Abstract

Mate choice decisions have long-term effects on both party's well-being as well as reproductive outcomes. Consequently, evolutionary biology and psychology devoted a large body of research on investigating human mate choice. The evolutionary psychology of human partner selection can be perceived as inter-connected processes, such as mating strategy, mate preferences, and mate choice. This dissertation thesis consists of two larger segments. The first segment is an Introduction to my four original research papers in the second segment.

In the Introduction, I discuss heterosexual partner selection in two parts. First, I describe how mating strategies affect mate preferences, what the key mate preference dimensions are – both positive and negative factors of partner evaluations –, how stable they are, and how they change over time within a person. Further, I review the concept of mate value and how mate preference factors are weighing in the overall perception of mate value on the mating market. In the second part, I discuss how partner preferences are integrated into mate choice, also known as the mate choice integration models. The Additive and Threshold models of mate choice, the Euclidean distance model, and Assortative mating will be discussed in detail since they are the most commonly applied models. Afterwards, the predictive validity of mate preferences and its theoretical and methodological implications on mate preference integration will be reviewed. Lastly, I show the most important future directions in the research field of human mate choice.

Subsequently, four original research papers are enclosed in the second segment. These papers are investigating key aspects of mate preferences, their contents, stability, and consequences on mate perception, moreover, how these preferences are integrated to mate choice decisions. The first paper reviews mate preference research and its methodological difficulties. This study also presents an original research testing mate preferences, and how these preference factors are affecting relationship satisfaction and self-perceived mate value. The second paper presents a prospective study showing that initially single individuals change their ideal partner preferences after entering a relationship. Perhaps they do so in order to decrease their cognitive dissonance stemming from mate choice and to accommodate their preferences closer to their actual partner's characteristics. The third study is testing how self-perceived mate value is predicted by proxy variables of objective mate value. The study on a sufficiently large sample found very low predictive validity of demographic variables with a holistic self-perceived mate value measure. These results indicate that conceptual advancements are needed in the theory of mate value. The fourth study focuses on mate preference integration algorithms. The study compares two influential mate choice models, the Additive and Threshold models. The Additive model predicts that the potential partner having the highest overall sum of characteristics is the most desirable, while the Threshold model predicts a potential partner needs to meet every mate preference threshold to be considered. Our results show that individuals preferred the potential partners meeting all thresholds. Participants rated less desirable the ones having a higher overall sum of characteristics but violating one of the thresholds, unless the low-level characteristic was unimportant. Future research would greatly benefit from testing further mate choice integration models and revealing how mate preference factors interact in partner perception.