

## **Paper 2: Primary Literature Analysis**

***“Women's and men's sexual preferences and activities with respect to the partner's age: evidence for female choice”***

Honors 221: Evolution and Human Behavior  
Section B (12:30)

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January 29, 2015

Growing up, my mother always told my sister and me “it’s just as easy to marry a rich man as it is to marry a poor man.” She was joking, I promise, but her satiric comment speaks to an interesting point—typically, women are attracted to older, more financially stable men. On an equally satiric note, my mother jokes that my brother has been trusted to pass on the family “jewels” (and our last name). The age variance of our eventual mating partners seems to not only be established by my family, but by society as well. A quick survey of my parent’s friends and it is easy to spot older men dating younger women. In fact, it is common to see older men dating *significantly* younger women. Arguably, men and women’s varying interest in parental investment and the age of fertility has shaped their respective sexual strategies. The article, “Women’s and men’s sexual preferences and activities with respect to the partner’s age: evidence for female choice,” aimed to study this phenomena. Researchers sought to investigate how men and women’s sexual preferences varied with age and to what extent these preferences mimicked actual sexual activity.

The researchers hypothesized that women should show a tendency to be sexually interested in and have sex with men who are slightly older than themselves. Additionally, they believed that men’s sexual interest and activity would not match each other. Irrespective of their own age, men should show a tendency to be interested in women in their mid-twenties. A third hypothesis stated that sexual activity should more closely mimics women’s preferences than men. The study’s 12,656 participants averaged 29 years old and consisted of twins and their siblings from the Central Population Registry of Finland. The design of the study aimed to separate sexual activity from sexual interest. Respondents were asked “*To which age group did the persons belong, that you during the last 12 months: (1) felt sexually interested in, or thought of in your sexual fantasies? (2) engaged in sexual activity with?*” For both questions the age categories given were: 0–6 years, 7–12, 13–15, 16–19, 20–25, 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, 41–50, 51–60, and 61 years or older. The study followed appropriate confidentiality agreements and was approved by the ethics board.

The results of this study were as predicted: women are interested in same-aged to somewhat older men, while men of all ages showed a tendency to be sexually interested in women in their mid-twenties.

The tendency was especially notable for men slightly older or younger than this age, thus strengthening the preference's prevalence. The study also found that sexual activity more closely mimics women's than men's sexual interest. While men's sexual interest showed preference for women in their mid-twenties (Figure 2), their age of sexual activity (realization) closely follows their own age, demonstrating sexual activity driven by female choice (Figure 3).

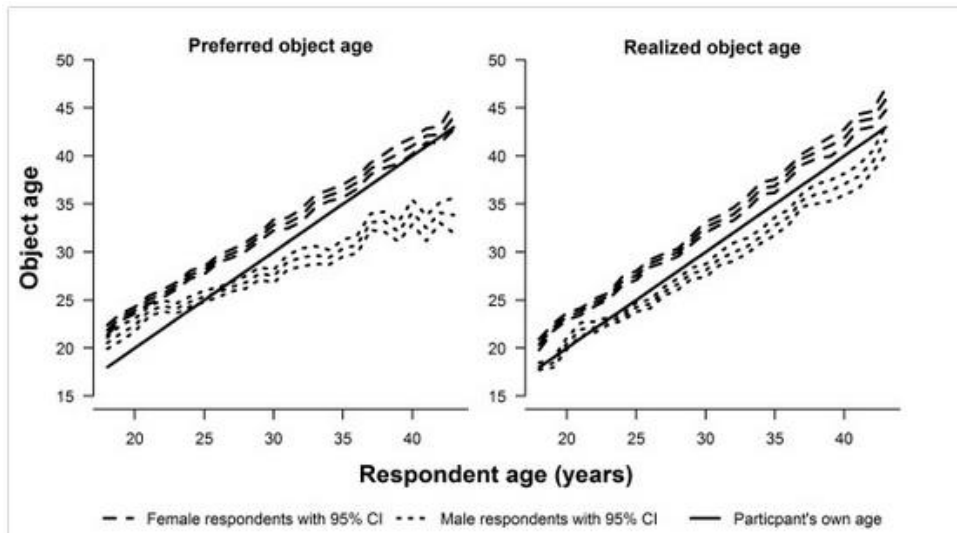
The results of this study fascinate me; they seem to support both a modern-day and an evolutionary perspective on male and female sex preferences. From an evolutionary perspective, women are attracted to slightly older men whom are presumably more mature and able to provide for a child. Similarly, men of all ages are attracted to the most fertile women, women in their twenties. Our natural desire to reproduce and care for infants is driving our sexual preferences. It is more surprising, though, to see women's preferences dominating men's. Because women have a relatively fixed number of childbearing years, in contrast to their male counterparts, it seems as if men's sexual interest would overtake women's preferred object age. Rather than attributing this trait to evolutionary reproductive needs, I believe this may have been the result of societal trends and mental capacity. Mentally, women and men of similar age are more compatible. In societies that value love and companionship in families, then following females mating preference creates a better environment for offspring to be raised. This outcome could also be due to the upbringing of the participants. Finland, like most Scandinavian countries, is a strong matriarchal society. Thus, the answer to this question may be dependent on a participant's background.

A more holistic answer to this study, in general, would require results from a cross-cultural study. In fact, a better-designed study may analyze results from dating websites instead of relying on self-reported data. With this, researchers could match the obtained ages of married couples with what ages they desired on their profiles. My guess is that these results will show more variance with demography than the original study proposed. A wealthy, attractive man or woman, for instance, is more likely to obtain their desired age from a mate than their less attractive, less wealthy counterparts are. In the best interest of creating a reproductive society, not everyone is able to pursue his or her sexual desire.

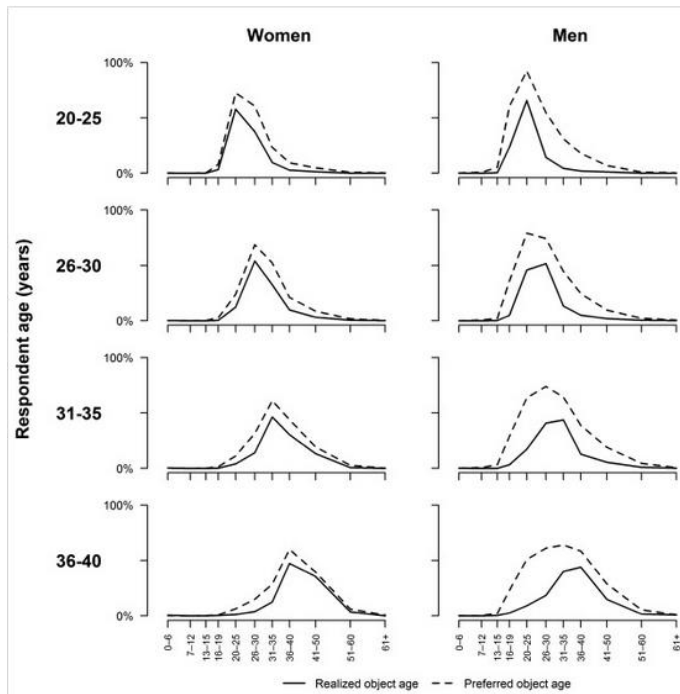
## Illustrations

Participant age	Women		Men		31	316	298	211	198
	Preferred	Realized	Preferred	Realized					
18	236	164	121	73	32	259	252	123	110
19	288	212	130	86	33	252	247	155	140
20	322	272	155	116	34	296	299	172	161
21	390	346	165	132	35	296	283	165	154
22	388	356	189	148	36	274	268	143	138
23	477	436	222	176	37	316	316	183	171
24	414	384	231	199	38	227	227	122	116
25	379	363	211	196	39	160	157	120	111
26	447	426	242	223	40	230	225	106	103
27	401	378	235	223	41	195	195	103	98
28	407	401	252	230	42	192	197	139	127
29	380	356	228	211	43	69	71	57	56
30	347	336	215	197	44 and over	20	22	11	10
					Total	7978	7487	4406	3903

**Table 1.** Number of responses of preferred object age and object age of realized (sexual) behavior per age group, per gender. 12,565 Finns were surveyed.



**Figure 2.** The average preferred object age for sexual behavior from age 18 to 43 for men and women. The difference between participant and their desired partner is 4 years in the late teens and early twenties until it lessens at the end of the age period. For men, interest crosses over to partners younger than themselves beginning at age 26 and most dramatically, between the ages for 40-43.



**Figure 3.** Percentage of participants sexually interested in (preferred object age) and having sexual activity (realized object age) during the last 12 months. Age difference for women is close to 2.5 years for all female age groups. For men, the reported age of sexual partners follows their own age closely but drifts from the respondent's own age in the late teens and early twenties to two and a half years younger than themselves at ages 40 to 43.

## **Citations**

Antfolk, J., Alanko, K., Bergen, Corander, J., E., Salo, B., Sandnabba, K., Santtila, P. 2015.

Women's and men's sexual preferences and activities with respect to the partner's age: evidence for female choice. *Evolution and Human Behavior*. Volume 36: 73-79.