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PARTNER SEARCH:

PREFERENCES AND PRESENTATION

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding partner search is an endeavour of sociologists, demographers and evolutionary psychologists[1]. It is the first stage in the process of forming a relationship[2] and as such has important implications at both individual and societal levels. Individually, people tend to be better off in a multitude of ways when they are in relationships, for example in terms of their health, happiness and success[3]. In a wider sense, without relationships children are not born and the population does not replace itself resulting in population ageing with severe consequences. Alternatively, children are born but outside marriage and thus face a more precarious existence (Kiernan, 2003) associated with worse outcomes in later life (McLanahan & Sanderfur, 1994). Fewer relationships also suggest a more individualistic society. In addition mate selection is critical for many intergenerational processes because of the essential role of biological reproduction in actually producing the next generation (Mare, 2003).

In this Introduction I review two theories of partner search and then describe Signalling Theory showing its relevance to partner search.

[1] Sociologists are interested in it because of what it can tell them about social interactions and the role of social structures in peoples' behaviour. Demographers are interested in it because it can explain trends in demographic processes for example marriage and fertility. Evolutionary psychologists are interested in it because it can help understand our evolutionary past.

[2] As opposed to the 'matching' (decision making) or 'interacting' (relationship formation) stage, as outlined in the typology proposed by Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992).

[3] See Putnam, 2000 for numerous examples of social relationships in general, but also marriages.

1.1 PARTNER SEARCH

The idea of searching for a partner has many analogies with searching for a job (Granovetter, 1995; Becker, Landes & Michael, 1977; Oppenheimer, 1988). Characteristic of these searches is the uncertainty facing both sides (worker-employer, man-woman), preventing perfect, instantaneous matching. There is a distribution of potential offers and only a proportion represent a 'perfect' match, meaning a costly search must be undertaken. Individuals face direct and indirect costs. The key indirect cost is the loss incurred by rejecting an offer in favour of continuing to search for a better offer. In most cases continuing to search until the perfect offer arrives is not optimal behaviour. To overcome this individuals set a minimally acceptable match (the 'reservation wage'). All offers below this level are rejected, the first one above accepted. Higher reservation wages tend to mean longer search time because of the reduced probability of finding an acceptable match. The actual level will depend on the offsetting effects of a better match against the higher costs in meeting it. Thus the reservation wage influences the length of time spent searching and the quality of the match.

The area on which women set their reservation wage for husbands, Becker (1974) argued, is their income. Becker saw the ultimate goal of marriage as maximising the economic utility of the household. People were argued to marry when the economic benefits of doing so outweighed the benefits of remaining single. On this basis Becker's economic theory emphasises the role of specialisation among partners. Parsons (1949) argued that differentiated sex roles were of functional importance for social integration, viability and marital stability. This sex differentiation was also

important to Becker's theory, but the reason he postulated was the greater efficiency it gave to the 'trading relationship' that was marriage. The theory was sex neutral but due to the limitations of biology he argued it was better for the man to be engaged in economic activities outside the home and the woman within the home. As such there might be differential investments in human capital between the sexes. In short, men and women are expected to contribute complementary resources to partnerships.

This is a theme also present in evolutionary thinking. Women are argued to be interested in men's resources, men in women's fertility (Waynforth & Dunbar, 1995; Buss, 1994). Alleged cues for these are broad. For men they include being relatively old or educated. For women, examples are youth and attractiveness. Men and women offer these traits, but women and men also *desire* them because of their association with reproductive success. Over evolutionary time those women and men who have mated with men and women possessing such characteristics are claimed to have produced more surviving offspring and thus more copies of their genes. The differences derive from basic biological principles of differential investment in offspring by the sexes, which affects their reproductive potential[4]. Overall, the theory argues that better quality women are able to attract better quality men and vice versa because of the mutual benefits in producing successful and numerous offspring.

Both theories suggest individuals engage in negotiation with potential partners in a 'partner market'. The two sexes are argued to offer different qualities that either maximise economic utility or reproductive success. Both theories have been useful in helping to understand patterns of human behaviour, but both have limitations. For

example many evolutionary tendencies whilst strong can be socially or culturally over-ruled, a good illustration is voluntary childlessness (see Campbell, 1985). Rising numbers of working women are less reliant on men to provide resources so they may do better to seek men likely to be good fathers or whose company they enjoy. Likewise, viewing marriages and families as units intending to produce the most economic output only takes our understanding so far. The increasing proportion of women working means their search for partners no longer needs to be limited to the earnings of men (if it ever was). Specialisation is observed less frequently with dual-earner families and it has been argued to be a risky strategy anyway (Oppenheimer, 1994). There are also examples of behaviour that clearly does not maximise economic utility (for example investment bankers becoming teachers).

Evolutionary and economic theories differ in their emphases on distal and proximal factors in determining partner choices. However, there are similarities. They are similar in seeing individuals as rational maximisers, whether conscious or evolved. Both approaches[5] tend to look at what one sex does relative to the other rather than what either sex does. They are also similar in viewing individuals' preferences as being determined by their own qualities. A basic assumption of evolutionary psychology is that "*expressed preferences will often be conditional strategies*" (Waynforth and Dunbar, 1995: 757). Similarly, economic theories argue that the 'reservation wage' individuals set for their partners and thus the distribution over which they search are determined by their own characteristics.

[4] Women invest more biologically than men and have limited fertility, whereas men invest virtually nothing biologically and have, theoretically, unlimited fertility.
[5] Particularly evolutionary psychology.

I would like to challenge this assumption about the formation of peoples' preferences. It seems to me more likely that people do not make rational decisions about the sort of characteristics they prefer in a partner, and that they do not result inevitably from their own qualities. I think that something deeper and more complex is happening which cannot be explained by the probable costs and benefits of partnering.

Rather than preferences being conditional, the traits offered seem to me more likely to be conditional to maximise the probability of success. Presenting oneself in a better light, emphasising different features and so on seems a more plausible view of what people do when trying to meet their desired partner than changing their desires. Such conditional presentation of the self is associated with Signalling Theory.

1.2 SIGNALLING THEORY

Signalling Theory is a relatively new theory in sociology[6] (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2001). It is "*usually concerned with scenarios in which agents have a motive for deception and no scruples*" (Bacharach, 2000: 3), a condition highly relevant to partner search[7]. Signalling Theory is an offshoot of rational choice theory and enables at least partial understanding of why some individuals engage in costly or harmful behaviours[8]. That is, they are providing information about some underlying characteristic that is otherwise unobservable and perhaps distinguishing themselves from others who do not possess it. Providing such information indicates their higher 'quality' in one or more respects, and thus may influence others' behaviour or treatment of them in a way perceived to be beneficial. In this sense, such actions may be rational even if they are costly.

This is relevant to partner search because individuals are likely to present themselves (or one could say 'signal') so as to encourage people possessing the desired traits to partner with them. In more formal terms:

> "*A signal is an action by a player (the 'signaler') whose purpose is to raise the probability that another player (the 'receiver') assigns to a certain state of affairs or 'event'"* (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2001: 159*)*

[6] The first use was by an economist (Spence, 1973) in relation to the hiring of employees. The application of this theory in sociology has not been extensive due to its novelty. Examples include signalling trustworthiness to taxi drivers (Gambetta & Hamill, forthcoming) and underworld communication (Gambetta, forthcoming).

[7] Signalling is also very relevant to partner search because of uncertainty. People do not know what a potential partner is going to be like in ten years, so will rely on signals in making their decision whether to marry or partner them.

[8] For example, persistent offending and joyriding in West Belfast (Hamill, 2000).

Thus, an individual seeking a partner could be termed the 'signaller', the sort of person the signaller is seeking may be known as the 'receiver', and the state of affairs or 'event' is partnership.

Signals can come in different forms, for example linguistic, behavioural or anatomical. However, they will only be given if the associated "*signalling costs*" (Spence, 1973: 358), in terms of time, money, effort or whatever, are outweighed by the benefits of producing that signal. A critical point here is that under some conditions there may be a proportion of individuals (mimics) able to give a signal for a trait, despite not actually having it. Under such conditions receivers face a problem in determining the true identity of signallers. For example, if a woman was searching for a rich man she would be unlikely to believe someone if they simply said they were rich because anyone can claim this: it is an easily mimicked signal. The costs of giving it are low but the potential benefits may be great if it increases the individuals' attractiveness to the person desired for partnership. Such a situation is known as a "*semi-sorting equilibrium*" (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2001: 159-160).

The key is that there is no difference in the cost of giving the signal between people who really are rich and those who are poor. A better, more reliable signal for richness would be spending a large amount of money. Rich people can afford to do so but poor people cannot. Therefore if someone spends a lot of money it can be assumed that they are actually rich. Such a situation is termed a "*sorting equilibrium"* because only those individuals who have that quality can signal it. The signal is unambiguous

and has a separating property because of its cost discrimination meaning that receivers are perfectly informed (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2001: 159)[9].

However, such sorting signals are rare in the domain of human courtship. Bacharach notes that most human signalling is linguistic, such that any signaller regardless of their state can give the same signal at a near-zero cost and "*in consequence, there is… no possibility of a solution of the agent's trait signalling problem.*" (Bacharach, 2000: 3). However, Gambetta shows, with reference to criminals, that the environment people frequent can often be a good discriminating signal. He illustrates with a situation highly relevant to this dissertation: "*patronising a 'singles bar' when searching for a mate…Single bars increase the probability to meet other single people, but they do not reduce to zero the probability of meeting patrons who while married will go there merely pretending to be single.*" (Gambetta, forthcoming: 6). Obviously, though, the criteria by which people search for a partner involves more dimensions than simply being single. In the next section I expand on this aspect and outline my aims.

[9] Essentially this is the same idea presented by the biologist Zahavi (1975, 1997) known as 'The Handicap Principle' and also termed the "*costly-to-fake principle*" by Frank (1988: 99).

2. AIMS AND DATA

My main claim is that the assumption about preference formation of evolutionary and economic theories seems unrealistic. I seek to show that signalling by people engaged in partner search is a response to their preferences for a partner. I am interested in which traits are signalled and why they may be signalled when people have certain desires. The way in which different traits are signalled with different preferences also serves as an empirical test of the complementarity between partners that economic and evolutionary theories suppose.

The data I have been able to collect does not allow complete unravelling of the phenomenon but still permits an interesting exploration and discussion. The data involves linguistic signalling (meaning that the signals will not be "reliable") but the relevance of Signalling Theory to partner search cannot be in doubt. The source of linguistic signals that comprise my data set are newspaper 'personal ads'[10].

I performed a content analysis of 862 personal adverts, 415 placed by men and 447 placed by women[11]. The sample came from six newspapers[12]. Both national and local papers were used to try to increase the representativeness of the sample for the population of adverts, and therefore also for the broader population of the country. Every advert from these six sources was coded except those where the content was unclear (for example speaking in metaphor) or those where the advertiser specified

[10] In these adverts people endeavour to find a partner by indicating different things about themselves, the kinds of features they desire in a partner and the type of relationship they would like.
[11] Only those engaging in heterosexual searches were considered.
[12] The Times, Saturday 3 May 2003; The Daily Telegraph, Friday 2 May 2003; The Guardian, Tuesday 6 May 2003; The Oxford Times, Friday 2 May 2003; Redhill & Reigate Life, Wednesday 30 April 2003; The Surrey Mirror, Thursday 1 May 2003.

"for friendship" (although those along the lines "friendship *initially*" were coded because the implication was for more). The content of the adverts was coded manifestly (Holsti, 1969) as the number of times a particular trait was mentioned. The coding was done according to the coding frame I developed following a number of earlier trials[13]. Each advert was also given an individual case number, coded as placed by a male or female and the newspaper from which it came.

Following preliminary trials, the traits fell into five broad groups: Appearance, Resources, Personality, Age and Interests. In total there were 41 categories that could be desired or signalled or both. For each advert the number of traits from each category desired in a partner and signalled about the advertiser were recorded. This data was then entered into an SPSS database from which the statistical analysis was performed.

Despite the detailed dictionary content analysis is invariably subjective to an extent because of the different ways words can be used and interpreted. Ensuring the reliability of the data is very important for the substantive results and conclusions that can be drawn: "*Reliability is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for validity*" (Krippendorff, 1980: 129). To measure this a sample of 80 adverts was analysed independently by a second coder[14] using the same coding frame. For each advert the total number of categories coded by the two coders was calculated and then the number of categories they agreed on was determined. This enabled the level of agreement to be found, and thus a measure of inter-coder reliability, which was 80%.

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[13] A full copy of the coding frame and a detailed dictionary of all words coded in each category, is contained in the Appendix. There is also a sample coding sheet.
[14] Dr Michelle Jackson, Nuffield College, Oxford.

As Gambetta points out, the environment in which people are found may be a good signal of their quality on different dimensions, for example being in a singles bar and their marital status. In the same way placing a personal ad is more likely to be done by singles and thus the very act itself is quite a reliable signal of marital status. However, the contents of the ads (and the range of characteristics likely to be important to people in their future partner) have much less of a discriminating property than the mere placing of the ad. Indeed, a common criticism of the use of such research material is that what individuals say about themselves may have no relation to what they are actually like (because of the lack of costs to such signalling already discussed). In Bacharach and Gambetta's words, "*the further that interaction departs from ideal face-to-face conditions, the less safe are signalers of personal identity from the corruption of their signals by the mimicking activities of impersonators.*" (Bacharach & Gambetta, 2001: 165). Given that personal ads are far removed from face-to-face contact the integrity of the signals is unknown[15]. Interpreting the data as signals rather than definite traits is beneficial because signals

[15] There are other problems with using such a source, for example the selectivity of who uses them such that it has been argued to be a deviant act (Darden & Koski, 1988). Such criticism is countered by Buchmann & Eisner (1997) who argue that the public nature of the ads limits the problem because "*public presentations of private matters constitute highly standardised practices*", although that argument was more relevant to their research than this research. The source does have a number of benefits. The individuals are actively engaging in partner search and the data is the act of their engaging in such a search, meaning they are a population of direct relevance. Also they "*represent the writer's initial (or ideal) bid in what is often a very long drawn out process of negotiation*" (Waynforth & Dunbar, 1995), whereas actual partners/spouses will have been chosen in light of the real-world situation where lack of availability of preferred partners will force compromises in obtained partners. The ads are extremely widespread and contained in magazines and newspapers read by people from all walks of life. Also, such methods are also increasingly gaining acceptance, along with dating agencies and websites, so those using them today will be more representative of the population than ever. Perhaps most importantly, they have the advantage of being 'real'. By this I mean that what is contained in them was put there by real people who did not know that they were going to be studied (see Lee, 2000). Thus, unlike experiments, surveys or interviews where there is generally knowledge as to the nature if not the goals of the research, there need be no concerns that the individuals are trying to give the right answer, are influenced by the question wording, are prompted by the interviewer, do as they think they are expected to, behave unnaturally, and so on. This benefit, in my view, certainly compensates the possible problems mentioned.

can be dishonest allowing for a lack of integrity among advertisers. The fact that I am interested in how individuals signal when they have certain preferences[16] sidesteps criticisms about 'objective quality' because I start with what is certain[17], and observe how advertisers act to make it most likely that they succeed in getting a particular kind of partner.

In light of the general aims and the available data I will investigate six areas:

1) 'Strategic' signalling: are some traits signalled more when certain traits are desired than not?

2) Fakeability and frequency: are harder-to-fake traits signalled more than easier-to-fake traits? Are easier-to-fake traits signalled more strategically than harder-to-fake traits?

3) Market value: is there a relation between the value of advertisers' desires and signals?

4) Market value and fakeability: are harder-to-fake traits higher value than easier-to-fake traits?

5) Unvalued traits and desires: do advertisers with high value desires signal fewer unvalued traits than those with low value desires?

[16] Rather than which individuals have certain preferences as in evolutionary psychology.

6) Presence of negative traits: do people with high value desires reveal fewer negative traits than those with low value desires? Do people who reveal negative traits adjust their other signals?

[17] Namely preferences because there is no point in people being dishonest about their preferences whereas there are many possible reasons why they may be dishonest about their characteristics.

3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 shows the number of signals and desires men and women gave in the Appearance, Resources, and Personality areas[18].

[18] Age and Interests are left out for most of this section because of the tendency to desire more ages than are signalled (because no-one can have more than one age), and to signal more Interests than desire (an interesting trend in itself, but not one to be pursued here).

Table 1

	Men		Women	
	Signal	**Desire**	**Signal**	**Desire**
Fair Hair	13	4	90	4
Dark Hair	36	1	47	3
Red Hair	0	0	4	0
Blue Eyes	22	1	48	4
Dark Eyes	11	0	12	0
Tall Height	104	16	45	78
Average Height	87	5	58	11
Short Height	17	2	69	4
Large Build	5	5	14	1
Medium Build	25	4	17	4
Slim Build	78	84	157	24
Attractive	127	90	183	60
Athletic Body	61	11	12	9
Stylish	14	27	34	10
Sexy	5	24	39	1
Other Appearance	23	3	41	8
Total Appearance	**628**	**277**	**870**	**221**
Financial Situation	31	8	12	26
Education/Intellect	62	50	73	73
Professional/Managerial Job	111	15	75	47
Service Job	2	0	10	0
Manual Job/Skills	6	0	7	5
Successful	37	5	7	23
Possessions	19	1	9	5
Other Resources	25	3	20	5
Total Resources	**293**	**82**	**213**	**184**
Trustworthy	89	49	50	116
Caring	87	50	62	89
Personable	159	128	198	170
Romantic	41	21	30	29
Other Personality	22	7	20	13
Total Personality	**398**	**255**	**360**	**417**
Total	**1319**	**614**	**1443**	**822**

The totals for the three areas confirm the predictions of evolutionary and economic (evo-eco) theories. Men desire Appearance more than women, women signal it more than men; women desire Resources more than men, men signal it more than women. Personality is about equally signalled by the two sexes but desired more by women.

Whilst this supports the validity of the data I am interested more in what men and women are doing than in comparisons between them.

3.1 'STRATEGIC' SIGNALLING

From Table 1, the eleven most desired traits for each sex were cross tabulated against every signal given at least once, to establish whether any were being used significantly more or less when certain traits were desired. A Chi Squared test was used for this purpose; where it was significant at the 5% level, I term those signals 'strategic'.

Table 2 shows the numbers and percentages of men and women strategically signalling traits from the three areas.

Table 2

	Strategic Signals that were:		
	Appearance	**Resources**	**Personality**
Male	14	10	8
	43.75%	31.25%	25%
Female	23	12	8
	53.49%	27.91%	18.60%

Simply comparing men and women misses a lot of interesting information. Women strategically signal Appearance more than men, and men signal Resources more than women. However, men strategically signal Appearance more than Resources and the difference between the sexes in signalling Resources is small. Thus simple comparisons can be misleading in appreciating how men and women behave. For this reason, a more detailed analysis is attempted below.

Male Advertisers

For men the top eleven desires covered the range of areas, with five Appearance, two Resources and four Personality. This yielded 341 comparisons of signals and the Chi Squared test statistic was significant at the 5% level for 34 of them: 32 of which were used more when the trait was desired than not, and two less when the trait was desired than not.

Table 3 shows each desired trait, the number of signals used 'strategically' and which signals were used in that way[19].

Table 3

Trait desired		**Number of strategic signals**	**Signals used strategically**
Appearance	Tall	4	**Tall**, Total Appearance, Successful, (Personable)
	Slim	2	**Slim**, Total Appearance
	Attractive	1	**Attractive**
	Stylish	3	**Stylish**, Successful, Total Resources
	Sexy	4	Stylish, **Sexy**, Total Appearance, Successful
Resources	Education/ Intellect	5	Fair, (Attractive), Athletic, **Education**, Total Resources
	Professional/ Managerial	3	**Professional**, Total Resources, Romantic
Personality	Trustworthy	1	**Trustworthy**
	Caring	5	Average Height, Trustworthy, **Caring**, Romantic, Total Personality
	Personable	0	-
	Romantic	6	Average Height, Total Appearance, Financial, Personable, **Romantic**, Total Resources

[19] Those in brackets were used less when the trait was desired than when it was not.

Ten of the top eleven desires had at least one signal that was used statistically differently when it was desired and when it was not. For every desire, when a signal was used strategically, the same trait was signalled as was desired. In other words there was a precise matching of signal and desire. This would appear to go against evolutionary and economic predictions[20].

Table 4 shows how strategic signals were distributed across desires for men, excluding those used less when the trait was desired than when it was not.

Table 4

		Desire				
		Appearance	**Resources**	**Personality**	**Total**	**%**
Signal	**Appearance**	**9**	2	3	14	43.75
	Resources	4	**4**	2	10	31.25
	Personality	0	1	**7**	8	25
	Total	13	7	12	32	100
	%	40.6	21.9	37.5	100	

The most used signal was Appearance, which does not fit well with evo-eco theories that predict that men contribute Resources because one would assume they would use signals for Resources strategically. A possible reason why they signal Resources less than Appearance may be because everyone signals Resources and thus by this definition of 'strategic' Resources are artificially low. However, going back to Table 1, Resources is the lowest of the three areas. The low number of Personality signals used strategically is also surprising given the relevance of these to both theories, their comparatively easy mimickability, and (as later analysis shows) that they are the traits most in demand.

[20] In addition, 48 men and 48 women explicitly stated something along the lines of "seeks similar other" or "like minded individual", giving direct evidence of a desire for similarity rather than

When an Appearance trait was desired thirteen signals were used strategically, compared to seven when Resources were desired and twelve when Personality was desired. On the face of it, this seems to support evo-eco theories with men more likely to manipulate their signals for traits of relevance to fertility and mother-wife roles than for economic capacity. However, more detailed consideration tells a different story.

When Appearance was desired, nine of the thirteen strategic signals were also Appearance features, whereas only four were for Resources. More than twice as many Appearance signals were given as Resource signals, the reverse of evo-eco predictions.

Only two desired Resource traits displayed any strategic signalling by male advertisers fitting with evo-eco theories that men are unconcerned by such features. However, men gave seven such signals fitting less well with evo-eco theories. Four of the seven were Resource traits, two were Appearance traits, one Personality, suggesting some support for evo-eco theories in terms of men offering Resources but also suggestive of 'matching'. Men who desire women with Resources may be unusual according to evo-eco theories, but they can perhaps be understood as men who seek partners of a similar social standing to them rather than as providers for them[21]. This is reinforced by the fact that signals were given for the two Resource traits probably most valued in a status sense (education and type of job). Arguments have also been made that specialisation in the household is an increasingly risky

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complementarity.

strategy, and that dual earner families in many cases may be more viable (Oppenheimer, 1994), hence male desires for women with such potential may actually be logical from the point of view of contributing to household income.

For three of the desired Personality traits, signals are used strategically. Seven of the twelve signals used in this way were also Personality traits, three were Appearance traits, and two Resource traits. Again, pointing towards more matching than exchange. Given that Personality traits are extremely important under both evolutionary and economic theories the fact that the area men are supposed to contribute in return (Resources) is the lowest of all three areas is intriguing.

Female Advertisers

Of the top eleven desired traits, three were for Appearance, four for Resources, and four for Personality. 352 comparisons were undertaken, 45 of which had significant differences at the 5% level when tested by Chi Squared, two of which were given less when the trait was desired than not.

Table 5 shows the number of signals used strategically for each of the top eleven desires, and what the signals were.

[21] There is a vast literature on assortative mating and homogamy, for example Kalmijn (1991, 1994).

Table 5

Trait desired		Number of strategic signals	Signals used strategically
Appearance	Tall	4	**Tall**, Slim, Total Appearance, (Caring)
	Slim	4	Fair, **Slim**, Attractive, Romantic
	Attractive	5	Blue eyes, Slim, **Attractive**, Total Appearance, Total Resources
Resources	Financial	3	**Financial**, Education, Total Resources
	Education/ Intellect	4	Slim, Stylish, **Education**, Total Resources
	Professional/ Managerial	7	(Blue eyes), Short height, Attractive, Education, **Professional**, Total Resources, Total Personality
	Successful	5	Fair, Slim, Attractive, Other Appearance, Total Appearance,
Personality	Trustworthy	2	Other Appearance, **Trustworthy**
	Caring	3	Total Appearance, **Caring**, Personable
	Personable	2	Total Resources, Other Personality
	Romantic	6	Fair, Sexy, Professional, Total Resources, **Romantic**, Total Personality

Each one of the top eleven desires had at least two signals that were used strategically. Nine of the 45 were the same signal as the desire, evidence against evo-eco theories.

Table 6 shows the distribution of strategic signals by desires, excluding those signalled strategically less.

Table 6

		Desire				
		Appearance	**Resources**	**Personality**	**Total**	**%**
Signal	**Appearance**	**10**	**9**	4	23	53.5
	Resources	1	**8**	3	12	27.9
	Personality	1	1	**6**	8	18.6
	Total	12	18	13	43	100
	%	27.9	41.9	30.2	100	

More than half of the signals used strategically were Appearance traits, which fits evolutionary arguments. That more Resource signals were given than Personality does not fit so well with evo-eco theories. One reason could be that there is a group of 'new women' able and willing to offer Resources.

With regard to when strategic signals were used, the support for evo-eco theories is stronger than among men. They were used most when Resources were desired and least when Appearance was desired. At the more detailed level it is not quite that simple, but generally women's signalling behaviour is more in line with the two theoretical approaches than men's.

When Appearance traits were desired twelve signals were used strategically. Ten of these were Appearance traits, one was Personality and one Resources, again suggestive of matching rather than trading. In this instance the signalling cannot really be argued to go against evo-eco theories but the desire clearly does.

Four of the top eleven desired traits were Resources. Women strategically signalled approximately the same number of Appearance and Resource traits when Resources were desired. The high number of Appearance can be understood in evo-eco terms but Resources cannot, suggesting further support for matching. The low number of

Personality signals is again surprising. Education and Professional may be understandable from the perspective of appealing to people of similar social status. Signalling Financial when Financial was desired might arise because women do not want to be seen as overt 'gold-diggers'. Only Resources were signalled when Financial was desired which contradicts evo-eco thinking, but may represent new views as to optimal family strategies with dual earners rather than risky specialisation. Women wanting Educated and Professional men tend to offer Appearance and Resources, partly supporting evolutionary ideas, and partly supporting more recent versions of economic theories of marriage.

When Personality was desired four of the thirteen strategic signals were for Appearance, three for Resources and six for Personality. Again this points more towards matching of traits, but the reasons men and women match Personality traits could be understood in evolutionary and economic terms. Women may seek men who they can rely on and who will continue supporting them, whilst men may seek women who will look after them and their children and be loyal to them. Distinguishing such an effect from a simple matching effect is not possible from this data. Support for the two theories may also be found in the fact that women used more Appearance than Resource traits. Those desired Personality traits perhaps most relevant to evo-eco theories (Trustworthy and Caring) did not have Resources offered at all by women, suggesting persistence of 'traditional' roles in these areas. Signalling of Resources for Personable and Romantic men may suggest less traditional motives and perhaps that these women are independent 'new women' and that the men they seek are not necessarily for marriage or childrearing.

3.2 FAKEAB ILITY AND FREQUENCY

Some signals are easier to mimic on a first meeting than others. Thus, if we consider the advertisers to be signallers, it would be expected that the best way to signal qualities to potential partners would be to signal harder-to-fake traits because receivers can have greater confidence in them[22]. In this section I group the traits into 'easier-to-fake' and 'harder-to-fake' on the first meeting[23], and then compare the frequency with which the two groups of signals were given.

From Table 1 the frequencies with which each category of traits was signalled can be found. For men, 'easier-to-fake' traits were signalled 486 times and the 'harder-to-fake' traits 763, in percentage terms 38.9% and 61.1% respectively. A z-test comparing these proportions found them to be significantly different: 'easier-to-fake' traits were used significantly less than 'harder-to-fake'.

For women 'easier-to-fake' traits were signalled 437 times and 'harder-to-fake' traits 925 times, in percentage terms 32.1% and 67.9%. A z-test again found them to be significantly different. There is no reason to assume that in the population of traits, those that were 'harder-to-fake' were more numerous, and thus a tentative explanation for their greater frequency can reasonably be found in their perceived signalling value to the advertiser because of the effect their display has on beliefs of receivers. Thus

[22] This is because although the signals in personal ads do not have cost-discrimination in the sense of Signalling Theory, there is likely to be a degree of cost-discrimination further down the line. Giving signals for traits that are obvious and that cannot be faked paradoxically signals dishonesty if the advertiser did not have them. Therefore, signals for harder-to-fake traits can be expected to tend to be given more by individuals that actually have them.

[23] Easier-to-fake were assumed to be: Fair Hair, Dark Hair, Red Hair, Stylish, Financial, Professional/Managerial, Service, Manual, Successful, Possessions, Trustworthy, Caring, Romantic. Harder-to-fake were assumed to be: Blue Eyes, Dark Eyes, Tall, Average Height, Short, Large Build, Medium, Slim, Attractive, Athletic Body, Sexy, Education/Intellect, Personable.

for both sexes, more of the signals given were for 'harder-to-fake' traits, suggesting that there is a belief that these traits are more valuable and more likely to yield success for the advertiser.

Similarly the frequency of *strategic* signals of 'easier-to-fake' and 'harder-to-fake' traits is revealing. It would be expected that easier-to-fake traits are used more strategically than harder-to-fake traits because more individuals not possessing them will be willing to signal them to attract their desired partner. For male advertisers 61% of strategic signals were 'easier-to-fake' and 39% 'harder-to-fake'. For female advertisers 39% were 'easier-to-fake' and 61% 'harder-to-fake'. The difference between the two for both sexes was significantly different. Interpreting the contrasting pattern for the two sexes is difficult. The result for men is unsurprising and can be understood as the men not being willing or able to pay the cost of signalling harder-to-fake traits. Women using 'harder-to-fake' signals strategically more than 'easier-to-fake' signals could either mean they have no conception of the fakeability of traits, or that they are prepared to risk the loss incurred from being found out for the benefits they anticipate.

3.3 MARKET VALUE OF TRAITS

Another feature of signals likely to be of importance in their use is their value in the 'market'. Signals of higher value traits should be more beneficial when high value traits are desired in a partner. Similarly, signals of lower value traits should be more beneficial when low value traits are desired in a partner[24].

To test this, the percentage of desires was transformed to take into account the propensity to signal more often than specify a preference[25]. I selected those traits desired at sufficiently high levels (above 2%) in the male and female populations for the market value concept to be useful[26]. Then, I calculated a measure of market value for the remaining traits using the formula demand/supply (where demand was the percentage of one sex requesting a trait, and supply the percentage of the other sex signalling it)[27]. Finally I found the overall 'value' of each advertiser's signals and desires by weighting their presence with their value and the two were correlated and regressed.

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[24] The logic for this is as follows. There is a market for traits and some traits are of higher value than others. There are assumed to be two populations in the market: signallers and receivers. Signallers are predicted to signal equal value to their desires because of their perceptions about receivers, and because of their desire for success. They believe receivers want the best deal they can get (and thus high value receivers will prefer high value signals), but also that receivers are realistic about their chances of different deals (and thus low value receivers will be cautious about high value signals). If signallers want a high value partner their best option is to signal high value traits (whether or not they have them) because high value receivers are expected to want high value partners and will expect to be able to get them. If signallers want a low value partner their best option is to signal low value (whether or not they are) because low value receivers, whilst they may or may not prefer high value traits, do not expect to be able to get them, therefore they expect that signallers desiring them and giving high value signals are dishonest which is undesirable.

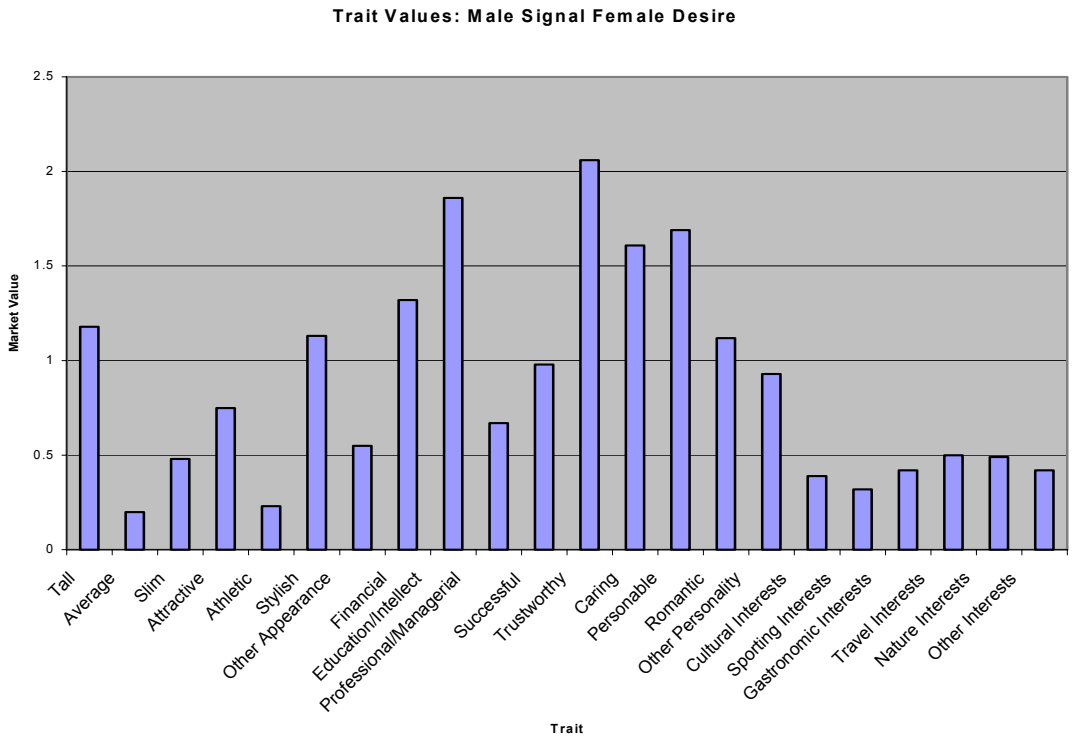
[25] This was done by multiplying by the ratio of signals to desires to get an adjusted percentage desired. For women there were on average 1.4139 desires and 2.3669 signals, giving a ratio of about 1.7 signals per desire. For men there were on average 1.1663 desires and 2.4241 signals, giving a ratio of about 2.08 signals per desire.

[26] No age signals or desires were included because advertisers tended to specify more than one age desired, whereas every advertiser could only have one age, therefore meaning that the demand for age was inevitably greater than the supply, and thus artificially high values for age signals emerged.

[27] It must be noted that the notion of value is merely used as an indicator not as any actual measure of quality of individuals and their characteristics.

Figure 1 shows the value of traits analysed for the female desire and male signal populations.

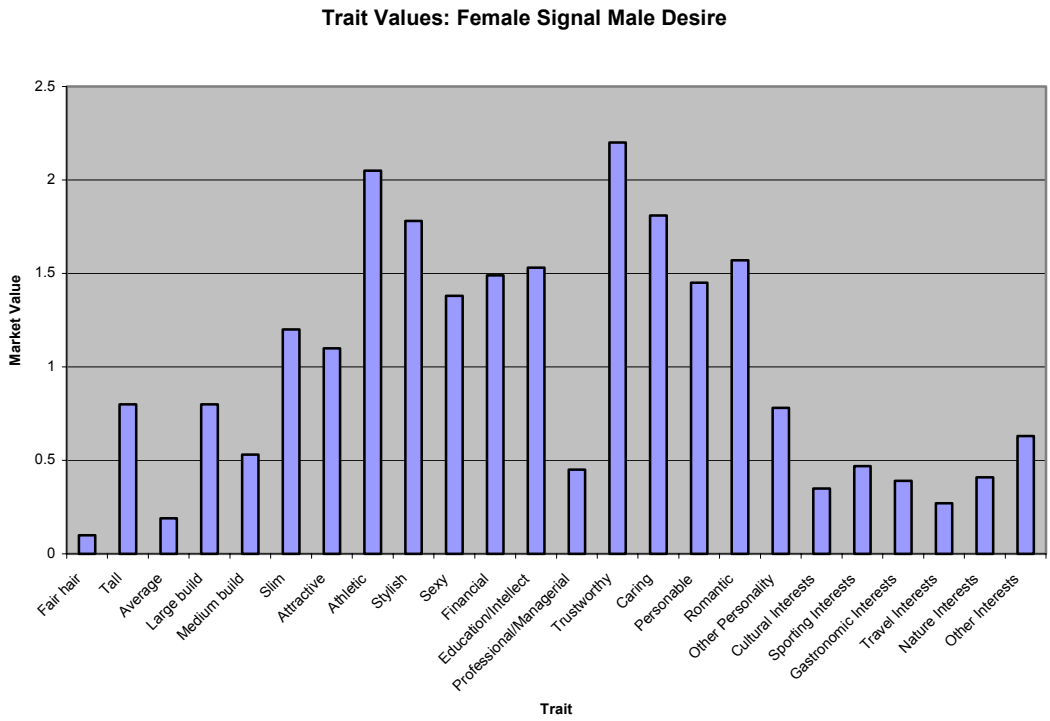
Figure 1



A cursory glance at these reveals that Personality traits are of high value: too few men signal them compared to the number of women who desire them. Education/Intellect, Financial, Stylish and Tall were also of high value. All Interests were of low value, which is probably due to the greater tendency to describe one's own interests than specify 'required' interests a partner must have. All remaining Appearance traits were of low value, meaning men signal these more than women actually want.

Figure 2 shows the trait values for the male desire and female signal populations.

Figure 2



As for male signallers, all Personality signals were of high value, all Interests signals were of low value. Financial and Education/Intellect were high value and considerably more Appearance signals were of high value namely Slim, Attractive, Athletic, Stylish and Sexy.

For the male population the Pearson correlation coefficient between value of desires and signals was 0.167, which was significant at the 0.01 level. Men who desire high value traits tend to signal high value traits and men who desire low value traits tend to signal low value traits.

Table 7 shows the results of running a regression for the value of the signals an advertiser will give depending on the value of his desires.

Table 7

	Unstandardised Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B		Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	**3.146**	0.146		21.576	**0.000**	2.860	3.433
Value of desires	**0.171**	0.050	0.167	3.438	**0.001**	0.073	0.269

Both the constant and the coefficient were significant at high levels and the confidence intervals did not include zero, giving good evidence that the value of signals and desires are positively related[28].

For the female population the Pearson correlation coefficient between value of desires and value of signals was 0.191, significant at the 0.01 level. So, as for men, women who desire high value traits tend to signal high value traits and women who desire low value traits tend to signal low value traits.

Running a linear regression for the data yielded the following results:

Table 8

	Unstandardised coefficients	Std. error	Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B		Beta			Lower bound	Upper bound
Constant	**2.999**	0.167		17.940	**0.000**	2.670	3.327
Value of desires	**0.210**	0.051	0.191	4.108	**0.000**	0.110	0.311

Both the constant and coefficient were significant at very high levels, and the confidence intervals did not include zero[29].

Comparing the two models is interesting. It seems that men with no expressed desires signal on average higher value signals than women with no expressed desires. However, for every unit increase in the value of their desires, women increase the value of their signals at a greater rate than men (0.210 compared to 0.171).

These strong relations can be interpreted as good support for the hypothesis that people adjust their signals according to their desires. This is not just in terms of the type of signal but in a way that considers the behaviour of other members of their sex and members of the other sex. However, the relationship could also be interpreted in a different way because of the problem determining correlation and causation (Goldthorpe, 2000). Evolutionary psychologists interpret such results that being high value leads people to want high value (Pawlowski and Dunbar, 1999). In other words they view desiring high value as something only high value individuals can afford. I prefer to interpret the relationship as individuals desiring high value feeling they cannot afford *not* to signal high value traits. The direction of causation cannot be determined, and from the data source used here nothing further can be said. However, viewing the content of the adverts as signals rather than traits allows an equally realistic interpretation.

[28] I ensured the assumptions for a linear regression model were met by plotting the residual values which were randomly distributed, and plotting a Normal Probability Plot for the standardised residuals which formed a roughly straight line meaning the distribution of errors was normal.
[29] Again, I checked that the assumptions of linear regression were met, and they were.

3.4 VALUE AND FAKEABILITY

Continuing the theme of market value and utilising the distinction in Section 3.2 between easier-to-fake and harder-to-fake, the value of traits might be expected to vary with their fakeability, such that harder-to-fake are higher value than easier-to-fake. For this analysis any trait desired at least once had a market value calculated and the mean value of the two groups were compared for men and women.

Table 9 shows the values of each trait for male and female signallers:

Table 9

Easier-to-fake	**Male**	**Female**	**Harder-to-fake**	**Male**	**Female**
Fair Hair	0.485623	0.099354	Blue eyes	0.287	0.046555
Dark Hair	0.131488	0.047574	Tall	1.184	0.796425
Stylish	1.127596	1.777924	Average	0.199427	0.193374
Financial	1.323963	1.496269	Short	0.370732	0.064767
Professional/Mana	0.668037	0.448153	Large build	0.316667	0.801917
Successful	0.980942	1.598726	Medium build	0.252492	0.526316
Possessions	0.414847	0.248756	Slim	0.485638	1.198747
Trustworthy	2.056876	2.194817	Attractive	0.745752	1.101856
Caring	1.614981	1.806777	Athletic	0.232653	2.05597
Romantic	1.116397	1.5693	Sexy	0.316667	1.379587
			Education/Intellect	1.858099	1.534599
			Personable	1.687549	1.448081
Total	**9.92075**	**11.28765**	**Total**	**7.936676**	**11.148194**
Mean	**0.992075**	**1.128765**	**Mean**	**0.661389**	**0.929016**

For both sexes it was actually the easier-to-fake traits that had higher value than the harder-to-fake traits. For men the average trait value was 0.992 for easier-to-fake and 0.661 for harder-to-fake. A t-test showed this difference to be significant at the 0.05 level, meaning easier-to-fake traits actually do have a higher value than harder-to-fake. For women the average trait values were 1.129 and 0.929 respectively, but a t-

test found them not to be significantly different. Thus the prediction is not supported, meaning that actually those traits that can be most easily faked on meeting are those most scarce relative to demand in the two samples, suggesting it is worth signalling such traits to raise the signaller's value.

This is a surprising result for which no obvious interpretation suggests itself. Perhaps signallers are aware of the greater power a signal for harder-to-fake traits have so do it more frequently despite not having it thus risking being 'found out', or maybe receivers have not appreciated the greater revealing quality such signals have and hence do not specify preferences for them as much.

3.5 UNVALUED TRAITS AND VALUE OF DESIRES

The ratio of signalled traits in each advert for which no value can be computed to the total number of signalled traits is used to conceptualise the extent to which adverts contain information of substance. A high ratio means little substance, whereas a low ratio means more substance. Individuals with high value desires are predicted to have a lower ratio than individuals with low value desires, because it is more important for those people seeking to acquire a partner of high value that they do not appear 'desperate' than it is for those people seeking a low value partner[30]. This can be expected to manifest itself in a negative correlation between the value of desires and the ratio of non-information to information.

For men, Pearson's correlation coefficient was –0.129, which was significant at the 0.01 level, giving evidence of the negative relationship expected. For women, Pearson's correlation coefficient was –0.092, which was just outside the 0.05 significance level, suggestive of a relationship in the expected direction. Thus there seems to be a tendency for people with high value desires to include less information in their adverts that is of no market value. This can be well understood by reference to the idea that they must appear, or think they must appear, less desperate.

[30] This suggestion is presented in the notorious book "The Rules" by Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, which states: "*Ads that run on and on…seem desperate… Not surprisingly, they contain too much information that no one cares about, and too much lovey-dovey stuff (of course you like walks on the beach, who doesn't?). Most people skim or ignore long ads and rarely respond to them…. It should be short, upbeat, and flirtatious – a pleasure to read."* (pg 102-3).

3.6 PRESENCE OF 'NEGATIVE TRAITS'

These were subjectively defined given common sense knowledge of perceived undesirable features from a perspective of mate search. For women they were: single mum, divorced, children, and wheelchair bound. For men they were: separated, divorced, dad of 3, single dad, no money[31]. 39 women and 19 men disclosed such 'negative traits'. The reason people reveal these traits at all is interesting, but probably most obvious would be that they are major aspects of their identity and lifestyle and that to avoid wasting search time they prefer to be honest about their situation and thus only potential partners who are not put off will respond.

People in the sample were divided into 'high-value-desirers' and 'low-value-desirers', the former being those with desired values greater than the mean desire and the latter those with desired values lower than the mean. The frequency with which the negative traits were revealed is compared between the two groups with the expectation that the latter disclose them more than the former.

For men, the mean desired value was 2.3253, and there were 177 'high-value-desirers' and 238 'low-value-desirers'. Among the former group only 2.3% disclosed a negative trait, whereas among the latter 6.3% did so. Chi squared was just outside the 5% significance level ($p = 0.051$).

[31] The reasons why they are undesirable are interesting, and given their nature it is probably because they either indicate the individuals are bad marriage material, they already have ties that may conflict with future commitments, they are poor providers and so on. Already having children is particularly interesting, especially for women because it could also be argued to indicate their fertility for potential partners, but instead seems to be viewed negatively perhaps because it means they may be less willing to have more children.

For women, the mean desired value was 2.6055, and there were 216 ‘high-value-desirers’, and 231 ‘low-value-desirers’. Among ‘high-value-desirers’ 6.9% disclosed a negative trait, compared to 10.4% of ‘low-value-desirers. This difference was not significant (p=0.197).

Comparing the value of signals between those who disclose such traits and those that do not is also interesting. For men disclosing one their mean value of signals was 3.5432 and those not disclosing one had signals of mean value 3.5104. Testing for the significance of this difference with analysis of variance found it not to be at all significant. Thus men do not differ in the value of their signals according to whether they disclose a negative trait or not, either because the revealing of the negative trait is ‘random’ or because those who reveal them alter their other signals to ‘compensate’. For women disclosing one their mean value of signals was 2.3121 whereas for those not disclosing one their mean value of signals was 3.6915. The difference between these was highly significant (0.000). Thus women disclosing a negative trait do not adjust their signals upwards to ‘compensate’ for it.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The preceding analyses represent a very small tip to an enormous iceberg. Understanding how people behave, and perhaps more importantly why, when engaging in partner search is far too great a subject for one dissertation. Nevertheless, in this small contribution there are, I think, a number of results that warrant at least attention if not further investigation.

The common perception among those studying partner search is that individuals know what they can get given their own attributes and set their desires accordingly. As I have repeatedly emphasised this seems to me unrealistic and makes something of a mockery of the complexity of people's emotions and the idea of 'love'. I have shown that, at least in part, patterns in this behaviour can just as accurately be represented by people presenting themselves in order to maximise their chance of meeting and beginning a relationship with their preferred 'sort' of partner.

Section 3.1 showed a number of signals used significantly more when certain traits were desired compared to when they were not. Of more interest was the finding that they tended to be signals for features that were similar to those desired, something contradicting at least two dominant theories. Finding patterns is one thing but explaining them is another, and from this data the reasons for such results can merely be informed speculation. The most appealing possibility stems from the argument made by Oppenheimer (1988) regarding the changing nature of families from previously being highly specialised to being increasingly less so. She argues specialisation was a risky strategy and that new family arrangements where both

partners work is more optimal in the contemporary environment. The implication here seems to be that sexual equality has paved the way for new kinds of relationships between spouses and romantic partners. This seems reasonable, and if there is sharing of responsibility for 'providing', then there can be no reason to assume that the sharing of other responsibilities should be any less equal. As such the tendency for both sexes to offer traits similar to what they desire need not be limited to those in the domain of Resources. This suggests itself as a possible over-time investigation – as women work more, do men have to look better?

Another implication of this argument would be that in the past complementarity of traits between partners actually was the way relationships operated, and that recent trends are breaking that norm. In light of the findings here that seems to be an empirical question worth answering. If it never was the case then the persistence of the theories is curious and would seem to be because of no suitable alternatives. However, it seems to me that the extent to which they are unwarranted today is greater than at any time in the past with the rapid increases in female educational opportunities and labour force participation. Thus marriage in the past may have represented some kind of dominant-subordinate relationship that women no longer need to accept. If declining marriage rates represent rejection of marriage rather than postponement then one reason may be women's lack of acceptance of their inferiority to men. Those women still interested in the institution of marriage are those able to be equal to men, and the best strategy for men still wanting to marry is to request women equal to themselves. Equally if declining marriage rates represent postponement then it could be that men are learning to adjust to the new preferences of women. Given the data source a note of caution must be given: is it these

individuals using these 'untraditional' methods to find partners who are untraditional in what they want and provide to relationships, or are they truly representative of a more general phenomenon?

Perhaps a simpler explanation is that people place different emphases on Appearance, Resources and Personality attributes, and thus there could be a group of people who are Appearance-oriented, a group Resource-oriented, and a group Personality-oriented. These orientations manifest themselves in their signals and desires so the same people who are interested in Appearances also signal Appearance, and similarly for Resources and Personality.

Distinguishing traits on the basis of their fakeability produced an interesting result with both sexes more likely to signal traits harder-to-fake, which are thus more reliable signals. This too can be interpreted as deliberate signalling. When the distribution of these signals was looked at with regard to the preferences of the individuals (strategic signals) the pattern was as predicted for men but not women. Considering this alongside the results from Section 3.4 that showed for male signallers easier-to-fake traits were significantly higher value than harder-to-fake one interpretation may be that for men the value is more important than the fakeability. Their higher signal value when they specify no desires found in Section 3.3 also supports this. However, it still remains to explain why women strategically signal harder-to-fake traits more. One reason may reflect the limited use of this definition of 'strategic'.

Section 3.3 showed how individuals align the signals they give with the value of those traits and the value of the traits they desire. Individuals who happen to want high value traits in a partner tend to signal high value traits, those who happen to want low value traits in a partner tend to signal low value traits. To the extent that this is likely to be deliberate it is remarkable because not only does it imply knowledge as to the value of the traits they prefer, but also the value of the traits they should offer. There is, of course, the possibility that there is endogeneity and that individuals who tend to want high value traits also tend to be those with high value traits, and equally for those who want low value traits. The strength of the relationships, however, leads me to suspect that this is unlikely to be the whole story and that to a certain extent at least there is some manipulation of signals.

Section 3.4 compared easier- and harder-to-fake traits on their 'market value' finding the former to be more valuable for men but no difference for women, something for which no clear reason presented itself. One suggestion may be that in this sense people are not strategic in their signalling. On this point an argument could be made that with only 34 and 45 'strategic' signals by men and women respectively, there is quite a *lack* of signalling. However, with the definition used and in light of the other findings this seems unnecessarily pessimistic. With a different strategy of research involving experimental manipulation of adverts, construction of adverts by people with known characteristics, response rates to real adverts and qualitative methods such as interviewing people about their experiences and perceptions, a better understanding of the phenomenon and mechanisms involved could be grasped.

Sections 3.5 and 3.6 both had findings supportive of signalling. In 3.5 the use of the ratio of valued to unvalued traits has problems because with a larger sample size it is very possible that new traits would emerge that had market values. The negative correlation, though, is good evidence of deliberate signalling. Further investigations would unravel it. In Section 3.6, which looked at the behaviour by people who disclosed really negative traits, there was slightly different behaviour by men and women, and as in Section 3.3 it was women who seemed not to be adjusting their signals as predicted.

To sum up, partner search is an area in which signalling is almost certain to be happening and this analysis has presented evidence of that. I have also shown that assumptions made by economic and evolutionary theories about preferences need not be 'correct' and that the complementarity of partners are not borne out by this data. The validity of this finding needs to be tested under more controlled conditions, but the implications for understanding demographic trends and societal change seem non-negligible.

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APPENDIX

CODING DICTIONARY

Appearance

FAIR HAIR - blond, fair
DARK HAIR - brown, brunette, dark, golden brown
RED HAIR - strawberry, auburn
BLUE EYES – blue eyes
DARK EYES – brown eyes, hazel eyes
TALL – 6’ + (men); 5’10 + (women)
AVERAGE HEIGHT – 5’8’ - 5’11 (men); 5’6 – 5’9 (women)
SHORT - < 5’8 (men); < 5’6 (women), small
LARGE - heavy, big, cuddly, fat, well built, chunky, stocky, broad shouldered, over size 14 (women), >14 stone (men)
MEDIUM – average, medium, size 12-14 (women), 11 stone – 14 stone (men)
SLIM - petite, thin, slender, <size 12 (women), <11 stone (men)
ATTRACTIVE – attractive, pretty, handsome, good looking, nice eyes, nice smile, young looking, gorgeous, attractive, stunning, beautiful, exotic looking, ex model, great teeth, demands attention, voluptuous, desirable, eye catching, presentable, glamorous, fanciable, luscious,
ATHLETIC – athletic, fit, muscular, healthy, masculine,
STYLISH – stylish, elegant, smart, chic, respectable, smart dresser, fashion conscious, classy, fashionable, funky, distinguished, tasteful, refined, graceful, enjoys wearing strappy high heels, well groomed,
SEXY – sexy, foxy, curvaceous, cute, sassy, feminine, curvy, nice figure, leggy, nice legs, shapely, feisty, long legs, busty, diva, seductive, nice body, nice bum,
OTHER

Resources

FINANCIAL - Income, solvent, career woman, comfortable, high flyer, seeks lady to spoil, to spoil and pamper, work full time, working, hard working, prosperous, job,
EDUCATION/INTELLECT - Education, educated, graduate, mathematical, intelligent, bright, academic, creative, well spoken, ex-public school, sophisticated, speaks French, well read, literary, accomplished, historically aware, switched on, wise, genius, with brains, adept, intellectual,
PROFESSIONAL - Professional, manager, businessman entrepreneur, teacher, lawyer, doctor, photographer, writer, Army officer, working in the city, surgeon, management consultant, journalist, IT consultant, architect, translator, company director, lecturer, helicopter pilot,
SERVICE – nurse, care assistant, antique dealer, salesman,
MANUAL – carpenter, labourer, artisan, practical, farmer, great cook, home maker, interior designer, good driver, domestic goddess, resourceful, kitchen skills, practical, sculptor,
SUCCESSFUL – successful, own business, workaholic, self employed, good career, career minded, great lifestyle,
POSSESSIONS – own house, own car, own place
OTHER

Personality

TRUSTWORTHY - Committed, honest, loyal, sincere, genuine, decent, trustworthy, reliable, modest, down to earth, polite, charming, mature, open, serious, devoted, true to self, one-woman-man, straight-talking, straightforward, gent, strong, traditional values, hard working, well mannered, perfect gentleman, integrity, with principles, strong, emotionally grounded, urbane, discreet, true, emotionally literate, good listener, emotionally intelligent, faithful, Christian values, Christian minded
CARING - Caring, warm, considerate, thoughtful, affectionate, patient, kind, sensitive, loving, calm, optimistic, sharing, positive, understanding, big heart, has pets, generous, warm hearted, kind hearted, gentle, compassionate, gentle hearted, supportive, peaceful, altruistic, loves to please, attentive, to adore, TLC, good natured,
PERSONABLE - Sociable, SOH, GSOH, humorous, witty, fun, bubbly, lively, easy going, confident, active, enthusiastic, interesting, independent, adventurous, cheerful, happy, cultured, articulate, deep, exciting, diverse, open minded, eccentric, nice, outgoing, sparkling, fun loving, gregarious, contemplative, loves life, fun to be with, fresh, super, nice personality, spontaneous, cosmopolitan, young at heart, depth, sense of adventure, strong minded, fun loving, energetic, charismatic, civilised, delightful, deep thinking, artistic, energetic, fascinating, accomplished, broad minded, worldly, joie de vivre, vibrant, imaginative, spiritual, enjoys most things in life, young at heart, positive, cheeky, sparky, nice person inside and out, good for a laugh, vivacious, impulsive, lots of stamina, captivating, dizzy, eternal optimist, adaptable, amiable, equable, jolly, zest for life, free thinking, spirited, companionable, socially poised, approachable, communicative, enlightened, content, uncomplicated, gregarious, easy to talk to, extrovert, talkative, free spirit, sense of the ridiculous, zany, dynamic, motivated, socially aware, quirky, well balanced, flexible, with attitude, mischievous, free thinking, garrulous, loquacious, happy go lucky, entertaining, laid back, own mind and attitude
ROMANTIC - Romantic, tactile, passionate, sensual, big hugs, soulful,
OTHER

Age

Under 30
30s
40s
50s, middle aged
60s, older
70 and over, older

Interests

CULTURAL - theatre, cinema, films, music, art, reading, conversation, socialising, creativity, arts, DIY, drawing, chatting, computer, languages, writing, musical, antiques, comedy, places of interest, natural history, cars, sport cars, culture, painting, motorbikes, parties, bars, cities, entertaining, current affairs, fashion, philosophy, ballets, bridge, history, astrology, driving, thinking, politics, art galleries, sales, ideas, words, pottery, friends, R4, clubs, psychology, interesting days out, having a nice

time, city pursuits, getting out and about, nights out, nights in, going out, biker, rave, sing, photography, creative writing
SPORT, keep fit, dancing, sporty, squash, cricket, sailing, rugby, skiing, golf, sports, horses, horse racing, windsurfing, scuba diving, gym, swimming, yoga, football, rowing, climbing,
GASTRONOMY – food, drink, wine, cooking, eating out, restaurants, vodka, real ale, dinner parties, healthy eating, having a drink
TRAVEL – travel, holidays, weekend breaks, weekends abroad, adventure, sun, sea, sand, day trips, France, seeing new places, trekking, cruises, foreign places
NATURE – nature, wildlife, animals, countryside, walking, outdoors, fresh air, gardening, sea, horse mad, country pursuits, country life, sunsets, National Trust, flowers, sunny days, mountains, rivers, blue skies, bird watching, wildlife photography, camping,
OTHER

CODING FRAME

	S	D	S	D	S	D	S	D
Case number								
APPEARANCE								
Fair Hair								
Dark Hair								
Red Hair								
Blue Eyes								
Dark Eyes								
Tall								
Average								
Short								
Large build								
Medium build								
Thin								
Attractive								
Athletic								
Stylish								
Sexy								
Other								
RESOURCES								
Financial								
Education/Intellect								
Professional/Mana								
Service								
Manual								
Successful								
Possessions								
Other								
PERSONALITY								
Trustworthy								
Caring								
Personable								
Romantic								
Other								
AGE								
Under 30								
30s								
40s								
50s								
60s								
70 and over								
INTERESTS								
Cultural								
Sport								
Gastronomy								
Travel								
Nature								
Other								

EXAMPLES OF CODING

The above advert was coded as:

Female, Surrey Mirror

Signals: Personable, 30s, Short, Dark hair, Other Appearance, Blue eyes, Other Interests

Desires: Trustworthy, Professional/Managerial, 30s, 40s, Personable

The above advert was coded as:

Male, Daily Telegraph

Signals: Caring x 3, Romantic, 40s, Slim, Average height, Personable, Trustworthy

Desires: Slim, Sexy