2	United States	MAT	3	0	Married	17.90	.17	22	39.70	.04	22	37.60
Murstein & Christy (1976)	1	3	United States	MAT	3	0	Married	17.90	−.14	22	39.70	.27	22	37.60
Neff (2012)	1	1	United States	Commitment, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.44	.56	84	27.52	.56	84	25.64
Neff (2012)	1	2	United States	Commitment, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.44	.11	84	27.52	.06	84	25.64
Neff & Broady (2011)	1	1	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.36	61	25.60	.11	61	23.50
Neff & Broady (2011)	1	2	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.30	61	25.60	.07	61	23.50
Neff & Karney (2005)	2	3	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.22	169	25.60	.11	169	23.40
Nichols & Maner (2008)	1	1	United States	Liking	1	1	Confederate		.62	50	20.08	.59	50	19.26
Overall (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	Commitment, PRQC, satisfaction	2	1	Dating/married	2.89	.44	197	23.67	.49	197	22.32
Overall (2012)	1	2	New Zealand	Commitment, PRQC, satisfaction	2	1	Dating/married	2.89	.11	197	23.67	−.02	197	22.32

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix A (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Overall & Fletcher (2010)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.00	.38	89	23.22	.57	113	20.85
Overall et al. (2006)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.82	.45	100	23.98	.32	100	22.46
Overall et al. (2006)	2a	1	New Zealand	IOS, PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.83	.41	62	23.80	.50	62	23.10
Overall et al. (2006)	2a	2	New Zealand	IOS, PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.83	.03	62	23.80	−.04	62	23.10
Overbeek (2012)	1	3	Netherlands	Yes percent received	2	0	Speed-dating		.41	266	33.12	.49	264	31.60
Paap & Gardner (2011)	1	1	United States	Satisfaction	2	1	Dating/married	3.09	.25	81	25.79	.11	201	22.34
Parish & Laumann (1999–2000)	1	1	China	Love, sexual satisfaction	4b	0	Married	N/A	.17	1,529	40.52	.18	1,524	39.13
Penke & Asendorpf (2008)	2	3	Germany	RAS	2	0	Dating	2.71	.00	70	24.13	.02	70	22.63
Peterson & Miller (1980)	1	3	United States	MAT	3	0	Married	43.70	.49	32	75.10	.42	32	73.50
Pillsworth (2008)	2	1	Ecuador	Long-term desirability	3	0	Opposite-sex peer		.45	24	17.40	.48	24	16.00
Saxton (2012)	1	1	United Kingdom	Yes to date	2	1	Speed-dating		.57	19	22.60	.62	19	21.20
Saxton (2012)	1	2	United Kingdom	Yes to date	2	1	Speed-dating		.01	19	22.60	.05	19	21.20
Saxton et al. (2008)	1	3	United Kingdom	Yes percent received	2	1	Speed-dating		.67	25	22.75	.41	22	22.75
Seidman (2012)	1	1	United States	IOS, DAS	2	1	Dating/married	6.42	.34	370	30.55	.34	377	29.35
Seidman (2012)	1	2	United States	IOS, DAS	2	1	Dating/married	6.42	.08	370	30.55	.02	377	29.35
Shea & Adams (1984)	1	1	United States	Love	3	1	Dating	0.77	.28	219	18.00	.24	437	18.00
Speed & Gangestad (1997)	1	3	United States	Romantic popularity	3	1	Opposite-sex peer		.76	52	21.20	.47	67	20.00
Sprecher & Duck (1994)	1	1	United States	Dating attraction, desire to see again	3	1	Dates		.81	83	20.40	.68	83	20.40
Swami & Allum (2012)	1	1	United Kingdom	Satisfaction	2	0	Dating	N/A	.23	147	24.79	.12	157	23.82
Swami et al. (2009)	1	1	Austria	Satisfaction	2	0	Dating/married	12.06	.21	113	35.13	.31	143	33.33
Swami et al. (2010)	1	1	United Kingdom	Satisfaction	2	0	Dating	2.45	.21	171	23.88	.17	191	23.67
Testa (2010)	1	2	United States	Yes number received	3	0	Speed-dating		.05	35	36.00	.29	35	36.00
Testa (2010)	1	3	United States	Yes number received	3	0	Speed-dating		.34	35	36.00	.02	35	36.00
Todd et al. (2007)	1	2	Germany	Yes percent received	2	0	Speed-dating		.43	26	35.60	.33	21	34.00
Todd et al. (2007)	1	3	Germany	Yes percent received	2	0	Speed-dating		.86	26	35.60	.49	21	34.00
Walster et al. (1966)	1	1	United States	Liking	3	1	Dates		.78	327	19.00	.69	327	19.00
Walster et al. (1966)	1	3	United States	Desire to date, liking	3	1	Dates		.42	327	19.00	.34	327	19.00
Walther et al. (2001)	1	1	United States	Affection, intimacy, social attraction	2	1	Opposite-sex peer		.25	7	21.00	.60	7	21.00
Xu et al. (2011)	1	3	China	IOS, passion	2	1	Dating	0.54	.56	9	21.67	−.02	9	21.56
Younger et al. (2010)	1	1	United States	IOS, passion	2	1	Dating	0.46	.50	7	20.14	.33	8	19.88
Zillmann et al. (1986)	1	1	United States	Able to get along with, desire to date/know better	2	1	Confederate		.84	36	19.00	.77	36	19.00

Note. IV = independent variable.
[a] Study is hyphenated in cases where it was necessary or useful to distinguish subsamples within a study. [b] 1 = participant report; 2 = partner report; 3 = objective. [c] We used acronyms when the researchers used an established scale that cross-cuts dependent variable types: DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976); DRQ = Dutch Relationship Questionnaire (Barelds et al., 2003); IOS = Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (Aron et al., 1992); MAT = Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959); MMQ-MA = Maudsley Marital Questionnaire–Marital Adjustment (Arrindell et al., 1983); PRQC = Perceived Relationship Quality Components (Fletcher et al., 2000a); QMI = Quality of Marriage Index (R. Norton, 1983); RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988); RSEP = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale About the Partner (Rosenberg, 1965); SMD = Semantic Differential About the Partner (Osgood et al., 1957). [d] 1 = listserv solicitation; 2 = other research team generated; 3 = published; 4a = authors' data; 4b = publicly available data set. [e] 0 = community sample; 1 = recruited through a college/university.

Appendix B

Data Points Used in Earning Prospects Meta-Analysis

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Addo & Sassler (2010)	1	3	United States	Commitment, emotional support, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Dating/married	10.39	.01	487	37.90	.07	487	34.68
Anderson et al. (2012)	1	1	Canada	Commitment, satisfaction	1	1	Dating	2.49	.40	14	24.57	−.22	11	21.20
Asendorpf et al. (2011)	1	3	Germany	Yes percent received	3	0	Speed-dating		.03	190	33.58	.11	192	31.96
Booth et al. (2010)	1	3	United States	Relationship happiness, love, satisfaction	4b	0	Married	14.44	.01	802	36.58	.09	1,155	34.70
Boyes & Fletcher (2007)	3	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating	2.27	.20	57	24.82	.39	57	23.37
Boyes & Fletcher (2007)	3	2	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating	2.27	.03	57	24.82	.23	57	23.37
Bryan et al. (2011)	3	1	United States	PRQC	3	1	Dating	2.10	.26	57	20.02	.35	62	20.02
Buck & Neff (2012)	1	1	United States	Commitment, intimacy, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.32	.43	171	29.11	.40	171	27.22
Buck & Neff (2012)	1	2	United States	Commitment, intimacy, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.32	.08	171	29.11	.20	171	27.22
Buck & Neff (2012)	1	3	United States	Commitment, intimacy, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.32	−.10	171	29.11	.04	171	27.22
L. Campbell et al. (2008)	1	1	Canada	Commitment, DAS, intimacy, RAS, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	12.52	.21	107	38.56	.30	107	36.70
L. Campbell et al. (2001)	2	2	United States	Commitment, love, satisfaction	2	1	Dating	1.46	.09	104	20.09	−.06	104	18.94
Dean et al. (2007)	1	3	United States	RELATE	3	0	Married	8.00	.16	600	32.50	.16	600	30.80

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix B (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
DeWall et al. (2011)	6	1	United States	Bonding, commitment, love, PRQC, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	4a	1	Dating	1.41	.53	69	20.70	.41	72	20.24
DeWall et al. (2011)	6	2	United States	Bonding, commitment, love, PRQC, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	4a	(mix)	Dating/married	9.07	−.03	193	33.06	−.03	193	31.62
DeWall et al. (2011)	6	3	United States	Bonding, commitment, love, PRQC, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	4a	(mix)	Dating/married	10.24	.02	104	34.97	−.18	120	33.04
Eastwick (2009b)	2	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Opposite-sex peer		.28	71	18.63	.21	75	18.58
Eastwick (2012)	1–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Opposite-sex peer		.37	39	19.00	.30	110	19.00
Eastwick (2012)	1–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Opposite-sex peer		.36	85	19.00	.34	105	19.00
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		.16	94	19.56	.15	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Desired partner		.17	94	19.56	.22	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4	2	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		−.01	94	19.56	.00	93	19.59
Eastwick, Eagly, et al. (2011)	4	3	United States	Romantic interest	4a	1	Speed-dating		.07	94	19.56	.05	93	19.59
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1–1	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.19	82	19.57	.16	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1–2	1	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Desired partner		.16	82	19.57	.18	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1	2	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.09	82	19.57	−.03	81	19.54
Eastwick & Finkel (2008a)	1	3	United States	Romantic interest	3	1	Speed-dating		.13	82	19.57	.14	81	19.54
Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly (2011)	3–1	1	United States	Bonding, passion	4a	0	Desired partner		.18	103	42.43	.20	114	41.71
Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly (2011)	3–2	1	United States	Bonding, commitment, satisfaction, passion	4a	0	Dating/married	1.09	.22	124	43.36	.36	156	39.16
Ellis et al. (2002)	4	1	United States	Love	2	1	Dating	1.46	.16	104	20.00	−.11	104	19.00
Ellis et al. (2002)	4	2	United States	Love	2	1	Dating	1.46	.07	104	20.00	.10	104	19.00
Finkel et al. (2009)	2	1	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, satisfaction, trust	4a	1	Married	8.50	.09	72	34.52	.22	75	32.99
Finkel et al. (2009)	2	2	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, satisfaction, trust	4a	1	Married	8.50	.14	72	34.52	.11	75	32.99
Finkel et al. (2009)	2	3	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, satisfaction, trust	4a	1	Married	8.50	.05	72	34.52	.10	75	32.99
Finkenauer (2006–2010)	1	1	Netherlands	DAS, commitment, intimacy, passion, trust	1	0	Married	5.71	.37	195	31.45	.35	195	28.56
Fisher & McNulty (2008)	1	3	United States	QMI, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.02	72	24.92	.07	72	23.54
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	1	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		.34	277	26.59	.33	274	26.13
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	2	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		−.04	277	26.59	.05	274	26.13

(*table continues*)

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix B (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Fisman et al. (2006)	1	3	United States	Liking, yes to date	3	1	Speed-dating		.26	277	26.59	.23	274	26.13
Fletcher (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.11	.32	60	22.67	.29	60	21.88
Gable et al. (2004)	3	3	United States	Intimacy, satisfaction	2	0	Married	10.10	.05	89	39.20	−.20	89	37.09
Grote & Clark (2001)	1	3	United States	QMI, RAS	2	0	Married	3.00	.15	181	32.00	.28	181	31.00
Kerr & Fletcher (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	Romantic interest	2	1	Lab interaction		.01	46	21.38	.23	46	21.02
Kerr & Fletcher (2012)	1	3	New Zealand	Romantic interest	2	1	Lab interaction		.17	46	21.38	.00	46	21.02
Kumashiro et al. (2008)	3	3	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, trust	4a	1	Dating	1.86	.04	88	22.48	.03	90	21.66
Kurzban & Weeden (2005)	1	3	United States	Yes percent received	3	0	Speed-dating		−.01	1,882	34.07	.05	1,588	31.42
Laumann (1995–1997)	1	3	United States	Love, sexual satisfaction	4b	0	Dating/married	8.35	.05	590	35.70	.17	811	34.71
Lenton & Francesconi (2010)	1	3	United Kingdom	Yes number received	2	0	Speed-dating		.04	1,870	35.60	.03	1,868	34.30
MacLean & Peters (1995)	1	3	Canada	DAS, trust	2	1	Married	7.15	.23	71	29.90	−.04	71	28.61
Marks et al. (2001)	1	3	United States	Satisfaction	2	0	Married	2.47	−.08	168	22.41	.06	168	20.46
McNulty et al. (2008)	1	3	United States	QMI, RSEP, SMD	3	0	Married	3.78	−.21	82	25.10	.07	82	23.70
McNulty & Russell (2010)	2	3	United States	QMI, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.04	135	25.90	−.02	135	24.21
Neff (2012)	1	3	United States	Commitment, passion, RSEP, satisfaction, sexual satisfaction	2	0	Married	3.44	−.21	84	27.52	−.02	84	25.64
Neff & Broady (2011)	1	3	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	−.09	61	25.60	−.04	61	23.50
Neff & Karney (2005)	2	1	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.34	169	25.60	.22	169	23.40
Neff & Karney (2005)	2	2	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.12	169	25.60	.14	169	23.40
Neff & Karney (2005)	2	3	United States	Commitment, QMI, RSEP, sexual satisfaction, SMD	2	0	Married	2.75	.02	169	25.60	−.08	169	23.40
Overall & Fletcher (2010)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.00	.34	89	23.22	.46	113	20.85
Overall et al. (2006)	1	1	New Zealand	PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.82	.31	100	23.98	.20	100	22.46
Overall et al. (2006)	2a	1	New Zealand	IOS, PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.83	.11	62	23.80	.26	62	23.10
Overall et al. (2006)	2a	2	New Zealand	IOS, PRQC	2	1	Dating/married	2.83	.08	62	23.80	.22	62	23.10
Overall (2012)	1	1	New Zealand	Commitment, PRQC, satisfaction	2	1	Dating/married	2.89	.17	197	23.67	.44	197	22.32
Overall (2012)	1	2	New Zealand	Commitment, PRQC, satisfaction	2	1	Dating/married	2.89	.01	197	23.67	.09	197	22.32

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix B (*continued*)

Publication	Study[a]	IV type[b]	Nation	Dependent variable[c]	Source[d]	College[e]	Paradigm	Relationship length (years)	Men			Women		
									r	*N*	Age (years)	*r*	*N*	Age (years)
Parish & Laumann (1999–2000)	1	3	China	Love, sexual satisfaction	4b	0	Married	N/A	−.02	1,214	40.87	−.03	1,208	40.42
Rusbult et al. (2009)	1	3	United States	Commitment, DAS, IOS, trust	4a	0	Dating/married	3.17	−.10	173	25.81	−.01	178	24.21
Smith et al. (2011)	1	3	United States	Marital happiness	4b	0	Married	21.18	−.02	8,560	43.25	−.06	7,018	40.42
Speed & Gangestad (1997)	1	3	United States	Romantic popularity	3	1	Opposite-sex peer		−.10	52	21.20	.10	67	20.00
Sweet et al. (1988)	1	3	United States	Marital happiness	4b	0	Married	20.26	.01	2,835	44.28	.00	3,195	41.39
Todd et al. (2007)	1	2	Germany	Yes percent received	2	0	Speed-dating		−.29	26	35.60	.13	21	34.00
Vannoy (2007)	1	3	Russia	Satisfaction	4b	0	Married	15.10	.01	853	41.36	.10	877	39.96
Wieselquist et al. (1999)	2	3	United States	Commitment, DAS, satisfaction, trust	4a	0	Married	3.16	.03	119	32.28	−.01	122	30.15
Wiik et al. (2009)	1–1	3	Norway	Commitment, satisfaction	2	0	Married	6.81	.07	725	30.88	.10	908	30.49
Wiik et al. (2009)	1–2	3	Sweden	Commitment, satisfaction	2	0	Married	6.92	.12	534	30.55	.01	736	30.19

Note. IV = independent variable.
[a] Study is hyphenated in cases where it was necessary or useful to distinguish subsamples within a study. [b] 1 = participant report; 2 = partner report; 3 = objective. [c] We used acronyms when the researchers used an established scale that cross-cuts dependent variable types: DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976); IOS = Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (Aron et al., 1992); PRQC = Perceived Relationship Quality Components (Fletcher et al., 2000a); QMI = Quality of Marriage Index (R. Norton, 1983); RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988); RELATE = Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (Holman et al., 1997); RSEP = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale About the Partner (Rosenberg, 1965); SMD = Semantic Differential About the Partner (Osgood et al., 1957). [d] 1 = listserv solicitation; 2 = other researcher team generated; 3 = published; 4a = authors' data; 4b = publicly available data set. [e] 0 = community sample; 1 = recruited through a college/university.

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