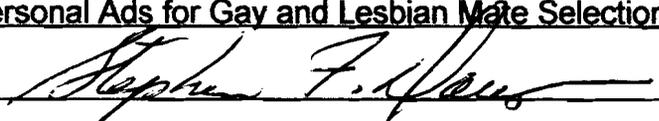


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Teri R. Richardson for the Master of Science

in Psychology presented on July 7, 1997

Title: Searching the Personal Ads for Gay and Lesbian Mate Selection Strategies

Abstract approved: 

Evolutionary theory has been used to explain heterosexual mate selection for numerous years; however, the theory essentially ignores gay, lesbian, and bisexual mate selection. To uncover these relationships, psychologists have turned to personal ads. This technique has replicated results of experiments using more traditional methods. However, previous studies which have attempted to evaluate gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual mate selection have been plagued with controversy and discrepant results. For example, several of these studies have used ads placed in sexually oriented periodicals. In order to rectify this problem, ads were collected over a period of several months from a mainstream, midwestern newspaper. Personal ads from the "men-seeking-men" and "women-seeking-women" subsections of the Kansas City Star were collected from October 1995 to January 1996. During the collection period 68 women and 74 men placed ads. Within the men-seeking-men section, 29% described themselves as attractive, 26% described themselves as having a good physique, and 26% described themselves as financially secure. Additionally, 13% requested an attractive mate, 15% requested a good physique, 12% requested financial security, 49% requested friendship, and .07% requested sex. Within the women-

seeking-women section, 38% described themselves as attractive, 24% described themselves as having a good physique, and 10% described themselves as financially secure. Finally, 16% requested an attractive mate, 22% requested a good physique, 13% requested financial security, 31% requested friendship, and .01% requested sex. In other words, neither lesbians nor gay men use the traditional characteristics of physical attractiveness or financial security when selecting or attempting to attract potential mates. These results imply evolutionary theory does not apply to gays and lesbians. Because the ad placers were looking for friendship rather than a mate, these results may not be directly applicable to evolutionary theory.

**SEARCHING THE PERSONAL
ADS FOR GAY AND LESBIAN
MATE SELECTION STRATEGIES**

**A Thesis
Presented to
the Division of Psychology and Special Education
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science**

**by
Teri R. Richardson
August 1997**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I finish my thesis and reflect on the past two years, the support and guidance of numerous individuals becomes evident. First, I would like to thank my family, Robert, Karen, and Bill. Without their continual emotional and financial support I would have never made it this far.

Second, I would like to thank Warren for being there for me every step of this long process. Without his ideas, editorial skills, friendship, sense of humor, support, and love this project would never have been completed.

My most sincere gratitude is also extended to Dr. Stephen F. Davis. It is difficult to express all that Dr. Davis has taught me over the past couple of years. He has challenged me to fully experience the field of psychology, assisted me in learning my strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrated the importance of perspective.

I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Nancy Knapp and Dr. Sheryl Nowak, for their gracious support on such short notice. Finally, I would like to thank all of my friends for their support. I would especially like to thank Jason for being a great friend and making school, posters, life, and many of our endeavors fun.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life, Darwin (1859) first outlined his theory of natural selection as the basis for evolutionary change. According to this theory, adaptive traits are "selected" by allowing organisms utilizing these traits to survive and reproduce. Organisms without these traits do not survive and, therefore, do not pass on non-adaptive traits through reproduction. Darwin also introduced a second theory, sexual selection, to help account for evolutionary change. The theory of sexual selection was comprised of two components: intrasexual selection and intersexual selection. Intrasexual selection refers to the tendency of members of the same sex to vie for mates of the opposite sex. Selected characteristics include combative traits, such as strength, and noncombative traits, such as mate attraction signals. Intersexual selection, on the other hand, refers to the tendency of individuals to prefer and to choose certain members of the opposite sex as mates. Darwin referred to intersexual selection as "female choice" because he saw female members of most species as the more discriminating sex. Today, natural selection is believed to subsume sexual selection, and males are recognized as playing a more significant role in intersexual selection.

Trivers (1972) proposed that relative parental investment is the driving force behind sexual selection. Women are unable to reproduce as often as

males, due to monthly ovulation, a nine-month gestation period, and menopause. Thus, women should choose the best mate possible. The consequence of a poor mate could be the death of an offspring and, therefore, a lower level of gene perpetuation or spread. Because men have less time involved in reproduction as well as less time and effort invested in child rearing, they can afford to be less discriminating in selecting potential mates. Therefore, men attempt to spread their genes by maximizing sexual opportunities. In other words, men focus on quantity of mates, whereas women focus on quality of mates. In keeping with these differences in parental investment, it would seem logical that men and women would differ in their preferences for mates. Additionally, because the preferences exerted by one sex should influence the resources over which intrasexual competition occur, intersexual and intrasexual selection should be related (Buss, 1988; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). For example, women should seek men with sufficient resources to support their children and men should display traits suggesting ample resources.

Numerous studies utilizing various methodologies have attempted to explain mate selection differences between heterosexual men and women. Some of these methodologies include survey research and analyses of personal ads. Although the various methodologies appear to uncover similar findings, the use of personal ads to determine mate-selection strategies has engendered substantial debate.

Some researchers have attacked the use of personal ads for uncovering

mate selection strategies because the use of ads to find a mate has been rated as “deviant,” meaning the public does not view the use of personal ads as a normal way to attract mates, and people using ads are often embarrassed about placing them (Rajecki & Rasmussen, 1992). Also, questions exist regarding the representativeness of ad placers (Davis, 1990). Moreover, ad placers may understate preferences and overstate offers in ads (Wiederman, 1993). Despite these drawbacks, several researchers have noted advantages to using ads, including: ads focus on salient characteristics because of space limitations (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Harrison & Saeed, 1977; Thiessen, Young, & Burroughs, 1993; Wiederman), ad placers are invested in the process of mate selection and are not answering questions solely for the demands of an experiment (Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Wiederman), ads are a piece of real life and are therefore akin to naturalistic observation (Greenlees & McGrew), ads present a broad range of participants who can be assessed (Greenlees & McGrew), and ads are considered a contemporary medium in courtship for older singles (Bolig, Stein, McKenry, 1984; Cameron, Oskamp, & Sparks, 1977; Rajecki, Bledsoe, & Rasmussen, 1991). In addition to these advantages, Feingold's (1992) meta-analysis revealed the results of studies utilizing personal ads corroborate the results of studies utilizing questionnaires. Regardless of the methodology employed, the majority of the studies have found similar forms of mate selection across different generations (Feingold) and across most cultures (Buss, 1989; Feingold). Additionally, the strategies which appear to be most prevalent are

consistent with evolutionary theory.

The most obvious difference between the sexes is heterosexual men prefer physical attractiveness and heterosexual women prefer financial status. This pattern of results was first obtained by Harrison and Saeed (1977) through their analysis of personal ads in national tabloids. Subsequent analyses of personal ads (Cameron et al., 1977; Davis, 1990; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Hirschman, 1987; Lyerly, Smith, & Brownlow, 1996; Lynn & Shurgot, 1984; RajECKI et al., 1991; Thiessen et al., 1992; Wiederman, 1993) have replicated these findings.

Buss (1988) provided additional support for the different preferences in a two-part experiment. In Study 1, college students were asked to form a list of different behaviors used to attract members of the opposite sex, from the woman's and man's perspectives. Another group of students was given a list of different mate-attraction strategies and was asked to rate the frequency of use for a close friend of the opposite sex. The results indicated men tend to emphasize their resources and women tend to alter their appearance to look more attractive. In Study 2, married couples were asked to rate the frequency of acts which were performed to enhance attractiveness to the opposite sex. These results replicated those from Study 1: men displaying resources and women altering their appearance. Utilizing another methodology, Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield (1994) asked respondents of the National Survey of Families and Households to rate assets and liabilities for potential marriage partners. Once again, the same

pattern of results was found. Men display resources and marry women with high fertility markers (youth and beauty), and women display fertility and marry men with financial resources. Finally, Feingold (1992) performed meta-analyses on research studies using five different paradigms (questionnaire studies, analyses of personal ads, correlations of attractiveness with popularity studies, correlation of liking and attractiveness studies, and experimental manipulation of attractiveness) to determine preference differences between men and women in terms of the importance of physical attractiveness on mate selection. These results confirmed men are more interested in physical attractiveness of their mates than are women.

Both of these preferences are consistent with evolutionary and sociobiological theory (Wilson, 1975). Women should be more concerned about attaining financial resources from mates in order to provide paternal investment in their offspring and guarantee viability of the child. In turn, men should be more concerned with physical attractiveness because they are primarily interested in maximizing sexual opportunities to perpetuate and spread their genes as widely as possible. This maximization is dependent on the fertility of women, and youth and physical attractiveness may signal this desirable condition.

Differences in preferred age of mate were also consistent across studies. Men generally prefer younger women (Bolig et al., 1984; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Lyerly et al., 1996; Rajecki et al., 1991; Sprecher et al., 1994; Thiessen et al., 1993; Wiederman, 1993), although this finding varies

according to the man's age (Kenrick & Keefe). Women consistently prefer older men who are still able to provide resources throughout the lifetime of the potential offspring (Bolig et al.; Greenlees & McGrew; Kenrick & Keefe; Lyerly et al.; Rajecki et al.; Sprecher et al.; Thiessen et al.; Wiederman). These differences are also consistent with evolutionary theory because younger women are more fertile and therefore are more reproductively valuable to men. Because age is not always easily detected, men may use physical attractiveness as a gauge for reproductive value. On the other hand, older men, up to a certain point, have more resources and can provide more assistance to women in terms of raising their children.

Another common difference found between men and women concerns the types of relationships being sought and the level of commitment preferred. Generally, women are more concerned with finding a friend or companion (Wiederman, 1993) or a more permanent or committed relationship (Davis, 1990; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Sitton & Rippee, 1986; Thiessen et al., 1993). Hence, women seek single and unattached men (Greenlees & McGrew, 1994); such men do not already have their resources invested in other offspring and, therefore, are more likely to devote all of their resources to the woman and their offspring. Men, however, are likely to be married (Greenlees & McGrew) and seek short-term relationships or sex (Wiederman, 1993). Once again, these differences are consistent with evolutionary theory; despite being committed to a woman, men desire to maximize their reproductive success by requesting sex with other

women.

The crucial second component in the evolutionary theory of mate selection is that intersexual and intrasexual selections should influence each other. In other words, the characteristics women offer should be the same as the characteristics men seek, and vice versa. In fact, this reciprocal relationship has been found in most studies. Men are more likely to offer resources than women, and women are more likely than men to offer physical attractiveness (Buss, 1988; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994; Harrison & Saeed, 1990; Lyerly et al., 1996; Thiessen et al., 1993; Wiederman, 1993).

The evolutionary theory of mate selection succeeds only in addressing heterosexual mate selection and essentially ignores gay, lesbian, and bisexual mate selection strategies. In fact, the evolutionary theory focuses on reproduction as the sole basis for mate selection and suggests individuals who do not have the traits associated with successful reproduction will be naturally eliminated. What rules govern gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual mate selection? Although little research has evaluated the mate selection strategies of gays and lesbians, the research which has been conducted suggests gay and lesbian mate selection strategies are similar to heterosexual strategies (Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr, & Brown, 1995).

Lumby (1978) evaluated personal ads placed by gay men in the Advocate, a national gay male periodical, and noted, albeit without statistical analyses, these men emphasized masculinity, physical attractiveness, and youthfulness.

Laner and Kamel (1977) also used personal ads from the Advocate to analyze gay male mate selection strategies. These researchers found a majority of ads requesting specific goals for the relationship, many including sexual relationships. They also found these men were unlikely to seek specific appearance qualities, physical traits, and personality in the characteristics they were seeking and offering. A problem with these ads, however, is the Advocate is a periodical emphasizing sexuality and may, therefore, not be an accurate representation of the gay male population (Deaux & Hanna, 1984). Also, these studies used one issue of the periodical and assumed it was representative of all ads.

Laner (1978) also analyzed personal ads placed in The Wishing Well, a lesbian publication. She concluded lesbians are more likely than their gay male and heterosexual male counterparts to offer information about their personality, interests, education, intelligence level, and occupational status. However, lesbians are less likely to offer physical appearance than men of either sexual orientation. Additionally, lesbians request permanent relationships more than gay males and heterosexuals. Laner compared her findings to a study of heterosexual women and concluded lesbians differ from heterosexual women in three areas: lesbians are more likely to offer information regarding education/intelligence level and occupational status, and heterosexual women are more likely to offer information regarding physical appearance. These results indicate lesbians are more similar to heterosexual women than they are to gay men. Once again, this study examined only one issue of a periodical and assumed it was representative of all lesbian personal ads. Additionally, Laner only compared two groups at a

time and, therefore, the results may reflect the presence of a Type I statistical error (i.e., accepting a false experimental hypothesis) due to the excessive number of comparisons made.

Deaux and Hanna (1984) analyzed a large sample of ads from the East coast (the Village Voice, heterosexual and gay and lesbian ads) and the West coast (the National Single Register, heterosexual ads; the Advocate, male gay ads; The Wishing Well, lesbian ads). Their data replicated the results discussed earlier. Men seek physical attractiveness, specific physical characteristics, and sexual characteristics, whereas women seek personality characteristics and permanent relationships. When sexual orientation alone was evaluated, heterosexual men and women were found to seek attractiveness, specific personality traits, hobbies, interests, and religious affiliation and were found to offer financial status, occupation, religious affiliation, marital status, and prospects for marriage. The only characteristics more desired by gays and lesbians than heterosexual men and women were specific sexual characteristics (e.g., sexual physical characteristics).

When the interaction between sex and sexual orientation was evaluated, several interesting results were uncovered. Specifically, heterosexual women were the most likely, and lesbians were the least likely, to offer physical characteristics. Heterosexual women were the least likely to offer their age. Additionally, lesbians were the least likely to seek specific physical characteristics and photographs. Heterosexual women were the most likely to seek financial and occupational status, as well as sincerity. Lesbians were most likely to offer

sincerity, hobbies, interests, and a desire for a permanent relationship. These results imply more stress is placed on heterosexual women's appearance, and lesbians are more free to define themselves in other ways.

Heterosexual men were the most likely to offer information regarding occupational status and to seek physical attractiveness. Gay men were likely to offer physical attractiveness (second to heterosexual women), race, and sexual characteristics. They were most likely to seek physical characteristics, race, and specified age ranges. Because Deaux and Hanna used ads from both the east and west coasts they were able to compare and contrast regional differences. They found west coast ads to request specific physical features, to suggest marriage, and to offer status more frequently. East coast ads revealed attractiveness as a more salient feature, emphasized race and religion, and requested the marital status of the respondent. Once again, the heaviest concentration of sex ads were among west coast males advertising in the Advocate. Overall, similarity appeared to be the major determinant of the patterns for offers.

Kenrick et al. (1993) used gay, lesbian, and heterosexual ads from the New Times, the Village Voice, the Gold Coast Lifestyle, the Detroit News, and the Arizona Republic to evaluate age preferences in mate selection. They found gay men and heterosexual men prefer increasingly young partners as they age. In fact, the tendency for gay men to prefer younger mates is slightly exaggerated compared to heterosexual men. Lesbians and heterosexual women prefer older and same aged partners, although lesbians show a slight preference for younger

partners.

Gonzales and Meyers (1993) evaluated ads published in the following weekly, biweekly, or monthly singles newspapers: the New York Native, the Village Voice, the Chicago Reader, the Chicago Outlines, Gay Chicago, the Twin Cities Reader, Equal Time, the San Francisco Bay Guardian, and Coming Up.

The results from this study revealed a greater number of heterosexual male and female ads seek long-term relationships and marriage than gay and lesbian ads. Also, they found heterosexual women are the most likely to seek financial security, and heterosexual men are the most likely to offer it. The results also demonstrated heterosexual women are the most likely to offer physical attractiveness. Along these lines, heterosexual and gay men did not differ in the amount of emphasis placed on offers of physical attractiveness. The analyzed ads also were consistent with previous studies showing gay men placing more requests for sex than any other group. Two findings, including lack of differences between heterosexual men and gay men and between heterosexual women and lesbians in offers of physical attractiveness and an absence of geographic differences, are at odds with previous research. These inconsistencies point to the need for additional research.

The purpose of the present study was to more fully understand the mate selection strategies employed by gays and lesbians by analyzing personal ads placed over several months in a midwestern metropolitan newspaper. In other words, is evolutionary theory capable of predicting mate selection strategies for gays and lesbians? These analyses provide a sample of gays and lesbians who

have advertised in a mainstream newspaper. This is an important addition to the scientific knowledge of gay and lesbian mate selection because other studies have been criticized for using periodicals which are more sexual in nature (e.g., the Advocate) and because gays and lesbians who place ads in predominately gay and lesbian periodicals may not be representative of gays and lesbians in general. Also, no analyses of gay and lesbian mate selection strategies have been conducted in the midwest. Deaux and Hanna's (1984) study revealed geographical differences between west coast and east coast preferences, suggesting differences may also exist in other geographical locations. Finally, this study utilizes ads collected over an extended period of time (i.e., four months). This technique should help provide more stable and generalizable results.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Advertisements

Personal ads from the “Dateline” section of the Kansas City Star were collected from October 1995 to January 1996. The newspaper circulates throughout the metropolitan Kansas City area, in the northeastern part of Kansas, and the northwestern part of Missouri. The sample included ads placed in the “men-seeking-men” and “women-seeking-women” subsections of Dateline. There was no charge to place an ad in the personals; however, respondents were charged for the phone call needed to leave a message for a particular ad.

The permanent identification number assigned each ad by the newspaper was used to distinguish among ads and to avoid duplication of data. During the 4-month-collection period, 68 women placed ads in the “women-seeking-women” subsection, and 74 men placed ads in the “men-seeking-men” subsection.

Coding Procedure

Each ad was coded on the basis of traits offered by the ad placer and the characteristics sought by each respondent. If the ad placer did not specify one of the characteristics listed below, this deficiency was coded as well. Additionally, any characteristics which were offered or sought but did not fit into one of the coding categories were placed into the “other” category. Finally, the total number of characteristics being sought and offered was recorded. Specific categories, including potential descriptors, were established in part by the procedures used by Davis (1990), Deaux and Hanna (1984), Gonzales and Meyers (1993),

Greenlees and McGrew (1994), Harrison and Saeed (1977), Laner (1978), Lysterly et al. (1996), Rajecski et al. (1991), and Wiederman (1993).

Age. Age was recorded if an ad specified an age or requested someone older or younger than the ad placer.

Attractiveness. Overall attractiveness was recorded if attractiveness was explicitly specified or if other words related to attractiveness were used. These words included cute, good-looking, handsome, pretty, beautiful, stunning, above average looks, gorgeous, nice looks, pleasant looking, and visually appealing.

Career/Financial Status. Career/financial status was recorded if either were explicitly specified or if other words related to finances or career were used. Other words which were used included must hold steady job, must have steady income, financially secure, financially independent, wealthy, professional, affluent, prosperous, successful, well-established, accomplished, rich, own home, solvent, employed, enjoys good/better things in life, hard working, income, industrious, job, well-to-do, working, career person, business owner, financially sound, financially stable, good income, secure career, secure job, and solid career.

Physique. Physique refers to overall shape or size and was recorded when words such as muscular, athletic, slender, full-figured, average, petite, large, shapely, cuddly, fit and trim, good figure, slim, chubby, well proportioned, good shape, good build, nice figure, proportionate, and weight proportionate to height were used in an ad.

Race/Ethnicity. Each ad was categorized according to the race of the ad placer and the requested race of the respondent.

Sexuality. Sexuality was recorded if sex was explicitly specified or if other words which imply it were used. Other appropriate words included high sex drive, sensuous, erotic, erotic fantasies, sexy, lustful, passionate, vixen, stacked, potent, butch, monogamy, holding hands, kissing, and sadomasochism.

Type of Relationship. The type of relationship being sought was recorded for each ad. The respective types included long-term, romantic, friendship, or ambiguous.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Each of the 142 ads (68 women-seeking-women and 74 men-seeking-men) placed in the Kansas City Star during the 4-month-collection period were analyzed. Within the women-seeking-women subsection, the mean age of the ad placer was 30.5 years, and the mean age requested of respondents was 28.27 years. Additionally, 65% of the ad placers specified they were Caucasian and 22% specified they were African-American. Finally, 41% identified themselves as lesbians, and 41% identified themselves as bisexual.

Within the men-seeking-men subsection, the mean age of the ad placer was 31.29 years, and the mean age requested of respondents was 30.96 years. Additionally, 74% of the ad placers specified they were Caucasian, and 12% specified they were African-American. Finally, 62% identified themselves as gay men, and 19% identified themselves as bisexual.

A series of Chi-Square analyses was performed for all women-seeking-women and men-seeking-men ads in terms of several characteristics being offered by the ad placer and being requested of respondents. The characteristics included physical attractiveness, physique, financial security, sexuality, and type of relationship. Because of the controversial and discrepant nature of the previous research, equal expected values were assigned to all categories in all comparisons. In other words, it was expected an equal number would specify and not specify each characteristic in each analysis.

The alpha level was set at $p < .05$ for all comparisons. Table 1 summarizes the percentages addressed in the following analyses. This table also depicts percentages derived from previous research.

Physical Attractiveness

Within the women-seeking-women subsection, 38% of the ad placers offered physical attractiveness to respondents and 62% did not specify physical attractiveness. This distribution is significantly different from the expected distribution of expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 5.76$, $p < .05$. Also, 26% of these women requested physical attractiveness in respondents, whereas 71% did not. These observed percentages also differ reliably from the expected distribution, $\chi^2 (1) = 23.04$, $p < .01$.

Within the men-seeking-men subsection, 29% of the ad placers offered physical attractiveness to respondents, whereas 71% did not. These percentages differed significantly from the expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 17.64$, $p < .01$. Finally, 13% of these men requested physical attractiveness in respondents and 87% did not request this characteristic. These percentages also differed significantly from the expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 54.76$, $p < .01$.

Physique

Another measure of physical attractiveness is physique. Within the women-seeking-women ads, 24% of the women specified their physique, whereas 76% did not. This distribution is significantly different from the expected values, $\chi^2 (1) = 27.04$, $p < .001$. Similarly, 22% requested a particular physique in

Table 1

Percentages of Men Seeking Men and Women Seeking Women Who Offer and Seek Attractiveness, Physique, Financial Security, Type of Relationship, and Sex in the Kansas City Sample and Previous Studies

		Attractiveness		Physique		Financial Security		Type		Sex	
		KC	Previous*	KC	Previous*	KC	Previous*	KC	Previous*	KC	Previous*
Men Seeking Men	Offer	29	37	26	19	26	3				
	Seek	13	25	15	13	12	1	Serious 17	8	.07	31
								Romance 6	9		
								Friend 49	30		
Women Seeking Women	Offer	38	7	24	36	10	2				
	Seek	26	4	22	9	13	0	Serious 15	26	.01	9
								Romance 2	4		
								Friend 57	31		

*Previous Men Seeking Men data were reported in Laner & Kamel (1977). Previous Women Seeking Women data were reported in Laner (1978).

respondents, whereas 76% did not. This distribution differs significantly, $X^2 (1) = 31.36$, $p < .01$, from the expected distribution.

Within the men-seeking-men ads, the 26% of the ad placers who specified their physique and 74% who did not, differed significantly, $X^2 (1) = 23.04$, $p < .01$, from the expected distribution of equal percentages. Finally, the 15% of these ad placers who requested a particular physique in respondents and the 85% who did not differed significantly, $X^2 (1) = 49.00$, $p < .01$, from the expected distribution of equal percentages.

Financial Status

Within the women-seeking-women ads, 10% of the women described themselves as financially secure, whereas 90% of the women did not. This distribution is significantly different from the expected distribution, $X^2 (1) = 64.00$, $p < .01$. Similarly, the 13% of the ad placers who requested financially secure respondents and 87% of the ad placers did not differ significantly, $X^2 (1) = 54.76$, $p < .01$, from the expected distribution of equal percentages.

Within the men-seeking-men ads, the 26% of the men who presented themselves as financially secure and the 74% who did not divulge this information differed significantly, $X^2 (1) = 23.04$, $p < .01$, from the expected distribution of equal percentages. Finally, 12% of these men also requested respondents who are financially secure, whereas 88% did not. This distribution differed significantly, $X^2 (1) = 57.76$, $p = .001$, from the expected values.

Type of Relationship

Within the women-seeking-women ads, 15% requested a serious relationship, 2% requested romance, 57% requested friendship, and 26% did not specify a type of relationship. This distribution is significantly different from the expected distribution of equal percentages, $\chi^2 (3) = 66.16, p < .01$.

Within the men-seeking-men ads, 17% requested a serious relationship, 6% requested romance, 49% requested friendship, and 28% did not specify a type of relationship. This distribution differed significantly, $\chi^2 (3) = 40.40, p < .01$, from the expected distribution.

Sexuality

Of the 68 women-seeking-women ads, only one ad (.01%) requested a sexual relationship. Similarly, of the 74 men-seeking-men ad placers, only five (.07%) ads requested a sexual relationship. All of these references to sexuality specified monogamy.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Evolutionary theory has been used to explain heterosexual mate selection for many years; however, the theory essentially ignores gay, lesbian, and bisexual mate selection. Previous studies (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Kenrick et al., 1993; Laner, 1978; Laner & Kamel, 1977; Lumby, 1978) which have attempted to evaluate the relationship between gay, lesbian, and bisexual mate selection and evolutionary theory tentatively show trends similar to heterosexual mate-selection. However, those studies have been plagued with controversy and discrepant results.

Analyses of women-seeking-women and men-seeking-men ads from the Kansas City Star uncovered several interesting results. In Kansas City, lesbians rarely describe themselves as physically attractive (in either the traditional way or in terms of physique) or financially secure. Similarly, these women do not seek other women who are physically attractive or financially secure. Many of these women are looking for a friend, and only one woman was seeking a sexual relationship. These results mean lesbians do not use traditional characteristics when selecting or attempting to attract mates.

Gay men appear to be similar to lesbians in terms of the use of traditional characteristics when selecting or attempting to attract mates. Gay men rarely describe themselves as physically attractive or financially secure. Additionally, they do not seek these qualities in potential mates. Close to half of these men are seeking friendship, and only a small minority are overtly seeking sex.

A closer examination of this Kansas City study reveals several similarities and discrepancies with previous studies. In terms of physical attractiveness, close to two-thirds of lesbians neither offer nor seek physical attractiveness. Physique is also used as a measure of physical attractiveness. As such, it is not surprising to see nearly identically low percentages of lesbians who seek, and offer, a particular physique. These results are consistent with previous studies. Laner (1978) originally found, and Deaux and Hanna (1987) replicated that lesbians do not offer or seek physical attractiveness in mates.

Similarly, two-thirds of the gay men who placed ads in the Kansas City Star neither sought physical attractiveness in prospective mates nor offered it to prospective mates. Additionally, over two-thirds of gay male advertisers did not specify a particular physique which they are offering to or seeking in future mates. These results are inconsistent with previous studies. Specifically, Lumby (1978), Deaux and Hanna (1984), and Gonzales and Meyers (1993) found gay men emphasize their own and their prospective mates' physical attractiveness. As noted earlier, however, these studies all used periodicals which are sexually explicit. The Kansas City Star is a mainstream newspaper with very few personal advertisements seeking sexual encounters. These differences in emphasis among the periodicals may explain the discrepancy between the current study and previous results.

According to these results, evolutionary theory does not appear to apply to gay and lesbian mate selection. Whereas heterosexual women offer physical attractiveness to mates and heterosexual men seek physical attractiveness in

mates, neither gay men nor lesbians emphasize this trait. This discrepancy may stem from the differences ultimately underlying the rationale for seeking a mate. In accordance with the evolutionary perspective, individuals who are primarily concerned with the perpetuation of their gene spread should be interested in either (a) advertising themselves as fertile (e.g., women promoting their beauty as a mark of fertility) or (b) seeking a mate who is fertile (e.g., men looking for beautiful mates). This is the overriding path of heterosexual mate-selection. For individuals who are not primarily motivated by the perpetuation of their genes when looking for a mate, no premium need be placed on markers for fertility (i.e., physical attractiveness). This scenario appears to fit gay men and lesbians.

Along these lines, the type of relationship individuals are interested in pursuing may affect the traits which they focus on in a potential mate. In the Kansas City sample, close to one-fourth of lesbians and close to one-half of gay men did not specify the type of relationship for which they were looking. Of those who did specify a particular type, a majority of lesbians and gay men were seeking a friend or companion, whereas a minority of both were seeking a serious or permanent relationship. These results are somewhat inconsistent with previous studies. Although it is common for women to seek friends, it is also common for them to seek committed relationships. On the other hand, a majority of heterosexual men seek short-term relationships or exclusively sexual relationships. Yet, within the Kansas City sample, less than one percent of ad placers requested a sexual relationship and all of those who did specify sex requested a monogamous sexual relationship.

The discrepancy of the current results with previous studies can be interpreted several ways. First, a focus on friendship may mean the individuals in Kansas City were not interested in mate-selection; rather, they were interested in friend-selection. If this is true, these results may not apply to evolutionary theory. Future studies should focus on ads which specify permanent, romantic, or sexual relationships and evaluate the traits on which those individuals focus.

Alternatively, the focus on friendship may be a reflection of the city from which the sample has been drawn. The recent political controversy surrounding same-sex marriage has revealed areas of the United States, such as Hawaii, California, and the Northeast, where gays and lesbians are more openly accepted. For example, Hawaii was the first state to recognize same-sex partnerships. Additionally, 30% of Hawaii's population support legalizing same-sex marriage, yet only 20% of the United States population believes it should be legal (Kirkpatrick, 1996). Concomitantly, other states, such as Kansas and Utah, successfully outlawed same-sex marriage (Kirkpatrick, 1996; Seib, 1996). In cities where gays and lesbians are not widely accepted, finding a network of friends may take precedence. Sexual or permanent relationships may be difficult to sustain in these cities and, therefore, are not emphasized. Future studies should compare gays and lesbians who advertise in cities with high levels of acceptance (e.g., San Francisco) against cities with low levels of acceptance. These geographic differences may be consistent with those found by Deaux and Hanna (1984).

Another characteristic often analyzed when looking at evolutionary theory

is financial security. According to evolutionary theory, women seek financial security in men and men offer financial security to women. In the current study, however, only a little over 10% of lesbians sought financial security and only 25% of gay men offered financial security to mates. These results are consistent with Gonzales and Meyers (1993), who found gays and lesbians do not place a lot of emphasis on financial security. However, the results are inconsistent with Laner (1978), who found lesbians are more likely than gay men to offer financial status to mates. With such low levels of descriptions of financial security from either lesbians or gay men, these differences may not be meaningful. The important finding is a lack of reliance by either gays or lesbians on seeking financial security through mate selection. This finding is relevant because it provides further evidence that the evolutionary theory of mate selection is not sufficient when discussing gay and lesbian mate selection.

The difference in emphasis placed on financial security may stem from the limitations placed on gays and lesbians by society. Because gays and lesbians cannot legally marry, they are not afforded the financial benefits of married couples. Without these benefits, gays and lesbians are forced to become independent in many aspects, including financially. Additionally, living in a midwestern city such as Kansas City, gays and lesbians may not be as comfortable maintaining open partnerships. Societal constraints or fear of rejection and prejudice by banks and realtors can further entrench this financial independence. Future studies should evaluate the emphasis placed on this characteristic in approving areas. Additionally, studies should investigate the

differences in financial strategies used by heterosexual and same-sex couples. Perhaps gays and lesbians maintain separate finances within long-term relationships, making the financial security of their partner less important.

In conclusion, results from this study question the validity of evolutionary theory for gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians in the midwest do not place the traditional emphasis on physical attractiveness or financial security, as heterosexuals typically do. If evolutionary theory cannot predict gay and lesbian mate selection, what theory can predict same-sex mate selection? Future studies should evaluate other traits, such as personality variables and interests, to determine if these characteristics predict gay and lesbian mate selection.

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Searching the Personal Ads for Gay and Lesbian
Mate Selection Strategies

Title of Thesis/Research Project

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July 25, 1997

Date Received