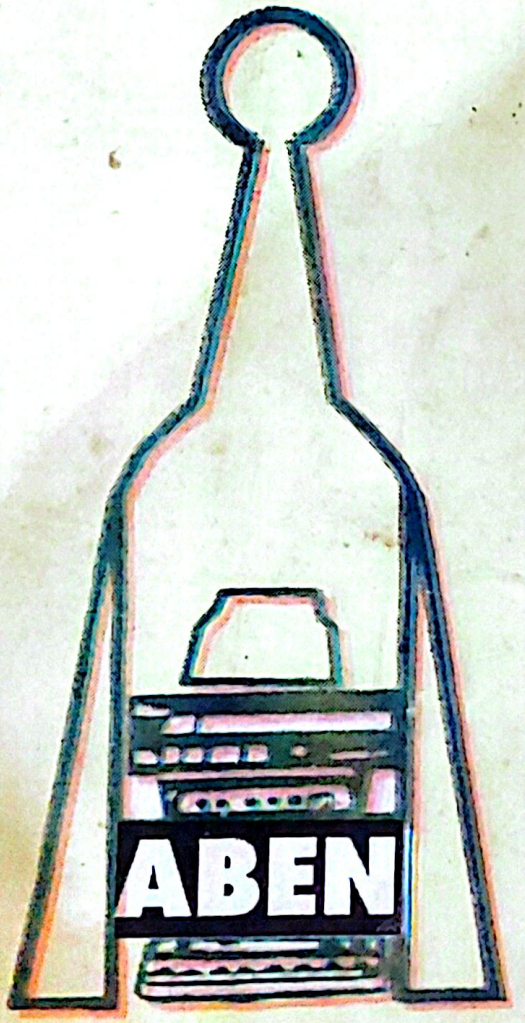
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AUGUST, 2008

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MATE SEEKING: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES AMONG NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

By

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the use of socio-cultural and physical attribute among University undergraduate. Five Universities were sampled in Ogun State (3 public and 2 private Universities). The sample population consisted of 1,500 undergraduate students with a sample of 300 each from the five Universities. Four research questions were raised and tested at 0.05 alpha level. The instrument used was an author-constructed questionnaire. Analysis of data was done using sample percentage and analysis of variance statistic. The major finding of the study were : (i) physical attractiveness positively influence the choice of mate, (ii) mate socio-economic status have significant effect on the choice of mate, (iii) parental value/cultural value contributed significantly to the prediction of mate seeking, and, (iv) physical attractiveness, mate socio-economic status and parental

value interactively greater successful dating of undergraduate students. The conclusions reached were that there is interplay between socio-cultural influence and the use of physical attractiveness in mate seeking and dating of an average individual.

Background /Introduction

For a long time in Nigeria, parents arrange marriage for their children based on the compatibility of the two families, the culture, family economic status, and social status etc. This simply means that in our society, just like any other society, love is not the only yardstick or parameter for mate selection. Today, one of the major concerns young ladies and men have is that of finding a real judgmental value to determine in the beginning which criterion suit them most or have the potential and which do not in the selection of a mate. Thus, what individual look for in the selection of a mate or partner for a relationship that leads to dating or/and marriage differs.

Women and men tend to value different qualities in their prospective mates. Sedikides, Oliver and Campbell (1994) in Jial Ye (2006) summed, overall, women place a greater emphasis on intimacy than men and are more pragmatic in their orientation (e.g. rating "financial security" as more important), whereas men show more preferences to sexuality than women (e.g., rating "physical attractive' as more important). Through surveying men and women from 37 countries, Buss (1990) reported consistent gender differences across cultures: men preferred a mate who was young, healthy, and beautiful, while women valued earning capacity, ambition, and hard work in mate. A few studies also suggested gender differences may vary across cultures in some aspects of mate selection. For instance, Higgins et al's (2002) survey among University students in China and United Kingdom showed that among the British sample, four traits that were mostly valued by men and women were personality, appearance, interests and intelligence.

However, physical attractiveness could be seen as the perception of the physical traits of an individual human person as pleasing or beautiful that makes him/her unique. Physical attractiveness (PA) include those attributes such as physique, skin tone, height, facial features, age/youthfulness, hip-ratio, breast size, body mass, physical fitness of dress etc. This might be the main reason why Myers (2002) affirms that the belief that "looks" matter little may be another instance of how we deny real influence upon us, for there is now a file cabinet full of research studies showing that appearance does matter. The consistency and pervasiveness of this effect is disconcerting. Good looks are great asset, he concluded.

Newman and Cobb (2000) argue that physical attractiveness is subjective, and they point for evidence to the influences of culture, time and the circumstances of our perception. One source of support for this view is that people from different cultures enhance their beauty in different ways: face painting in Asia and parts of America; plastic surgery in America, securing tattoos in Europe and America. filling of teeth and wearing of braces, piercing of nostrils in East Africa, parts of West Africa and parts of Asia.

Regardless of how beauty is defined, it is, clear that people seen as physically attractive are of social advantages, they have more friends, better social skills and more attractive to admirers (Feingold, 1992). As noted by Major (1991) and Efnes (1994) beauty is not related to objective measures of intelligence, personality adjustments or self-esteem. Early, Ashmare et.al (1991) affirm in their studies that good looking people are judged to be smart, successful, happy, well adjusted, socially stalled, confident and assertive. Researches shows that good looking people do have more friends, better social skills and a more active life (Feingold, 1992, Yongmee, 1997).

Buss (1994) affirms that male and female by nature must differ in their optimal mating behaviors. A female must be highly selective because she is biologically limited in the number of children she can bear and raise in her lifetime. Researches conducted by Davis (1990),

Townsend and Wasserman (1997) reveal that female phy attractiveness received more public attention and scrutiny than male physical attractiveness, but did not find any universal stand of beauty (except if you consider cleaningness to be a beauty standa Peterson and Miller (2002) report that matched individuals in te of physical attractiveness are more likely to get married and married than those who are physical mismatched.

To see whether men and women are indeed more influenc by looks, researchers have provided male and female students w various pieces of information about someone of the other se including a picture of the person. Or they have briefly introduced man and a woman and later asked each about their interest in dati the other. In such experiment, men do put somewhat more value o opposite sex physical attractiveness (Feingold, 1990, 1991; Sprech & others, 1994). Perhaps sensing this, women worry more about the appearances and constitute 90 percent of cosmetics surgery patient (Crowley, 1996; Dion & others, 1990). But women too, respond to man's look (Meyers, 2002).

Researcher reveals that people usually approach someone whose attractiveness roughly matches their own (See; Bersheid & others, 1971; Houston, 1973, Stroebe et. al, 1971). Much importantly, study from White (1980) show that good matches may be conducive to good relationships as shown in his study of UCLA dating couples that those who were most similar in physical attractiveness were most likely, nine months later to have fallen more deeply in love.

A study from Ross and Lovie (1997) show that females would differ from males who would place more importance on physical characteristics in dating than females. Hatfield and Sprendrer (1995) in their finding reveal a strong support that males would care more than females about physical attractiveness, while female would care more than males about status and personality attributes, that females would be more "choosy" than males. Males value physical attractiveness more in their partner while female attach more

importance to the socio-economic status of their preferred partner than do men (Buss, 1994, Archer, 1996). This is not say that female completely neglect the physical appearance or attractiveness of the male in their choice of partner. The reason for this difference is completely associated with the cultural value of their immediate society. For instance, Buss (1994) report that woman search for a mate who possesses economic resources and who is willing to commit those resources to support her offspring. In contrast, men seek out women who are young and physically attractive (having smooth skin, full hips, incurious hair, good muscle tone, and other youthful features).

It should be noted, however, that there are preferred proportions of the varying physical attributes to constitute a beautiful woman and a handsome man. For instance, females' sexual attraction towards a male can be partly determined by the height of the man (Pierce, 1996; Cunningham, 1990; Pawlowski, et. al, 2000). Women seem more receptive to an erect posture than men, though both prefer it as an element of beauty; this fact appears correlated to the preference for males who demonstrate confidence, physical strength, and a powerful bearing (Buss, 1994; 2003). Wikipedia (2006) citing a cosmopolitan magazine has shown that women are most attracted to men who are 1.1 times her own height. On the other hand, BBC (2006) affirm that most males exhibit a preference for females of shorter physical stature than themselves, and studies indicate that women of below average height have greater reproductive success.

Both men and women use physical attractiveness as a measure of how 'good' another person is. However, one study across 37 cultures show that men desire on average, a woman 2.5 years younger than themselves for a wife with men in Nigeria and Zambia at the far extreme, desiring their wives to be 6.5 to 7.5 years younger. As men, they also desire a larger age gap from their mates (Buss, 1994, 2003). This preference for youth has also led to a preference of neoteric and youthful appearance features. Full lips, clear and smooth skin, clea

Instrumentation: A 40- item self developed questionnaire was ... in this study. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections. Sec... A comprised of the socio-demographical data of the respon... section B comprised of 20 items which sought information on ... physical attractiveness tagged "Physical Attractiveness In... questionnaire (PAIQ). section C contained 10- items which reve... information on good looks and successful dating tagged "GI ... questionnaire, while section D emphasize on the use of So... economic Status of mate tagged (SES) questionnaire.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument: face validity ... well as content validity were ensured for the instrument by giving ... questionnaire to a teak of experts on test construction and ... irregularities suggested were rectified in the final form of ... questionnaire.

Test-retest reliability for the instrument was also ensured and obtain... in two separate administration of the questionnaire on the same gro... of HND students selected from a Polytechnic with similar backgrou... to those to whom the original questionnaire was later administere... The correlation coefficient was computed and it gave reliabil... coefficient of 0.89. This showed a high and positive relationsh... hence the instrument is considered adequate for administration.

Procedure: Testing involved administering the questionnaire iter... to three hundred randomly selected undergraduates from the fi... Universities which participated in the study with the help of so... proctors. In this way, one thousand and five hundred subjects we... tested.

Data Analysis: The responses of the subjects to the items of t... questionnaire were compiled into contingency tables according ... the main variables being examined. The analysis was carried out usi... simple percentages, and regression analysis.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Socio-demographical Results

S/N	Variable		Freq	%
A	Sex	(i) Male	673	44.9
		(ii) FeMale	827	55.1
B	Age Range:	(i) 18 - 22 years	518	34.5
		(ii) 23 - 27 years	693	46.2
		(iii) 27 years above	289	19.3
C	Sexual Orientation			
		(i) Heterosexual	1500	100
		(ii) Bisexual	NIL	NIL
		(iii) Homosexual	NIL	NIL
D	Relationship Status:			
		(i) Single not engaged	NIL	NIL
		(ii) Single but engaged	1187	79.16
		(iii) Living with a partner	111	07.4
		(iv) Married	202	13.5
		(v) Divorce/separated	NIL	NIL

		MALE		FEMALE	
S/N	Variable	Freq (673)	%	Freq (827)	%
1.	Youthfulness (Age)	632	93.9	207	25.0
2.	Skin tone	582	86.5	147	17.8
3.	Height	627	93.2	533	64.5
4.	Physique (Average)	441	65.5	591	71.5
5.	Waist/hip-ratio	499	74.2	NA	NA
6.	Body mas (Average)	5.17	76.8	444	53.7

Table 1 above show that 673 (44.9%) respondents of the study were males, while 827 (55.1%) was females. Age wise; 34.5% fell within the range of 18 – 22 years, 46.2% with 23 – 27 years and 19.3% were within 27 years and above. The whole respondents believe in heterosexual relationship while their relationship status revealed that 79.1% respondents were single but engaged, 7.4% were living with partners and 13.5% already married.

Table 2: Preference for mate selection

7.	Facial expression	601	89.3	633	76.5
8.	Breast size	511	75.9	N.A	N.A
9.	Dressing	668	99.3	649	78.5
10.	Socio-economic status of partner.	093	13.8	739	89.4

The results on Table 2 reveal that both male and female have their own preference for mate selection. Generally, the male respondents concentrate more on the physical attractiveness of their mate. The female on the other hand believe in physical attractiveness of the opposite sex but tend to appreciate the socio-economic status of their mate better. It could then be said that socio-economic status and physical attractiveness are the most prominent attributes in mate selection among University undergraduates.

Table 3(a) Parental and cultural influence on mate selection

S/N	Influence in %	Responses	%
1	100 %	NIL	NIL
2	75 %	488	32.5
3	50 %	603	40.2
4	25 %	309	27.3
5	Less than 25 %	NIL	NIL

72.7 % of the total respondents believed that parents and cultural values play a prominent role in the choosing of a mate for dating in spite one's personal values such as physical attractiveness, mate socio-economic status etc.

It could then be deduced that the influence of the parental/cultural values on mate selection is significant and it is accounted for by about 53.4% choice in mate selection (see Table 3(b) below).

Table 3 (b)

	Yes	%	No	%
Would you stop dating your partner if your parents and culture frown at it completely?	801	53.4	699	46.6

Thus, no matter what individual's preference for mate selection is, parental and cultural values play a significant role in influencing one's decision on choice of mate. As a matter of fact, parents' approval in mate selection or in the choice of mate still meant a lot to an average Nigeria youth. This finding sharply contradicts that of Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu and Tatia (2004).

Research Question 1

Would physical attractiveness influence the choice of mate among undergraduate students?

Table 4: ANOVA table showing the influence of physical attractiveness on the choice mate.

Source	Df	Ss	Ms	F – ratio	P
Main effect	4	56013.73	14003.43		
Residual	1498	433618.44	290.5	48.20	<.05
Total	1499	489632.17	14293.93		

The result presented in Table 4 above indicated that physical attractiveness is a good predictor of mate selection among Universities undergraduates. Thus at P<.05 the undergraduate students show that their selection of mate for dating was significantly influenced by "looks" of the opposite sex. The present finding concurred with those of Dion and others (1990), Feingold (1991) and Crowley (1996) that good physical matches is a moderately good predictor of how frequently one dates.

It should be noted, however, that physical attractiveness of an individual has a great influence on how others value or appreciate him or her, which in turn means that, the more attractive a woman/man is, the more s/he is likely to be dated. This is also supported by Sprecher & others (1994) that male and female are indeed being influenced by looks. While Myers (2002) affirmed that the belief that looks matter little may be another instance of how we deny real influences upon us.

Research Question 2

Would socio-economic status (SES) influence the choice of mate among undergraduate students?

Table 5: ANOVA Table on mate's socio-economic status

Source	Df	Ss	Ms	f-ratio	P
Main effect	4	29148.11	1821.76		
Residual	1495	318065.98	212.75	8.56	<.05
Total	1499	37214.09	389-.72		

Table 5 above revealed a significant influence of socio-economic status on mate selection. The calculated F-ratio (F4, 1499) = 8.56 which is greater than F (4, 1499) critical at 2.37 at <.05 signifying level shows a statistical significant F-ratio. It could be deduced that mate socio-economic factor have an influence on his/her dating style.

This result confirmed the previous finding of Buss (1994), Archer

(1996) and Omoni (2006) that one of the prominent attributes in mate selection is the socio-economic status. This study also shows that female attach more importance to their mate's socio-economic status which was also confirmed b y Buss (1994).

Research Question 3

What is the relative contribution of physical attractiveness (PA) socio-economic status (SES) and parental/cultural value (PCV) to the prediction of mate seeking among undergraduates?

Table 6: Regression weights on relative contribution of independent variables to the prediction of mate seeking

S/N	Variable	Std. Reg Wt	Se β	t – ratio	P
1	Physical attractiveness	.0971	.0319	3.141	Siq
2	SES	.0168	.0256	.893	Siq
3	PCV	.0636	.0281	1.745	Siq

As shown in Table 6 above, the value of the t – ratio associated with the respective variable indicated that all the three variables, that is, physical attractiveness, socio-economic status and parental/cultural value contributed significantly to the prediction of mate seeking among undergraduates. The values of the standardized regression weights associated with these variables indicate that, physical attractiveness is the most potent contributor to the prediction followed by parental/ cultural values while socio-economic status is the least contributor variable to mate seeking. Previous researchers has lend a good credence to this finding as Buss (1994, 2003), Dion & others (1990), Crowley (1996), Feingold (1990,1991), Hatfield and Sprendrer (1995) reported positive effects of physical attractiveness in dating. This finding sharply contracdict that of Lalondde, Hyine, Pannu & Tatia on family approval (parental/cultural), as this result shows that parental

approval is significant a attribute in mate seeking and dating in Nigeria. Also mate's socio-economic status was supported by the finding of Buss (1994), Arche (1996) and Omoni. (2006).

Research Question four

To what extent would physical attractiveness, socio-economic status and parental value bring about successful dating?

Table 7: Summary of regression analysis on the combined effect PA, SES and PV as predictors of successful dating.

Analysis of variance					
Source	Df	Ss	Ms	f-ratio	**Regression Analysis**
Main effect	3	1755.23	585.08		R= 0.25171
Residual	309	3837.23	12.42		R^2= 0.43807
Total	312	5592.46	597.5	47.11	SE= 2.51991

Table 7 indicate that, the use of three independent variables (physical attractiveness, socio-economic status and parental value) to predict successful dating yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of .252 and adjusted multiple regression square (R^2) of .438. The table also revealed that analysis of variance of multiple regression data yielded an F- ratio 47.12 significant at .0247 levels. The (R^2) value translated into 44% of the observed variance of successful dating .White (1980)'s finding corroborate this as he reported that good matches may be conducive to good relationships as those most matched in his study were nine months later had fallen more deeply in love.

Counseling implication

In the recent time, it has been relatively observed that married couples do not have personal values and so upholding such values in

marriage does not arise. Rather, most couples transfer what they value in courtship or dating to marriage, for instance, male values beauty while female on the other hand values wealth in return. The question now is that what will be the outcome of such marriage if the beauty fades on the part of the woman? Or when the economic power of the man reduced drastically?

Thus, the need to help intending couples and the larger society to analyze and develop values that will help in sustaining marriage institution. Counseling psychologist should help in mounting premarital counseling for all couples to be. This can also be complimented at the Registry before marriage and by religious leaders in the religious institution as well.

Also, marital counseling should be taken to the grassroots and the women should be educated as regards the changing economic role of couples in the homes while counseling efforts should be geared towards the male couples to enhance marital stability.

It has been observed that men's greater interest in physical form also makes them the main consumers of the most of the world's visual pornography (see, Myers, 2002; Ayodele, 2007). Thus, the male couples needs to be counseled that flowers dies and beauty fades but values enriched with love will last.

Conclusion

This research work has provided a unique framework of the investigation into the uses of socio-cultural and physical attributes in mate seeking among University undergraduates. The finding of this current research suggested that there is interplay between socio-cultural influence and the uses of physical attractiveness in mate seeking of individuals. Of equal importance is that physical attractiveness is a potent predictor of mate seeking for male, which is reflected in the attitude of females, for instance, short women prefer to put on high heels to add some inches to their height to make them look attractive and sexy. Also, female dressing codes nowadays (tight jeans: trousers and shirts that tend to reinforce their hips and tight

tops that will make their breast move visibly, padding of buttocks and breast is also common. Omoni, 2006) depicts the reasons why men were easily turned on with female attractiveness in mate seeking and dating.

A gender difference was established and reported in the use of mate's socio-economic status among undergraduates. Therefore, mate socio-economic status (SES) is potent factor for female. Thus, it could be deduced that male do not necessarily need to consider their mate's socio-economic study in mate seeking and depend solely on this for survival later in life.

All things being equal, physical attractiveness, mate's SES and cultural/parental values.to a great extent has a deep imprint on the individual's perception and attitude or behaviour towards mate seeking, dating and marriage.

In a nutshell, the most acceptable justification for this discussion is that personal, cultural and social factors interact significantly to account for the apparent behaviour exhibited by male and female undergraduates' preference in mate seeking and dating.

However, it should be noted, that this current research only examined the use of socio-cultural and physical attribute in mate seeking and dating, but did not closely analyse detailed content of each of the variable under study. Future research would benefit by examining further the variable under study with more comparison with the role of biographical mediators in the psychology of mate seeking.

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