Height and Weight Factors in Ideal Mate Preferences

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Abstract

This study looked at the influence of participant height and weight on ideal mate height and weight preferences. Using surveys disturbed at the University of California, Santa Barbara; researchers collected data regarding preferred height and weight as well as self esteem. The results significantly supported the idea that both men and women want an ideal mate whose height and weight corresponds to their own, and that self esteem is not a significant factor in ideal mate preferences.
Height and Weight Factors in Ideal Mate Preferences

There are many theories as to what qualities a person considers when imagining their ideal mate. Some theories suggest there is an overall standard for what people find attractive in the opposite sex. Yet other theories suggest that preferences are individualized by person. If preferences differ from person to person, what factors influence that difference? This study looks at the theory that ideal mate preferences vary from person to person.

A study by Kurzban and Weeden (2004) looked at data from a speed dating service and found that dates were selected primarily on physical attributes such as height, weight, BMI, age and attractiveness. This study also found that traits such as education, finances and religion had less influence on mate selection than physical characteristics. This study shows the importance of height and weight in ideal mate selection, but doesn’t discuss how these preferences differ for each person.

In a study conducted by Manning (1995), researchers looked at the relationship between body weight and fluctuating asymmetry (FA), which is a display of stability and superior genes. In this study, researchers looked at the correlation between body weight and FA. The study found that female adults perceived higher stability and superior genes in association with higher male body weight. This study also supports the importance of physical characteristics, such as height and weight, when selecting an ideal mate. However, it doesn’t look at how this relationship varies by person.

Pierce looked at the relationship between romantic attraction and height in a study conducted in 1996. This study tested the effect size of height on attraction in men and women. The results showed that women put a stronger emphasis on their mates’ height
than men. While this study discussed the difference in preference between the sexes, it didn’t look at the interaction between participants’ height in relation to their ideal mate height.

In a study by Gillis and Avis (1980), researchers looked at data concerning the height difference in couples and whether the male or female partner was taller. The study concluded that while the probability of a woman being taller than her partner was 2/100, the actual occurrence of this phenomenon was 1/720, which supported the idea that the male partner’s height in relation to the female had a significant effect on mate selection. This study supports the idea that people look for ideal mates whose height corresponds to their own in some way.

A study by Buss (1985) looked at which characteristics were highly correlated in partners. The study showed the most highly correlated characteristics included age, education, race, religion and ethnicity. The study also concluded that characteristics such as mental abilities, eye color, height and weight were also strongly correlated among partners. These findings further support the idea that men and women want a mate whose characteristics complement their own significantly.

The current study focused on height and weight preferences in males and females, specifically whether a person’s own height and weight are related to their height and weight preferences of a romantic partner. The study also looked at self esteem to determine if lower self esteem would lead to differences in mate selection. However, because the study focused on ideal mates, where the participants were asked to describe the perfect person, instead of actual mates, where people often settle for what is realistically obtainable; it predicted that self esteem wouldn’t have a strong an affect.
The study hypothesized that men and women would prefer a mate whose own height and weight correlated to their own height and weight regardless of the participants' reported self esteem level. The purpose of this study is to examine another facet of human mate selection.

Method

Participants

The participants for the study were N=397 men and women in and around the University of California, Santa Barbara campus. Participants were N=193 female and N=204 male. Researchers recruited participants randomly at and around the University of California, Santa Barbara campus and participants received no compensation for their study. Information gathered was anonymous; researchers did not record participants' age and race, but all participants did give informed consent verbally.

Materials

Participants filled out a questionnaire which included 17 questions relating to hunger, their weight, height and self esteem levels, and ideal mate preferences. Rami Gabriel created this questionnaire for an experiment involving hunger and ideal mate preferences.

Design

The study used a correlational design. The predictor variables were participant gender, height in inches and weight in pounds; and the outcome variables were the participant's ideal mate's height and weight. Data was collected regarding these variables and the experimenter then calculated these figures to look for a significant statistical relationship. Participants also rated their self esteem levels on a 1-5 scale,
where 5 meant the participant felt they had very high self esteem. The experimenter looked at this data as well to determine whether or not self esteem played a role in preferred height and weight of the participant ideal mates.

**Procedure**

Researchers collected data using self-report questionnaires which allowed the participants to record their own height, weight and self esteem level, as well as their preferred height and weight for their ideal mate. Participants in and around the University of California, Santa Barbara campus completed the questionnaires during different times of day over the course of a week long period. Researchers compiled results for data analysis.

**Results**

The study hypothesized that men and women would look for heights and weights in ideal mates that corresponded to their own height and weight, and that self esteem would not have an effect on preferred height or weight. The data collected was supportive of this hypothesis.

The experiment conducted a multiple regression to study the effects of participant height, weight and self esteem on preferred height and weight. The regression model found that in men, preferred height was positively related to participant height, $\beta=.339$, $t(202)=4.76$, $p<.001$. Findings also indicated that preferred weight was positively related to participant weight in men, $\beta=.310$, $t(202)=4.37$, $p<.001$. In men, self esteem was marginally negatively related to preferred weight, $\beta=-.118$, $t(202)=-1.75$, $p=.082$. Men reported a mean preferred weight of $x=127.7$. 

In women, the regression model found that preferred height was marginally positively related to participant height, $\beta=.150$, $t(191)=1.9$, $p=.058$. Findings also indicated that women’s preferred weight was positively related to participant weight, $\beta=.441$, $t(191)=6.07$, $p<.001$. In women, self esteem was not related to preferred weight, $\beta=.063$, $t(191)=.95$, $p=.342$. Women reported a mean preferred weight of $x=166.73$.

In women there was also a significantly stronger ($p<.05$) correlation between participant weight and preferred weight [$r (193) =.425$, $p<.001$] than participant height and preferred height [$r (193) =.201$, $p<.01$]. This effect was not seen in men.

In addition, there was not a significant relation between participant self-esteem and preferred height in males, $\beta=-.099$, $t(202)=-1.48$, $p=.140$ or females, $\beta=.068$, $t(191)=.96$, $p=.337$; this supports the idea that self esteem has no effect on preferred height.

Discussion

This study looked at the relationship between participant height and weight and the preferred height and weight participants would look for in an ideal mate.

Because there was a significant relationship in males and females between participant weight and preferred weight, as well as a significant relationship between participant height and preferred height in males and a marginal relationship between participant height and preferred height in females; the findings support the hypothesis that men and women are more likely to prefer a mate whose height and weight correspond to their own. The findings also supported the idea that self esteem would not have an effect on preferred height and weight in females and only a marginal negative effect on weight in males.
While the findings also show a higher mean preferred weight as reported by women than by men, this finding is inconclusive about whether or not women prefer heavier weights, as seen in the study by Manning (1995), because men typically weigh more than women. To support evidence that women preferred heavier mates, these means would need to be compared to average population weights.

An interesting additional finding is that the correlation in women between their own weight and preferred weight was stronger than the correlation between their own height and preferred height, which was not the case in men. This supports the idea that women value corresponding weight in ideal mates more than corresponding height.

Males also showed a stronger relation between participant height and preferred height than females. This data might mean that the male-taller norm is more important to men than women, or that women place less value on finding a mate whose height corresponds to their own than men.

Another interesting finding was the marginal negative relationship between self esteem and preferred weight in men. This means that as men’s self esteem rating lowered, their preferred ideal mate’s weight increased. It’s unclear as to why these findings didn’t correspond to the hypothesis, and why this effect was only shown in males. These findings could have been due to the fact that self esteem was only rated on a 5 point scale, which could be limiting, or because self esteem was self reported and the 5 point scale may not have been an accurate way to evaluate participants’ actual self esteem. Further research in this area could explain this effect and further study the relationship between self esteem and weight in both men and women.
The data found in this study supports the findings of studies by Buss (1985), Pierce (1996), Kurzban and Weeden (2004) and Gillis and Avis (1980) in that it shows a relationship between physical attributes, such as height and weight, and attractiveness. The data also expands on previous studies by finding evidence that height and weight preferences also correlate with participant height and weight. This can be helpful in understanding the reasoning behind attractiveness and why it varies from person to person.

While the findings in the study can be generalized to the University of California, Santa Barbara community, there are many limitations to this study as well. One limitation presented by the study is that the data was collected within one community and cannot conclusively be generalized to the rest of the world, nation, or even the rest of the state without conducting further research using random selection within a larger, more diverse population.

Additionally, because of the correlational design, there is no conclusive evidence as to whether there is a causal relationship between participant height and weight and preferred height and weight. The observational aspect of this study allows for a number of third variable problems, where additional data can be influencing the correlations between heights and weights.

In addition to broader research regarding height and weight relationships in human mate selection, additional research could also look into mate preferences such as race, age, eye color or hair color. Further self report questionnaire studies could be designed to look at these variables. Studies could also be designed where the participants features were recorded, then they rated the physical attractiveness of these features in
members of the opposite sex. This might provide evidence about what people find
attractive and whether people want an ideal mate with similar attributes to their own.

In conclusion, the relationship between height, weight and self esteem presents
some interesting findings about the relationship between a person’s attributes and the
attributes they want in an ideal mate. This study can serve as a jumping off point for
further understanding of human mate selection.
References


Figure Captions

Figure 1. Scatter plot showing the weight and preferred weight for mates as reported by females.

Figure 2. Scatter plot showing the weight and preferred weight for mates as reported by males.

Figure 3. Scatter plot showing the height and preferred height for mates as reported by females.

Figure 4. Scatter plot showing the height and preferred height for mates as reported by males.

Figure 5. Comparison of the mean weight and mean preferred mate weight for female and male participants.

Figure 6. Comparison of the mean height and mean preferred mate height for female and male participants.