# Chapter 3
# Dating and Mate Selection

**Title Image 3.1**

https://unsplash.com/photos/J6bU2RfapD8

**Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Outline the functions of dating, both historically and today.

2. Compare and contrast theories of attraction and identify factors related to who we find attractive.

3. Examine what should be included in the term sexual coercion.

4. Describe factors that are influential in mate selection.

5. Summarize the difference between dating and mate selection.

*<vignette>*

Fatinah didn't know what to do. She had to find a way to make Simon understand, but it was hard. She really liked him, but if she didn't put a stop to their friendship there would be serious trouble for her. How could she explain that she wasn't allowed to date? That even being seen alone together was inappropriate? That her life depended on him staying away from her? Everyone around her was dating or "hanging out." It was so frustrating to live in Canada but to have to follow her parents' strict Muslim beliefs. Her dad's warning was serious, though. She had to stay away from Simon. She could not bring shame to the family or there could be deadly consequences.

*<end of vignette>*

As discussed in Chapter 2, life course theory states that we go through several transitions from one stage to another over our life course. The goal of this chapter is to discuss transitions that tend to occur during young adulthood as a first step toward family formation: dating and mate selection. With the increasing diversity in Canada, we need to be aware, as the opening vignette suggests, that not all individuals date prior to marriage. In addition, keep in mind that dating and mate selection can occur at any age and may be repeated several times throughout the life course, but they are most prevalent in young adulthood. This chapter will explore the goal of finding someone to share one's life with for short-term or longer-term experiences. We begin by discussing what it means to date and then discuss mate selection strategies that may lead to cohabitation, marriage, or remarriage. Since sociological research on same-sex coupling is rare, this chapter primarily deals with heterosexual coupling strategies. Future research is required to determine whether the same processes exist for same-sex couples as exist for opposite-sex couples.

## Dating: Now and in the Past

We tend to believe that the way we have been socialized to do things is the way it has always been done. This is not the case with dating rituals. Prior to the 1920s, dating activities were closely regulated by parents or other family members (chaperones) and often occurred in the home of the female. Dating during this time was considered serious and an indication of commitment to marriage (White, Larson, Goltz, & Munro, 2005). Thus, the dating individuals did not spend time alone together and dating was done for the purposes of showing commitment to the intent of marriage, not for fun.

The period between 1920 and 1960 was the "golden age of courtship" (Langhamer, 2007). After World War I, dating was less supervised. Courtship then became an important rite

of passage (Langhamer, 2007) through which young adults could refine gender roles, status, and identity. Dating generally followed four stages: casual dating, steady dating, engagement, and marriage (Nett, 1988). Employment opportunities and available earnings during this period made long courtships unnecessary. Thus, there was a high rate of marriage and a decrease in age at marriage. Members of the working class were especially likely to marry young, as they tended to finish their education sooner than members of the middle class. “Where marriage remained a woman’s primary goal, courtship was less tied to a particular individual and instead became a state of being” (Langhamer, 2007, p. 181). Therefore, at least for women, dating was an essential stage of life with a main goal of attaining a husband.

Beginning in the 1960s, dating practices changed dramatically. As women gained more freedom, dating practices shifted. While traditionally men were the initiators, planners, and payers for dates, today women have more of a direct role in these processes (although Laner and Ventrone [1998] have found that gender roles with respect to the early stages of dating have not shifted that much since men still tend to plan and pay for dates—at least the ones they initiate). Dating has become much less formal, with spur-of the-moment activities more and more likely. Group activities or “hanging out” have become commonplace, allowing individuals the chance to meet and develop friendships or intimate relationships. Technology has also become a source for meeting individuals through internet dating, social networking websites, chat rooms, and even reality TV shows. The goal of dating, it seems, has shifted to that of having fun and meeting new people.

Traditionally, heterosexual dating followed a basic script. A man asked a woman out a few days before the event would take place. He planned the activities they would do, picked her up, and brought her home, and, since he was responsible for initiating and planning the date, paid for the date’s expenses (Bailey, 1988). Murstein (1980) was one of the first scholars to ask, is dating dying? Today, rather than dating, a more common practice on college and university campuses is “**hooking up**” (Bogle, 2007). Glenn and Marquardt (2001, p. 4) define this as, “when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further.” “Hooking up” can also involve any combination of women, men, or gender non-conforming people, so long as they are attracted to one another. In other words, the hookup is a physical encounter without any expectation of a relationship to follow. According to their research, approximately 40 percent of the women sampled stated they had engaged in a hookup sometime during their college or university experience. Studying a sample of teenagers, Manning, Giordano, and Longmore (2006) found that (at least for teens) the hookup partner was usually a friend or a former partner. However, one third of those hooking up hoped that it would lead to a more conventional dating relationship. Thus, the purpose of hooking up may be to initiate dating. Hooking up is most common among college and university students.

When young adults talk about **dating** today, they generally are referring two people who are attracted to one another who attend functions together (Bogle, 2007). Dating differs from mate selection in that the purpose of dating is entertainment only, not choosing a life partner. However, dating can be a source of pressure, as it is often linked to social status (Bibby, 2002).

If you don't have someone to date, you may be seen as lower in status (value) than someone who has many people interested in dating them.

It is important to keep in mind that the extent of dating that occurs depends somewhat on the subculture to which a person belongs. For example, dating is strongly encouraged in the Mormon community. An individual is supposed to date many people before getting married, to find the right mate (note, though, that in this context "dating" is really mate selection and does not involve sexual encounters). In South Asian culture, dating is discouraged (especially for women). Women are to remain virgins until they marry, so dating "for fun" is seen as risky. The practice of arranged marriage also interferes with the idea of dating someone who is not chosen by one's family. Box 3.1 discusses some common misconceptions around the practice of arranged marriage.

**Box 3.1**

**Arranged Marriage**

**Arranged marriage** is the practice of having someone other than the individual who will be married select the marriage partner, avoiding (or at least shortening) the practice of dating. The marriage partner can be chosen by parents and extended family, matchmakers, or religious leaders. The purpose of the marriage is to have a family. Love is expected to develop as the marriage progresses due to similarities in socio-economic status and cultural background between the two individuals. It is believed that parents and matchmakers have practical knowledge and experience with regards to partner selection, while young adults choosing partners based on emotion (love) may make avoidable mistakes.

The following common misconceptions exist about arranged marriages:

- *Individuals do not get to choose their marriage partners*. In modern arranged marriages, the individuals do get to decide if the selected "match" is suitable to them. Often, the individuals have the final say in whether a marriage will occur (Ternikar, 2004).
- *Arranged marriages are forced marriages*. In fact, this is not the case in most cultures that practise arranged marriage. In some cultures, the individuals are even encouraged to date their potential match to get to know eachother better.
- *Individuals are unhappy and "stuck" in their arranged marriage*. There is some evidence that the divorce rate is lower among arranged marriages compared to love marriages. However, we must keep in mind that this may be due to either the quality of the marriage itself or a more traditional culture that frowns on divorce (and thus people stay in their marriages and make the best of it)

Source:
http://www.professorshouse.com/Relationships/Marriage-Advice/Articles/Arranged-Marriage-Facts/

*<end of Box 3.1>*
<continuation of text from section “Dating: Now and in the Past”>

According to King and Harris (2007), immigrant youth tend to date less than their Canadian-born peers. This can occur for a number of reasons. Parenting style, for example, can have an influence on dating opportunities. Immigrant families may restrict opportunities by trying to foster cultural identity in their children through organized cultural events (both at home and in the community). King and Harris (2007) found that parents who try to control their children’s social lives are at risk for dating rebellion, as the children in their study were found to engage in unwanted romantic relationships (that is, unwanted by the parents). Immigrant teens may also have fewer opportunities to date since they must take on more responsibilities in the family (e.g., translate for their parents). Interracial dating, however, is on the rise. Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) found interracial dating among more than 50 percent of the African-American, Latino, and white participants in their study. It has been observed that Muslim youth who identify stronger with mainstream Canadian cultures expressed more openness to interfaith and intercultural marriage (Wong et al., 2017). Although interracial dating is increasing, interracial marriages are quite rare— 4.6 percent of marriages in 2011 (2011 National Household Survey).

There is little research on same-sex dating to provide an accurate picture of this process. However, Elze (2002) suggests it may be a more difficult process for gay and lesbian teens and young adults because they may have a harder time recognizing potential partners and do not have access to enough potential partners to find a suitable match until they have established larger social networks. Same-sex dating may also be more difficult because of the lack of sexual health education on safer same-sex intercourse practices (Charest et al., 2016). Comparison with opposite-sex dating is also lacking in the research and would be a fruitful area for future research. Research so far has found that in comparison to opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples do not tend to match on along biological and reproductive fitness lines, which implies that evolutionary theories of dating are less accurate when discussing same-sex dating (Allen & Lu, 2017)

**The Functions of Dating**

As suggested above, the dating process can occur for a variety of reasons. Dating can establish short-term sexual encounters and relationships, mate selection, cohabitation for practical purposes and to avoid being alone (e.g., to share bills), cohabitation as a trial or precursor to marriage, and cohabitation as a substitute to marriage. Cohabitation and marriage will be explored more fully in subsequent chapters. We focus on dating for short term relationships and mate selection in this chapter.

Skipper and Nass (1968) identified four main functions of dating: gaining status, socialization, recreation, and mate selection. Dating someone who is considered highly desirable (popular) can increase a person’s status within his or her social group. You must be a

“worthy” individual if an attractive or popular person wants to date you. In fact, for men, dating an attractive female will cause others to believe that they have some highly desirable attributes (this is called the **radiating effect of beauty**). In this way, your partner’s attractiveness can improve the way people perceive you. Dating is also a great arena for socialization. It allows men and women to learn how to behave and adjust to others in an intimate context. Often, dating allows a person to get an “outsider’s view” on his or her personality and character, which can lead to self-improvement. Dating also provides opportunities for recreation. You can have fun with another person who may make you try something new. Finally, dating can lead to mate selection by allowing you to determine whether a particular person would make a good life partner for you. Box 3.3 provides a brief look at the use of non-verbal behaviours during the courtship process.

| **Box 3.2** |
| --- |
| **Economic Incentives of Being Seen as Attractive** |
| The economic benefits of being beautiful |

**Dating and Sex**

Castells (2004) argues that sex has been “de-linked” from marriage and family (where, historically, sex was supposed to occur in the context of marriage only). Reiss (1967) states that there are four general premarital sexual standards in which individuals believe today. **Abstinence** is a belief that sex should occur only in the context of marriage (not during dating). **Permissiveness with affection** is a belief that sex is considered okay if the two people are not married but in love. **Permissiveness without affection** is a belief that love does not have to exist for a person to have premarital sex. Finally, the **double standard** occurs when there is a belief that women should practise permissiveness with affection but it is considered okay for men to practise permissiveness without affection. Although attitudes toward premarital sex have become more permissive, it is still socially regulated (e.g., you cannot have sex with certain family members or in public places) (Eshleman & Wilson, 2001). Bibby (2001) found that 82 percent of teens believe that sex before marriage is fine if the two people are in love (permissiveness with affection). Approval rates for permissiveness without affection (okay if the two people only like each other) drop to 48 percent for females and 68 percent for males. Rotermann (2008) found that, in 2005, 33 percent of Canadians aged 15 to 17 years and 66 percent of Canadians aged 18 or 19 years had had sex. A study of university students in British Columbia found that 71 percent of non-Asian males and 76 percent of non-Asian females had had intercourse. The rates for Asian males and Asian females were 63 percent and 52 percent, respectively (Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1996). Another study found that South Asian young women had less pre-marital sexual experiences than South Asian young men, most likely because of the role daughters’ virginity plays in determining family honour (Zaidi et al, 2014;

Chakraborty, 2010). Thus, premarital sex is occurring but at different rates depending on age, gender, and ethnicity.

**Box 3.3**

**Who Initiates? Non-Verbal Courtship Behaviours**

Moore (2010) reviewed research conducted on non-verbal flirting (courting) behaviour. The first descriptions of human non-verbal courtship behaviours were recorded in 1965 by psychiatrist Albert Scheflen, who wrote about some of the flirting behaviours displayed between clients and therapists in psychotherapy sessions. Both therapists and clients exhibited these flirting behaviours. Scheflen (1965) categorized them into four types of courtship behaviours: (1) courtship readiness cues (e.g., presenting muscle tone), (2) preening behaviours (e.g., stroking one's hair, fixing makeup), (3) positional cues (e.g., leaning toward the target), and (4) actions of appeal or invitation (e.g., palming or displaying an open wrist or hand, gazing, rolling the pelvis). Further research into non-verbal courting conducted by Cary (1976) proposed that women hold the power in initiating conversations both in the laboratory and in bar settings. Conversations started only after the woman looked at a man more than once. Similarly, Moore and Butler (1989) found that a trained observer could predict, with high accuracy, the outcomes of interactions based on female courtship behaviours. Signalling was more important than attractiveness, as men were more likely to strike up a conversation with an average-looking woman who signalled interest than with a beautiful woman who did not signal. Moore and Butler (1989) also compiled a list of rejecting behaviours that seemed to be the opposite of flirting (e.g., leaning away and crossing one's arms over one's chest, frowning, picking at teeth or nails). In terms of sexual initiation, non-verbal strategies (e.g., touching, kissing) were used by both men and women 70 percent of the time (Jesser, 1978). Although women seemed more likely to elicit initial interaction, men were more likely to make non-verbal gestures to elicit sex.

**Image 3.1**

## Attraction: The First Step Toward Dating

Many theories of attraction have been developed to explain why we are attracted to some individuals but not to others. This section describes several theories of attraction that have been proposed in the literature.

### Propinquity Theory

The first perspective is proximity or **propinquity theory**. This perspective simply states that we are attracted to those individuals who are around us. In other words, to be attracted to someone we must first be able to meet him or her! Repeated contact (or familiarity) causes us to like an individual (Zajonc, 2001). A classic study by Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) looked at individuals living in a series of apartment buildings. People who lived close to each other were much more likely to become friends than those who lived farther away. It has been suggested that if you want to make personal connections at work, you should try to get an office or cubicle by either the bathroom or the water cooler, as you will run into more fellow employees that way. Keep in mind that familiarity can work in reverse, too. If you are disliked by someone, repeatedly encountering him or her will only heighten that person's dislike for you (Ebbesen, Kjos, & Konecini, 1976).

**Box 3.4**

**Finding a Date through Advertisements**

Today, finding a date is much easier than it was in the past. One way individuals are finding dates is by using advertisements. This is not a new idea, as people have been placing personal ads in newspapers for decades. With advances in technology and the widespread availability of internet service, however, online ads on dating websites are becoming a common method used to find dates. Many dating sites are available, from free sites such as Plenty of Fish to paid sites such as eHarmony. There are sites for pet lovers (e.g., Love Me Love My Pets), sites geared toward specific religious groups (e.g., Catholic Singles), and sites specifically for the elderly (e.g., Senior People Meet). What exactly are we buying or selling in these ads?

An article by Elizabeth Jagger (1998) examined the content of 1094 dating advertisements placed in local newspapers. She wanted to see if traditional mate selection strategies were still the norm. In other words, she expected that men would "sell" their financial and occupational status and "buy" (look for) physical attractiveness in a potential partner. Women would "sell" their attractiveness and "buy" status and resource attributes. Interestingly, Jagger found that lifestyle choices were becoming more important than resources for women, as women were marketing traditionally masculine attributes (e.g., "I'm athletic," "I like to golf") and looking for men who had some traditionally feminine attributes (e.g., emotionally supportive, sensitive men). Note that ideas about what is "masculine" and what is "feminine" are socially constructed and can change over time. Body characteristics continued to be important for both men and women. Specifically, when placing ads, men were most likely to describe their body, personality, resources, and lifestyle interests. Women were most likely to describe their body, personality, lifestyle interests, and attractiveness. When asked what they wanted in a prospective partner (what they were looking for), men reported the important attributes to be personality, body, attractiveness, and lifestyle factors while women reported looking for personality, body, resources, and non-smokers.

Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) looked at the self-presentation strategies of online dating participants. They found that small cues became very important in the online context. For example, writing ability, such as spelling and grammar, was perceived as an indication of intelligence level. Writing too much in an email response was thought to show desperation or lack of friends. Participants also focused on the timing of the message—when it was sent. One participant learned that he was being perceived as a night owl (seen as a negative trait) due to his late-night emails. Honesty was a theme explored in this study. Participants found a way to be honest yet also attractive to a potential partner by describing their ideal self instead of their real self. For example, a man may state in his ad that he likes hiking even though, in reality, he hikes only once a year. In this way, he is being honest but also identifying what he perceives to be attractive to a potential dating partner

*<end of Box 3.3>*

*<continuation of text from section"Propinquity Theory">*

Historically, this perspective made sense. An individual could meet only those in his or her immediate surroundings. Thus, the choice of partners in small towns, for example, may be limited. However, with the advent of new technologies, virtual spaces are now available where individuals can "meet" in a virtual sense. It is now possible to meet someone halfway around the globe through an online dating site such as Match.com or Lavalife. In fact, dating sites of all kinds exist. If you are an animal lover, you can meet someone on the website Love Me Love My Pets. Sites such as Lavalife allow you to choose the type of connection you want to make: sexual encounter, just for fun, or committed relationship. There are even dating sites specific to certain groups (e.g., seniors, religious groups). Box 3.3 describes strategies used to attract a date and attributes looked for when trying to find a date using advertisements (both in print and online).

**Similarity Theory**

**Similarity theory** states that "birds of a feather flock together" or that "like attracts like." We generally like those who are similar to us (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Similarity allows people to have shared experiences, helps to strengthen relational identity, and lowers the risk of breakup (Kalmijn, 2005). **Assortative mating** occurs when we choose partners based on certain traits. **Homogamy** means that we choose individuals with traits similar to ours. Demographic similarity is important. We tend to like people who are close to us in age, education level and social class (Nelson & Robinson, 2002), ethnicity (McClintock, 2010), and religion. Religious homogamy is more important to some groups, such as Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, than to Christian groups such as Protestants and Catholics (Statistics Canada, 2006a). We also are attracted to people with similar attitudes; we like people who think the way we do. We even choose people with the same moods (Locke & Horowitz, 1990). For example, non-depressed people are attracted to other non-depressed people. Homogamy may be less important to same-sex couples, however (Jepsen & Jepsen, 2002); often, lesbian, gay bisexual, trans*, and queer (LGBTQ) people are more open to dating a wider variety of individuals. Initially, similarity leads to attraction; later, similarity can help to strengthen our attachment to someone.

**Complementary Theory**

**Complementary theory** relates to the notion that "opposites attract." For example, a person who hates cooking will be attracted to someone who loves to cook. There is little evidence to support the idea that complementary personalities cause attraction. However, we do find complementary behaviours and interests attractive (Aron, Steele, Kashdan, & Perez, 2006) and often will exchange beauty for resources (Mathes & Kozak, 2008). If we have evidence that people who are similar are attracted to one another and that people who are different are attracted to one another, how do we reconcile these findings? How do these two theories work together? What we have learned is that similarity provides the context for the relationship in which different skills and interests become complementary (Aron et al., 2006). For example,

since professor A is a sociologist, people may think that the best match for professor A is another sociologist (they would likely have similar attitudes toward social issues or, at minimum, have similar work schedules). However, dating someone in the same department would likely be problematic. They would be in constant competition. Who would be the better academic? Perhaps, then, a person with similar attitudes toward social issues and a similar work schedule would be attractive as long as that person worked in a different department or position. Then they could both be experts in their own areas and not be in competition with one another. People who have different interests allow us the opportunity to try to learn about new things we wouldn't normally (opportunities for self-expansion) and this can be gratifying.

**Stimulus-Value-Role Theory**

Murstein (1986, 1987) proposed stimulus-value-role (SVR) theory in an effort to merge these ideas. According to SVR theory, we are initially attracted to external attributes (the stimulus stage). Approval by the partner is the primary reward in first encounters (e.g., if they validate our beliefs, we feel accepted). During the stimulus stage, we focus on choosing someone who is attainable, not necessarily someone who is our ideal (e.g., we may choose someone with a similar level of attractiveness as we have, not the most attractive person we know). The second stage is the value stage. Here, we get to know each other to see if our attitudes, interests, and beliefs match. Over time, we disclose information about ourselves to our partner. The pace of this disclosure is important. If you reveal too much information too soon, you may scare your date away (Buck & Plant, 2008). If you reveal too little information, you may frustrate your partner. In the value stage, we focus on gathering information through verbal interaction. We may even set up little "tests" to check for attitude similarity. For example, if you want to see if your partner likes children, you may take him or her to a playground or invite him or her over when your niece or nephew or baby sister or brother is there, and then see how he or she responds. During the value stage, you are in essence determining whether a long-term relationship is possible. The final stage in SVR theory is the role stage. A role is a set of behaviours that are expected of a person who occupies a specific position in a group. During this stage, we evaluate a mate on two dimensions: (1) how we actually function in the relationship compared to how we expected we would function in the relationship, and (2) how our partner functions in the relationship compared to how we expected him or her to function. We are evaluating not only how well our partner meets our expectations but also how we are behaving as a result of this relationship. Sometimes a relationship ends because we do not like who we become when we are with a particular person. Thus, according to SVR theory, successful performance of our respective roles will lead to commitment.

**Psychological Reactance**

The theory of psychological reactance states that we like people we cannot have (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). This is due to both internal and external barriers. A person is more desirable if he or she plays hard to get (internal barriers). However, if he or she plays too hard to get, that person may be seen as not worth the trouble. So, it may be important to be seen as selectively hard to get. External barriers may also increase psychological reactance. For example, if a

parent disapproves of a particular partner, this may in fact enhance one's feelings for the partner (especially among teenagers). Sometimes geographical distance or closing time at a bar can act as an external barrier as well.

## The Dark Side of Dating

### Getting a Date

With the advent of new technologies, it is becoming easier to find a date. Individuals can now connect through social networking sites such as Instagram, join online dating sites and apps such as OKCupid and Tinder, and even "meet" through avatars on virtual reality sites such as Second Life, in addition to meeting face to face at school or at work. For those who are technologically inclined, potential meeting "sites" abound. However, especially among younger and older groups, there may still be some stigma attached to using online dating sites to meet someone special. Younger individuals may believe that they should be able to meet someone in person (e.g., at school) rather than go online to date. Older individuals may not be technologically savvy enough to use online sites. However, these sites allow individuals who are normally shy the opportunity to "talk" at their own pace (and with as many rewrites as needed before pressing send) (Baker & Oswald, 2008). Due to the visual nature of these sites (most sites allow you to upload pictures), there are still some disadvantages for individuals who do not fit the norm for attractiveness. It is also possible to be dishonest in the online context, and individuals often lie about their age, weight, and relationship status (i.e., married or single) (Ellison et al., 2006).

### Interference

Although most Canadians (with the exception of some ethnic subgroups) practise free choice dating, our family and friends can have a large influence on who we ultimately choose. It is not uncommon to "check in" with our friends and family to see if they approve of our dating partners. Many individuals will consider ending a relationship if their friends and family disapprove. Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) found that people were more satisfied with a relationship if it was approved of by their social network. Zhang (2009) conducted a cross-cultural study examining the influence of network members on commitment to a relationship and marriage intentions in China and the United States. Network influence predicted Chinese relationship commitment and marital intentions. For U.S. participants, the length of the relationship and feelings about support and care as well as network influence predicted relationship commitment and marital intentions. Thus, in both countries, research indicates that our family and friends have an impact on our choices but the amount of influence may vary by culture.

### Violence and Coercion

Hartwick, Desmarais, and Hennig (2007) examined sexual coercion among undergraduate students at a Canadian university. They used a definition of sexual coercion proposed by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1994, p. 96): "an experience of being pressured or forced by another person to have contact which involved touching of sexual parts or sexual

intercourse—oral, anal, or vaginal." Additionally, sexual coercion can involve forced touching of the clitoris.

Research has shown that females who are coerced have had a greater number of sexual partners. Some evidence for low self-esteem and low assertiveness has also been found (Testa & Dermen, 1999). Research on male characteristics associated with being coerced is rare. Craig (1990) and Loh and Gidycz (2006) performed reviews on sexual coercion and found that initiators and victims (both male and female) are more likely to have had more sexual partners and a history of childhood victimization than those who are not coerced or coercing. The authors found that an almost equivalent number of males (24.4 percent) and females (23.3 percent) reported some form of sexual coercion before age 14. Overall, 47.9 percent of female participants and 38.8 percent of male participants in the study reported being victims. Guilt and intoxication were the most common strategies used to coerce another (see Figure 3.1).

We must keep in mind, however, that sometimes studies on unwanted sexual activity equate unwanted activity and coerced activity. O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) show in their study of heterosexual dating relationships that often college students have unwanted sex that is verbally accepted. In other words, you can feel no drive to have sex but still accept a partner's invitation for sex. In their study, 38 percent of the participants reported having unwanted sex during a two-week period. Motivations for doing so include satisfying a partner, avoiding relationship tension, promoting intimacy, feeling obligated because of past experiences with a partner, and feeling unable to refuse.

Muehlenhard and Linton (1987) found that, in their sample, 77.6 percent of the women and 57.3 percent of the men had experienced sexual aggression in their relationship and that 14.7 percent of the women and 7.1 percent of the men had had unwanted sexual intercourse. Risk factors include men's acceptance of traditional sex roles, men's initiating and paying for a date, miscommunication about sex, alcohol and drug use, and adversarial attitudes about relationships. Length of time in the relationship was not related to risk for sexual aggression.

In response to the issue of sexual coercion and violence on its campus, Antioch College proposed a set of rules in an attempt to decrease and ultimately eliminate sexual aggression on campus (see Box 3.4). Should your campus community enforce such rules?

| **Box 3.5** |
| --- |
| **Date Rape and Antioch College** |
| Most studies of date rape have been conducted on college and university students. Estimates of date rape range widely from 15 to 78 percent. It is difficult to get accurate statistics because of the ambiguity of the term rape. Stets (1992) proposes that date rape and dating violence occur because the individual is unable to take the role of the other—that is, to see the |

situation from the other person's point of view. Antioch College, in Ohio, found this to be such an important issue that it proposed the following rules on its campus.

### The Antioch College Sexual Offense Prevention Policy

In 1991, a group of Antioch students began to create a policy in an attempt to end sexual coercion and violence on campus and foster a culture of consensual sexuality. Individuals who attend, work at, or visit Antioch College must now be familiar with and follow the following rules.

**Consent** *Consent* is defined as the act of willingly and verbally agreeing to engage in specific sexual conduct. Previously agreed-upon forms of non-verbal communication are not appropriate methods for expressing consent. In order for consent to be valid, all parties must have unimpaired judgment and a shared understanding of the nature of the act to which they are consenting, including safer-sex practices. The person who initiates sexual conduct is responsible for verbally asking for the consent of the individuals involved. Consent must be obtained with each new level of sexual conduct. The person with whom sexual conduct is initiated must verbally express consent or lack of consent. Silence conveys a lack of consent. If at any time consent is withdrawn, the conduct must stop immediately.

**Offences Defined** Any non-consensual sexual conduct is an offence under this policy. Examples of offences include but are not limited to the following.

*Sexual assault* is a non-consensual sexual act including but not limited to vaginal penetration, anal penetration, and oral sex. Penetration, however slight, includes the insertion of objects or body parts.

*Sexual imposition* is non-consensual sexual touching.

*Sexual harassment* is any unwanted sexual attention, including but not limited to sexually threatening or offensive behaviour.

Source: Adapted from Antioch College (2005).

## Honour Killings

Honour killings are not the same as murder in a domestic violence scenario. According to Welden (2010, p. 380), an **honour killing** is "the death of a female family member who is murdered by one or more male family members, sometimes with the active assistance of other women related to the victim. In 'honor' murder, a female family member is deemed by her male relatives to have transgressed the family's 'honor.' " These killings are planned and, as the vignette at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the victim is often threatened beforehand.

It is difficult to determine the prevalence of honour killings, as they are underreported. Since the victim brought shame to the family (or so is believed by the family members), these deaths are not often reported. As suggested by White and Mick (2007), these murders are rare

in Canada. The United Nations General Assembly (2006) stated that about 5000 women per year are killed in this manner worldwide.

In situations where an honour killing occurs, the patriarch or dominant male in the family is considered responsible for the actions of his family members and must restore his honour by killing the offender. Inappropriate actions by a female family member can include failing to cover her face, hair, or body; choosing to wear Western clothes or makeup; dating those not approved of by the family; attending higher education; marrying someone not chosen by the family; divorcing; and acting autonomously (e.g., driving by herself) (Chesler, 2009).

As reported in the Vancouver Sun and on CBC News (Hildebrandt, 2009), Aqsa Parvez, a 16-year-old girl from Pakistan, was strangled by her father and brother in Mississauga, Ontario, in December 2007. She had wanted to wear Western clothes and get a part-time job. A year earlier, Muhammad Shafia; his second wife, Tooba Muhammad Yahya; and his son Hamed Shafia were charged with first-degree murder for killing Muhammad Shafia's first wife and three daughters. They were found submerged in a vehicle in a canal in Kingston, Ontario. It is not known how many other such cases exist in Canada.

## The Difference Between Dating and Mate Selection

In everyday language, we use the term dating to mean both dating for fun and mate selection. From a research standpoint, we need to make the distinction between these two terms clear. As stated earlier in the chapter, the purpose of dating is simply to have fun with another person we are interested in romantically. **Mate selection** is the term used by social scientists to refer to the time when people are actively looking to find a life partner. "Dating" in this sense becomes a quest for "the one." Dating tends to focus on choosing people we like and find attractive. In mate selection, other attributes may become more important (e.g., potential stability, love). Mate selection is supposed to lead to marriage or marriage-like cohabitation (i.e., with the intention of permanence).

Historically, marriage fulfilled economic, status, and kinship needs (Ackerman, 1994). You did not necessarily need to love your partner but he or she had to have status, wealth, or a political alliance of some kind. Love was expected to develop after marriage (if at all). Modern ideas about marriage and marriage-like cohabitation insist that we love our partners (at least at the time we marry) (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986).

**Image 3.2**

Several theories classify types of love. One such classification was developed by Lee (1988), who proposed six styles of loving. **Eros** is a type of love that has an intense, physical component. People focus on the attractiveness of their partner. **Ludus** is playful love or game-playing love (e.g., “playing the field”) in which a person may try to juggle several dating partners at one time. **Storge** is love based on friendship that grows to lasting commitment. **Mania** is obsessive, possessive love where a person feels out of control. **Agape** is altruistic and selfless love. Finally, **pragma** is practical love in which a person carefully considers a person’s vital attributes (e.g., education level, age) to find the best match. Men generally score higher on ludus love than women do, while women are more likely to score high on storge and pragma love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2003).

DeMunck, Korotayev, deMunck, and Khaltourina (2011) conducted a cross-cultural study on the meaning of love using American, Russian, and Lithuanian samples. They found that all three groups agreed that love included intrusive thinking, happiness, passion, altruism, and increased well-being. However, comfort and friendship were critical to the U.S. sample but were irrelevant to the Russian and Lithuanian samples. These latter two groups also perceived love as fleeting and unreal.

## Theory of Mate Selection

### Biosocial Theory

Buss (1989, 2003) and Kenrik, Trost, and Kelley (1987) propose a biosocial theory of mate selection. This theory is based on an evolutionary perspective in which choosing a sexual partner is related to genetically adaptive procreation. According to this perspective, since a woman gives birth, she is certain the child is her offspring. Men, on the other hand, cannot be sure if a child is theirs (except, of course, through DNA testing, which was not available until recently). Women must bear the brunt of raising their children and, since they have higher parental investment, will be more selective in their choice of sex partner and mate, favouring someone who shows willingness to contribute time and resources to potential offspring. Men are less selective since it is to their advantage (genetically speaking) to have as many children as possible; thus, they favour choosing someone for a sexual encounter rather than as a long-term mate. It is good to keep in mind, however, that this mainly applies to heterosexual couples. Allan and Lu (2017) found that evolutionary theories don't tend to apply to attraction in LGBTQ dating, where that is not a priority due to the inability to conceive children and the barriers to having them.

Due to differences in parental investment, men and women who are attracted to the opposite gender find different traits attractive. Women are attracted to men who look strong and dominant (Rhodes, 2006), especially when the women are ovulating (Puts, 2005), as these men presumably have better genetics that can be passed onto offspring. If you look at the animal kingdom, the strongest male will win fights over fertile females and will subsequently mate while the male who lost must find another partner.

**Figure 3.1 Which Body Type Do You Prefer?**

Men are attracted to women who outwardly exhibit health and the potential to bear offspring successfully. In other words, men are attracted to women who are young (Buss, 2003) and have an hourglass figure (birthing hips). In fact, research has shown that a waist-to-hip ratio of 0.7 is most attractive across many cultures (Singh, 2004) (see Figure 3.1). (To calculate your waist-to-hip ratio, measure your waist and divide this by the measure of your hips.) Interestingly, the actual size of the woman is less important than the ratio. So, a woman could be a size 2 or a size 22 and still have a 0.7 waist-to-hip ratio that is considered attractive. Of course, higher weight is an indicator of poor health, so often heavier women are seen as less attractive (Swami, Greven, & Furnham, 2007).

| **Box 3.6** |
| --- |
| **The Wedding Ring Effect** |
| The **wedding ring effect** is scientifically known as mate choice copying. This is the idea that (among humans) married or unavailable men are more desirable to women than single or available men. This idea stems from the animal kingdom, where among certain species (e.g., guppies, a type of fish) the female will choose a male that is already taken even though there may be a “better” (e.g., bigger, brighter coloured) available male present. The wedding ring is |

said to signal that a man has valuable attributes (e.g., he must be rich or kind) as well as that he is willing to commit to a long-term relationship. However, some stigma is associated with starting a relationship with a man who is otherwise taken. Uller and Johansson (2003) decided to test this theory using engaged versus single men. The study was done in a laboratory setting and each male confederate was both "engaged" and "single" in various conditions. The researchers found that the effect did not hold. The women in the study were not more attracted to the "engaged" men. The authors suggest that this effect may work for unattractive men but it offers no additional benefit to men who are already attractive—an idea that needs to be tested further.

Today, as status and wealth are often achieved through intelligence rather than brawn, what is attractive to heterosexual women is shifting. An intelligent, successful, and wealthy male may be the "winner" in the mating competition over strong, dominant men. Stereotypes about muscular men have turned negative, as extremely muscular men may be viewed as self-absorbed and unintelligent. Note that studies have shown that, while ovulating, women prefer a dominant, muscular man, whereas during the rest of their cycle they prefer a committed man (Puts, 2005). From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. When the chance of pregnancy is high (during ovulation), mating with a dominant male may provide the best genetics to one's offspring. But highly attractive, dominant men may have many opportunities to mate and thus may be less committed to one partner. Thus, when not ovulating, a committed male is preferred, as he is more likely to stay and provide resources for the child, which will enable survival. Box 3.5 explores whether unavailable men (i.e., married men) are perceived as more attractive than available men.

**Social Exchange Theory**

Exchange and investment theories are often used to explain mate selection. Exchange theory is an economic model of human behaviour developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). The focus of this theory is motivation. To understand a person's behaviour, we need to understand their motivations. A central assumption of the theory is that people are motivated by self-interest to maximize their profit and minimize their loss. In other words, we are selfish and will do what is best for us when we can. Another assumption of the theory is that we are rational—that is, we have the ability to make the best choice based on an assessment of the costs and benefits of each alternative. Nye (1979, p. 1) states:

> Humans avoid costly behavior and seek rewarding statuses, relationships, interaction, and feeling states to the end that their profits are maximized. In seeking rewards they voluntarily accept some costs; likewise in avoiding costs, some rewards are forgone, but the person, group, or organization will choose the best outcome available, based on his/ her/ its perception of rewards and costs.

Rewards are things a person likes, while costs are things a person dislikes. Professors can reward you in two ways: (1) they can give you something pleasant (e.g., an A in the course), or (2) they can take away something unpleasant (e.g., your need to write the final

exam). Costs also work in two ways: (1) they can give you something unpleasant (e.g., an extra assignment), or (2) they can take away something you like (e.g., your formula sheet for a statistics exam). Costs can also include forgone rewards. For example, if you decide to go to graduate school, you must give up benefits that go along with your other options, such as getting a paid job in the workforce. In this case, you give up the benefits of having a salary to continue with your education. Profit is the term used to describe our calculation of the rewards minus the costs of a choice.

There are two other concepts we need to discuss in relation to exchange theory. Comparison level (CL) "is a standard by which the person evaluates the rewards and costs of a given relationship in terms of what he feels he deserves" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 21). We can measure CL in several ways. We can compare what we have now to our ideal or to what we had in the past. For example, how does your new girlfriend or boyfriend compare to what you had in the past? If your new partner is better than your old partner, you will be satisfied. However, if your new partner is worse than your old partner, you will not be very satisfied. Thus, CL is a measure associated with satisfaction (Miller & Perlman, 2009). Comparison level of alternatives (Clalt) is "the lowest level of outcomes a [person] will accept in the light of alternative opportunities" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 21). Our Clalt is the measure of our options. If you have many options, you will be less dependent on the one that you have chosen. If you have few options, you will be more dependent on the one you have chosen. Thus, Clalt is a measure that relates to our dependency level (Ellis, Simpson, & Campbell, 2002).

Another concept we must consider is salience. In our assessment of rewards and costs, some factors may be more important than others and thus have greater weight in our decision making. Finally, we need to take time into consideration. Life isn't static, so we must consider how our decisions will pan out in both the short term and the long term.

The formal propositions for exchange theory are as follows (Nye, 1979, p. 6):

1. Individuals choose alternatives from which they expect the most profit.

2. Costs being equal, they choose alternatives from which they anticipate the greatest rewards.

3. Rewards being equal, they choose alternatives from which they anticipate the fewest costs.

4. Immediate outcomes being equal, they choose alternatives that promise better long-term outcomes.

5. Long-term outcomes being equal, they choose alternatives that provide better immediate outcomes.

Let's look at these propositions in the context of dating. Let's say, for the sake of this example, that you are a heterosexual female, two men want to date you, and you must choose one of them. You have created the following cost–benefit list:

| **Person A** | **Person B** |
|---|---|
| Funny | Smart |
| Confident | Attractive |
| Wealthy | Polite |
| Smelly | Pessimistic |
| Flirty | Cheap |
| Immature | Dishonest |

To this list, you add the relative salience of each trait. Positive traits are rated on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the best; negative traits are rated on a scale from –1 to –10, with –10 being the worst.

equal

| **Person A** | | **Person B** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Funny | 9 | Smart | 7 |
| Confident | 8 | Attractive | 10 |
| Wealthy | 10 | Polite | 4 |
| Smelly | -4 | Pessimistic | -6 |
| Flirty | -7 | Cheap | -8 |
| Immature | -5 | Dishonest | -10 |
| **Total** | 11 | | -3 |

If we calculate the overall scores, we see that Person A would be the "rational" choice for a dating partner. We have listed positive traits (rewards), negative traits (costs), and calculated profit (rewards minus costs) for each alternative. We have also incorporated the concept of salience by giving the traits weights to indicate which are more or less important to the decision. Now we must add the time component. Let's say that both Person A and Person B are college

students and that their calculated profits are equal (i.e., short-term profits are equal). However, Person A wants to be a “bum” (live off his partner) when he graduates while Person B wants to be a manager. According to Proposition 4 above, you would rationally choose Person B to be your partner, since in the long run this person will be the more profitable choice. Now let’s say that Person A and Person B both want to be managers when they graduate (i.e., long-term profit is equal). Rationally, according to Proposition 5 above, you would choose Person A for your partner since he has the better profit outcome in the short term.

**Equity Theory**

Equity theory is another interdependence theory that is similar to exchange theory. Like exchange theory, equity theory states that people will try to maximize their outcomes (rewards minus costs) when making a choice. Additional propositions include the following (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p. 6):

1. Groups will generally reward members who treat others equally and generally punish (increase costs) members who treat others inequitably.

2. When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals will feel.

3. Individuals who discover they are in an inequitable relationship will attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity. The greater the inequity that exists, the more distress they will feel, and the harder they will try to restore equity.

Once again, the assumption of this theory is that people are selfish. However, we learn quickly that for society to exist (and work fairly smoothly), it is more profitable to behave equitably than inequitably. Thus, in the first proposition listed above, people will punish members of society who do not follow this rule. More important for mate selection purposes are propositions 2 and 3 above. We want our relationships to be equitable. In other words (Miller & Perlman, 2009, p. 201):

$$\frac{\text{Your outcomes}}{\text{Your contributions}} = \frac{\text{Your partner's outcomes}}{\text{Your partner's contributions}}$$

According to the principle of equity, the more a person contributes to a relationship, the more he or she should gain from it. For example, if you increase your contributions, to have an equitable relationship your partner should increase his or her contributions in turn. This may be something you want to try in your own relationship. Spend at least a few weeks doing more nice things for your partner and see if he or she will reciprocate in kind. If a relationship is not equitable, this theory suggests that we will feel distress. The person whose ratio is smaller (who is not getting as much as he or she should) is called the underbenefitter, while the person whose ratio is larger (who is getting too much) is called the overbenefitter. The underbenefitter

will feel unappreciated and used, while the overbenefitter will feel guilty (note that both feel distress, just in different ways) (Hatfield, 1983). According to Proposition 3 above, a person will try to alleviate the stress by (1) restoring actual equity (making changes in real life) (Canary & Stafford, 2001), (2) restoring equity psychologically (believing that the relationship is equitable), or (3) leaving the relationship.

We must keep in mind one final idea. The egocentric bias suggests that people tend to overestimate the amount they contribute to a relationship and underestimate the contributions of other people. Therefore, they will tend to feel they are giving more rewards than they are receiving—not a good outcome according to equity theory! Floyd and Wasner (1994) have shown that the equity balance is predictive of relationship satisfaction (the more equitable, the more satisfied). Satisfaction with the relationship in turn predicts commitment to the relationship.

**Filter Model of Mate Selection**

Several theories, such as Murstein's SVR theory, show that the process of mate selection occurs over time. Another process theory is called the filter model of mate selection, which was introduced by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962). This model incorporates both personal and societal factors related to our choice of mate and shows how our choice of mate is filtered along several dimensions. Through a process of filtering, we narrow the total number of people who are available or in the "mating market" to a small group.

We first divide the pool of eligible people by roughly half simply by filtering out those who are not of the gender we prefer or are attracted to. We then tend to narrow our search to those who are in close proximity to us (recall propinquity theory, explained above). Even with the advent of new technologies, we still tend to prefer dating face to face, so individuals near us are kept in the pool of eligibles while those who are not near us are filtered out (Sahlstein, 2006).

The sex ratio of a given area can have an impact on the pool of eligibles for heterosexual individuals how they behave in the mating game. A sex ratio is defined as the number of men per 100 women in a given population. When the sex ratio is high, there are more men than women in a population; when the sex ratio is low, there are more women than men. Trovato (1988) found that when the sex ratio is high (more men), the rate of marriage increases. In fact, when there is a high sex ratio, societies tend to be more traditional. One may think that since same-sex marriage has become normative in many countries that the marriage rate would be less affected by the sex ratio. However, recent research has confirmed the finding that a high sex ratio continues to be associated with a high marriage rate (Stone, 2019).

Think about the following example: Say that we have a heterosexual society made up of 10 men and 5 women, all of whom want to get married and migration is not possible. Five of the men (under monogamous rules) will not be able to marry, as not enough women are available. Therefore, the men will have to compete with each other to “gain” a wife. Thus, it is likely that the men with the highest resources (recall exchange theory) will win a mate while those with lower resources will lose the competition. To keep a mate, it would also make sense to isolate the women from the single men. In a traditional society, men are breadwinners (have resources) while women are homemakers (depend on resources and are not in the workforce where they can easily associate with other men). Now assume that our society has 10 women and 5 men. In this case, five of the women will not be able to marry. Therefore, they will have to enter the workforce to support themselves. Here, a traditional system no longer works, as five women would have no male “breadwinners” to support them. In this case, society tends to become more modern. Of course, this is a simplistic example but it should help to explain how sex ratios can influence the modernity of a society. Figure 3.2 shows the number of men and women (by age) in Canada in 2010. Notice that overall (total) there are more women than men in Canada. However, most of this difference occurs in later life, when there are higher numbers of females than males in the same age groups. Data Box 3.1 discusses the role of sex ratios on mate preferences.

As you can see, an imbalance in sex ratio can reduce marriage for one group or the other. This is called a marriage squeeze, where marriage is reduced for a given group due to lack of available partners. Social norms can also cause specific groups to be squeezed out of marriage. For example, women who are very successful (i.e., have high status and resources), as well as men at the bottom of a social class (i.e., those with few resources and low status), are often squeezed out of marriage. Since it is normative for women to marry up in status, there are few available men with equally high or similarly high status and resources to those of very successful women. Thus, very successful women often choose not to partner and instead rely on family and friends as sources of social support. Similarly, men with few resources to offer a

potential mate will be squeezed out, as there will be fewer available women for them. This is due to the mating gradient, where women seek men of similar or higher status and men seek women of similar or lower status (Mitchell, 2006).

The next filter is whether your mate must be within or outside of your social group. Exogamy is marriage outside a social group. For example, cross-cultural marriages are exogamous. Endogamy is marriage inside one's group. For example, two Muslims getting married is endogamous. In Canada, for the most part we will select a mate who is homogamous to ourselves. Homogamy is the tendency to select a partner with similar social and personal characteristics. Heterogamy occurs when we choose an individual who is not like ourselves. We tend to be homogamous in terms of age, education, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, and religion (McClintock, 2010; Nelson & Robinson, 2002). This is called assortative mating—that is, people choose mates "like themselves."

**Figure 3.2 Population by Sex and Age Group, Canada, 2010**

| | **Canada** | **Male** | **Female** | **Canada** | **Male** | **Female** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age group | Persons (thousands) | | | % of total of each group | | |
| **Total** | **34 108.8** | **16 917.4** | **17 191.5** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |
| 0 to 4 | **1878.2** | 963.4 | 914.7 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.3 |
| 5 to 9 | **1803.3** | 928.4 | 874.9 | 5.3 | 5.5 | 5.1 |
| 10 to 14 | **1935.2** | 992.1 | 943.2 | 5.7 | 5.9 | 5.5 |
| 15 to 19 | **2226.8** | 1140.1 | 1086.8 | 6.5 | 6.7 | 6.3 |
| 20 to 24 | **2364.9** | 1214.8 | 1150.1 | 6.9 | 7.2 | 6.7 |
| 25 to 29 | **2394.5** | 1212.1 | 1182.4 | 7.0 | 7.2 | 6.9 |
| 30 to 34 | **2301.4** | 1150.7 | 1150.7 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 6.7 |
| 35 to 39 | **2294.7** | 1153.1 | 1141.6 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 6.6 |
| 40 to 44 | **2421.0** | 1219.6 | 1201.4 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 7.0 |
| 45 to 49 | **2793.4** | 1405.3 | 1388.1 | 8.2 | 8.3 | 8.1 |
| 50 to 54 | **2618.8** | 1306.5 | 1312.2 | 7.7 | 7.7 | 7.6 |
| 55 to 59 | **2288.3** | 1128.2 | 1160.1 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.7 |
| 60 to 64 | **1968.7** | 965.0 | 1003.7 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.8 |
| 65 to 69 | **1468.9** | 712.6 | 756.4 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.4 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 70 to 74 | **1104.6** | 519.5 | 585.0 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 3.4 |
| 75 to 79 | **912.4** | 412.1 | 500.2 | 3.2 | 2.4 | 2.9 |
| 80 to 84 | **688.2** | 283.8 | 404.3 | 2.0 | 1.7 | 2.4 |
| 85 to 89 | **427.5** | 150.6 | 276.8 | 1.3 | 0.9 | 1.6 |
| 90 and older | **218.1** | 59.4 | 158.8 | 0.6 | 0.4 | 0.9 |

Note: Population as of July 1.
Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM database http:/ / cansim2. statcan. gc. ca, table 051-001, April 5, 2011

**Data Box 3.1**

**Mate Preference and Sex Ratio**

Stone, Shackelford, and Buss (2007) wanted to see if sex ratios had an effect on mate preferences. They specifically wanted to test two hypotheses: (1) the classical sex ratio mate preference shifts hypothesis, which states that, “in imbalanced sex ratio societies, the more numerous sex will lower their standards, to facilitate acquisition of a partner of the less numerous sex” (p. 288), and (2) the alternative sex ratio mate preference shifts hypothesis, which states that “in lower sex ratio societies, men will lower their standards to secure more short-term matings, whereas women will raise their standards to avoid deception by men seeking short-term relationships” (p. 288).

In this study, sex ratio was defined by the number of men per 100 reproductive-aged women within a society. Table 3.1 provides sex ratios by country or culture.

The findings suggest that in a lower sex ratio society (i.e., more women than men), men will raise their standards when choosing a long-term mate. This is consistent with the classical hypothesis. Women’s mate preference ratings supported the alternative hypothesis. In a low sex ratio society, although competing for men, women also increase their mate preference standards. The alternative hypothesis suggests that this is to avoid being deceived by men seeking short-term relationships. The authors conclude that, “women who maintained more stringent mate preference standards and successfully avoided being deceived by short-term relationship seeking men in lower sex ratio contexts might have experienced relatively greater reproductive success over human evolutionary history” (p. 294).

Source: Stone et al. (2007).

**Table 3.1** Sex Ratio by Country or Culture

| Country or Culture | Sex Ratio |
|---|---|
| Australia | 103.23 |
| Belgium | 103.38 |
| Brazil | 99.26 |
| Bulgaria | 101.61 |
| Canada | 102.60 |
| China | 108.30 |
| Colombia | 98.19 |
| Estonia | 99.47 |
| Finland | 104.47 |
| France | 102.30 |
| Germany | 104.55 |
| Great Britain | 102.18 |
| Greece | 100.08 |
| Hawaii | 100.60 |
| India | 108.26 |
| Indonesia | 100.81 |
| Iran | 102.42 |
| Ireland | 104.00 |
| Israel (Jews) | 101.03 |
| Israel (Palestinians) | 101.03 |
| Italy | 100.41 |
| Japan | 101.52 |
| Netherlands | 104.76 |
| New Zealand | 100.72 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Nigeria | 100.15 |
| Norway | 105.23 |
| Poland | 101.95 |
| South Africa | 100.15 |
| Spain | 101.33 |
| Sweden | 104.55 |
| Taiwan | 108.62 |
| United States (contiguous) | 100.60 |
| Venezuela | 102.24 |
| Yugoslavia | 102.75 |
| Zambia | 98.51 |
| Zulu | 86.79 |

Source: Adapted from Stone et al. (2007, p. 293).

**Box 3.7**

**Making a Choice**

Kamal's parents insisted it was time for him to get married and wanted to pursue an arranged marriage for him. Given that he grew up in Canada, they thought it would be fair if they first let him try to choose a mate on his own: a love match. If he was unsuccessful, they would arrange a suitable match through their family and friends.

Kamal was sensitive to both his South Asian heritage and his Canadian upbringing. He decided that since he was in his early thirties and, despite having dated several nice women, had not yet found a suitable partner, he would like to have a "modern" arranged marriage in which he would have the final say in the choice of mate. His extended family began setting up formal meetings with potential mates. Kamal, however, did not know how to choose. He did want to have a successful marriage but he did not know how to ensure this for his future.

While reading a textbook for his university course in family sociology, Kamal learned that people generally choose individuals similar to themselves. This seems to reduce the number of areas of potential conflict in a marriage. He also learned that having an equitable relationship would help keep both members of the relationship happy. Finally, he learned that having similar values and role expectations was important. With this information in hand, he used exchange theory to make a list of benefits and costs of each potential partner and then discussed it with his parents. In the end, Kamal realized that a long-time friend had all of the qualities he was looking for in a mate. He wasn't sure she would agree to marriage at this stage in their relationship, so instead he asked her out on a date.

*<end of Box 3.6>*

*<continuation of text from section "Filter Model of Mate Selection">*

At this point in the filtering process, you can see that many of the available people have now been selected out, leaving us with a much smaller pool of eligibles. The next filter fits with Murstein's SVR theory. Among our narrow pool, we now look for individuals who fit with our value system and are compatible with our role expectations (see the discussion of SVR theory earlier in this chapter). Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) state that for a relationship to become more permanent, it depends on shared beliefs (similarity or homogamy filter) but also role expectations needed to be complementary. Once we find this lucky person, we then choose whether we want to cohabit with them (as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative to marriage) or to marry them. As you can see, filter theory incorporates a wide range of factors that influence the formation and continuation of a relationship. Box 3.6 provides an example of how some of the theories discussed in this chapter can be used in the process of choosing a marriage partner.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the first steps to family formation: dating and mate selection. The road to family formation is diverse. Some individuals date or hook up for fun and socialization. Others date for status or as a means of mate selection, while others still have their mates chosen for them (e.g., arranged marriage). Dating today often involves sex but does not necessarily have to. Getting a date has become easier with technological advances such as the internet. Several theories of attraction have been proposed, such as propinquity, similarity, and complementary theories. We can be influenced in our dating choice by our family and friends. Often sexual coercion or aggression occurs, although most research is limited to studies of college students. Today, for the majority of Canadians, love is paired with mate selection. Exchange and equity theories as well as filter theories are useful in explaining our choice of mate.

## Summary of Key Points

- Dating is considered the first step toward family formation. Not all individuals date prior to marriage. In addition, dating and mate selection is not restricted to the young and can occur at any age.

- Historically, dating was regulated by parents or other chaperones. Dating generally followed four stages: casual dating, steady dating, engagement, and marriage (Nett, 1988). Dating today has become less formal, often with group activities involved.

- Hooking up is a physical encounter without any expectation of a relationship to follow. According to Glenn and Marquardt (2001), approximately 40 percent of the women sampled stated that they had had a hookup sometime during their college or university experience.

- Arranged marriage is the practice of having someone other than the individuals to be married select the marriage partners, avoiding (or at least shortening) the practice of dating. There are several common misconceptions about arranged marriage.

- Reiss (1967) states that there are four general premarital sexual standards in which individuals believe: abstinence, permissiveness with affection, permissiveness without affection, and the double standard. Rotermann (2008) found that, in 2005, 33 percent of Canadians aged 15 to 17 years and 66 percent aged 18 or 19 years had had sex.

- There are several theories of attraction. Propinquity theory states that we are attracted to those individuals who are around us. With the advent of new technologies, virtual spaces are now available where individuals can “meet” in a virtual sense, so propinquity is becoming less important. Similarity theory states that “birds of a feather flock together” or “like attracts like.” We generally like those who are similar to us. Complementary theory

relates to the notion that “opposites attract.” Murstein (1986, 1987) proposed stimulus-value-role (SVR) theory in an effort to merge these ideas. The theory of psychological reactance states that we like people we cannot have.

- Although most Canadians (with the exception of some ethnic subgroups) practise free choice dating and mating, our family and friends can have a large influence on who we ultimately choose.

- Craig (1990) and Loh and Gidycz (2006) found that an almost equivalent number of males (24.4 percent) and females (23.3 percent) reported some form of sexual coercion before age 14. Overall, 47.9 percent of female participants and 38.8 percent of male participants reported being victims. O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) show in their study of heterosexual dating relationships that college students often have unwanted sex that is consensual.

- Estimates of date rape range widely from 15 to 78 percent. It is difficult to get accurate statistics because of the ambiguity of the term rape. Stets (1992) proposes that date rape and dating violence occur because the individual is unable to take the role of the other—that is, to see the situation from the other person’s point of view.

- According to Welden (2010, p. 380), an honour killing is “the death of a female family member who is murdered by one or more male family members, sometimes with the active assistance of other women related to the victim.” As suggested by White and Mick (2007), in Canada these murders are rare. The United Nations General Assembly (2006) stated that about 5000 women per year are killed in this manner.

- Lee (1988) proposed six styles of love: eros, ludus, storge, mania, agape, and pragma. Men generally score higher on ludus love than women do, while women are more likely to score high on storge and pragma love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2003).

- Economic theories of mate selection include exchange theory and equity theory.

- Buss (1989) and Kenrik, Trost, and Kelley (1987) propose a biosocial theory of mate selection. This is based on an evolutionary perspective in which choosing a sexual partner is related to genetically adaptive procreation.

- Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) introduced the filter model of mate selection. This model shows how our choice of mate is filtered along several dimensions. Through a process of filtering, we narrow the total number of people who are available or in the “mating market” to a small group.

## Glossary

**abstinence** A belief that sex should occur only in the context of marriage (not during dating).

**agape** Altruistic and selfless love

**arranged marriage** The practice of having someone other than the individuals to be married select the marriage partners.

**assortative mating** Occurs when we chose a partner based on certain traits.

**complementary theory** Opposites attract.

**dating** Nowadays refers to a man and a woman who are already a couple attending functions together.

**double standard** A belief that women should only practise permissiveness with affection while it is okay for men to practise permissiveness without affection.

**endogamy** Marriage inside of a social group.

**eros** A type of love that has an intense, physical component.

**exogamy** Marriage outside of a social group.

**heterogamy** We choose a mate with traits different from our own.

**homogamy** We choose a mate with traits similar to our own.

**honour killing** “The death of a female family member who is murdered by one or more male family members, sometimes with the active assistance of other women related to the victim” (Welden, 2010, p. 380).

**hooking up** A physical (sexual) encounter without any expectation of a relationship to follow.

**ludus** Playful love or game-playing love.

**mania** Obsessive, possessive love.

**marriage squeeze** Occurs when marriage is reduced for a given group due to lack of available partners.

**mate selection** Choosing a life partner.

**mating gradient** Occurs when women seek men of similar or higher status, while men seek women of similar or lower status.

**permissiveness with affection** A belief that sex outside of marriage is appropriate if the two people are in love.

**permissiveness without affection** A belief that love does not have to exist for a person to have premarital sex.

**pragma** Practical love where a person carefully considers a person's vital attributes.

**propinquity theory** We are attracted to those individuals who are around us.

**psychological reactance** We like people we cannot have.

**radiating effect of beauty** When you are dating someone attractive, people believe you must have some positive traits that make you a desirable partner.

**sex ratio** The number of men per 100 women in a given population.

**sexual coercion** "An experience of being pressured or forced by another person to have contact which involved touching of sexual parts or sexual intercourse—oral, anal, or vaginal" (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994, p. 96).

**similarity theory** We like those who are similar to us.

**storge** Love based on friendship.

**wedding ring effect** The idea that (in humans) married or unavailable men are more desirable to women than single or available men.

**Connections (Links)**

https://www.professorshouse.com/arranged-marriage-facts/

https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/honour-killings-domestic-abuse-by-another-name-1.792907

https://secondlife.com/

Vancouversun.com - Honour Killings rise Canada Expert (Link Not Found)

www.dosomething.org/whatsyourthing/Violence+And+Bullying (Link Not Found)