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Indian mate preferences: Continuity, sex differences, and cultural change across a quarter of a century

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ABSTRACT

Expressed mate preferences provide unique windows into evolved mating psychology. The current study used two research instruments—one ranking and one rating procedure—to examine mate preferences in India. We compared modern Indians ($n = 536$) with a more modest Indian sample studied a quarter of a century earlier ($n = 105$) to test the hypothesis that sex-specific mate preferences—as hypothesized by parental investment theory—would persist during this time period. Mate preferences for mutual attraction and love remained important and invariant over time, despite India's history of arranged marriages. Sex differences in mate preferences for cues to *fertility* (youth, physical attractiveness) and *resources* (good financial prospects, social status) remained relatively invariant over time. Several changes in mate preferences emerged, including a greater preference for mates who are “creative and artistic,” “ambitious and industrious,” and “a good cook and housekeeper” for both sexes. Despite cultural changes in India over the past 25 years, evolved mate preferences have persisted during this time period. Discussion highlights limitations of this research.

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1. Introduction

Mate preferences are important in several contexts. First, mate preferences influence who is chosen and who is excluded from mating, influencing the direction of sexual selection (Darwin, 1871). Second, mate preferences determine which potential mates are considered to be high and low in mate value. Mate value, in turn, influences the desirability of the mate one can attract (Buss, 2003). Third, some mate preferences are produced by evolved psychological adaptations, solutions to adaptive problems such as choosing a mate who is fertile or who is willing and able to invest in offspring (Buss, 1989). Fourth, mate preferences influence which mate attraction tactics are effective—tactics that embody qualities desired by the individual someone is trying to attract (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Fifth, mate preferences provide a window into cultural values. When examined over time, changes in mate preferences can be used to assay the evolution of cultural values (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Lei, Wang, Shackelford, & Buss, 2011). For these reasons, the study of mate preferences is an important, ongoing endeavor.

Parental investment theory has been used to generate hypotheses regarding sex-specific mate preferences (Trivers, 1972). Because fertility cannot be observed directly, evolutionary psychologists hypothesized and found that men (more than women) value physical appearance in a mate because appearance provides a wealth of observable cues to fertility (Buss, 1989; Symons, 1979). Because female fertility declines more sharply with age, evolutionary psychologists hypothesized and found that men (more than women) have preferences for young mates (Symons, 1979). Women (more than men) must invest more resources in their offspring (e.g., nine months of pregnancy). Thus, evolutionary psychologists hypothesized and found that women (more than men) have preferences for mates who are able to acquire resources and who are willing to invest resources in them. These sex differences are hypothesized to be universal across cultures (e.g., Badahdah & Tiemann, 2005; Buss, 1989; Khallad, 2005; Lei et al., 2011).

India is interesting for studying mate preferences. According to Heitzman and Worden (1995), “In India there is no greater event in a family than a wedding, dramatically evoking every possible social obligation, kinship bond, traditional value, impassioned sentiment, and economic resource”. Marriage patterns in India have changed dramatically over the past 25 years. Traditionally, marriages in India have been managed by parents through arranged marriages

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(Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak, & Lafortune, 2009). In contrast, modern Indians now exert more influence regarding whom they marry. This trend is pronounced among India's educated and middle class, which by one estimate will include 256 million people by the years 2015–2016 (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/indiaatlse/2012/10/01/marriage-in-modern-india-the-middle-class-ideal-of-an-indian-marriage-has-not-changed-henrike-donner/>).

A key question is whether evolved mate preferences among Indians have persisted over the past quarter century, given these cultural changes. We hypothesize that, despite these cultural changes, sex-specific mate preferences hypothesized and identified from parental investment theory would persist over this time period. The current study also seeks to contribute preliminary knowledge about cultural evolution. Thus, we also compare expressed mate preferences of a sample of Indians a quarter of a century ago to those expressed by a sample of modern Indians.

These questions must be addressed with caution because India is a culturally diverse country. First, diverse religious traditions include Hindu, Buddhism, Muslim, Christianity, and dozens of others. Second, some regions of India encourage marriage to blood relatives such as cousins, whereas other regions discourage marriage to blood relatives (Heitzman & Worden, 1995). Third, marriage patterns vary from urban to rural, and across traditional Indian castes (Banerjee et al., 2009). Thus, the current research must be interpreted with caution when generalizing these results to the Indian population. Nonetheless, the current study provides a unique and unprecedented opportunity to compare expressed mate preferences of a sample of Indians a quarter of a century ago to those expressed by a sample of modern Indians.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

This research consisted of a 1984 Indian sample and a 2009 Indian sample. For the 1984 sample (56 males, 44 females), we used data from the 37-Culture International Mate Selection Project (see Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990). For the 2009 sample, participants (275 males, 261 females) were drawn from Karnatak University in Dharwad, Karnataka state, India. Participation was not rewarded.

2.2. Materials and procedures

Participants from both samples completed the English version of the Mate Preference Scale (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990), which is comprised of two sections. The first section is a ranking procedure in which participants received the following instructions:

Below are listed a set of characteristics that might be present in a potential mate or marriage partner. Please rank them on their desirability in someone you might marry. Give a "1" to the most desirable characteristic in a potential mate; a "2" to the second most desirable characteristic in a potential mate; a "3" to the third most desirable characteristic; and so on down to "13" for the 13th most desired characteristic in a potential mate. Rank These 13 Characteristics From Most (1) to Least (13) Desired in a Mate." Following these instructions were 13 characteristics derived from a previous factor analysis of a larger set of 76 characteristics (see Buss & Barnes, 1986).

In the second section, participants reported their age, sex, the age at which the participant preferred to marry, and the age differences they preferred between themselves and their spouse. Participants then rated 18 mate qualities on a 0–3 scale (0 = *irrelevant or unimportant*, 1 = *desirable, but not very important*, 2 = *important, but not indispensable*, 3 = *indispensable*).

3. Results

3.1. Age and mate preferences in a partner

Table 1 shows the participant's ages, ages at which they preferred to marry, and age difference preferred between themselves and their spouse. Participants from the 2009 sample were younger than participants from the 1984 sample by 1.65 years for males and by 0.66 years for females.

In the 1984 sample, the age at which participants preferred to marry differed significantly between men (27.30 years) and women (23.04 years). We documented a similar sex difference in the 2009 sample (men: 28.34 years; women: 25.29 years). These sex differences are consistent with those documented across several other cultures (Buss, 1989; Lei et al., 2011).

Consistent with the hypothesis that men have an evolved preference for young, fertile partners, men from both our samples reported a preference for a spouse who was younger than themselves (1984: 4.50 years; 2009: 3.92 years). Indian women preferred spouses who were older than themselves—4.19 and 3.33 years older for the 1984 and 2009 samples, respectively. These sex differences represent large effect sizes, with *ds* of 4.28 and 4.34. These are among the largest sex differences documented in the psychological literature (see, e.g., Geary, 2009).

3.2. Validity check for the expressed age difference between self and spouse

Mate preferences cannot be invariantly translated into actual mating decisions. Individuals cannot always get what they want. They are limited by their own personal mate value and by the pool of available mates (Buss, 2003; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Nonetheless, mate preferences cannot have evolved unless they influenced actual mating behavior during the time period during which they evolved.

One validity check on preferred age differences between self and spouse involves examining the actual ages at which men and women marry. Indian demographic data from 1982 (the closest in time to our 1984 sample that we could locate) reveal that the average age at first marriage for women was 19.3, whereas the average age at first marriage for men was 24.0 (http://www.medindia.net/health_statistics/general/marriageage.asp). Indian brides were approximately 4.70 years younger, on average, than Indian grooms in 1982. These demographic data correspond well to men's and women's expressed preferences for age differences between themselves and their mate (in 1984, men preferred their brides to be 4.50 years younger, and women preferred grooms to be 4.19 years older). Thus, mate preferences correspond to actual age differences at marriage, providing validity for these measures of expressed mate preferences.

In 2011, the average Indian marriage age increased to 22.2 years for women and to 26.0 years for men (http://www.medindia.net/health_statistics/general/marriageage.asp), or roughly 3.80 years difference between brides and grooms. This also corresponds well to the expressed preferences for age differences between self and mate in our 2009 sample: Men reported preferring a mate who is 3.92 years younger than themselves, and women reported preferring a mate who is 3.33 years older than themselves. In short, expressed age preferences for Indian brides and grooms correspond well to actual age differences at first marriage, providing validity for the measure of expressed age of mate preferences.

A cultural change in both age preferences and actual age at marriage is noteworthy. Both sexes, but especially women, preferred to marry a few years older in 2009 than in 1984. Paralleling this cultural shift, the actual ages at which Indian women and men married shifted to a few years older.

Table 1
Age and age preferences for marriage.

Age variable		1984	Age	2009	Age	Sex diff. 1984		Sex diff. 2009		Cross-time diff	
						<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>
Age of Participants	Male	25.17 (4.71)		23.52 (2.30)		2.07*	0.44	7.92***	.70	3.59***	0.41
	Female	22.75 (6.20)		22.09 (1.74)						1.42	0.16
Age Prefer to Marry	Male	27.30 (3.18)	0.02	28.34 (1.78)	0.35***	7.09***	1.42	20.27***	1.79	-3.17**	-0.36
	Female	23.04 (2.85)	0.40**	25.29 (1.63)	0.12					8.07***	0.92
Age Difference Preferred Between Self and Spouse	Male	-4.50 (2.35)	-0.08	-3.92 (1.79)	-0.15*	-20.95***	4.28	-49.26***	4.34	-1.90	-0.22
	Female	4.19 (1.76)	-0.01	3.33 (1.53)	0.06					3.64***	0.42

Note: Means for age, age prefer to marry, and age differences preferred between self and spouse are expressed as years. For age difference preferred between self and spouse, negative values reflect a preference for a younger partner; positive values reflect a preference for an older partner. Significance levels.

*** $p < .001$.

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$ (all two-tailed). $d =$ Cohen (1988) effect size index, with $|0.20| =$ small, $|0.50| =$ medium, $|0.80| =$ large.

3.3. Cultural changes in mate preferences

Tables 2 and 3 show findings for sex differences and cross-time differences in mate preferences for the ranking instrument (Table 2) and rating instrument (Table 3)—means, standard deviations, t -tests for sex differences, t -tests for cross-time differences, and d statistics for magnitudes of effect. Because the two samples are not strictly comparable, being samples of convenience from a heterogeneous country rather than random or systematic samples, we err on the conservative side and interpret only cross-time differences that show moderate or large effect sizes (see footnotes notes in Tables 1–3).

3.3.1. Mate preferences that increased in valuation over time

Three mate preferences increased in importance for both sexes from 1984 to 2009. “Creative and artistic” increased in valuation for men on the ranking instrument from 8.35 to 6.82 ($d = 0.36$), and for women from 8.46 to 6.51 ($d = 0.48$), both highly significant and showing moderate effect sizes. “Good cook and housekeeper” increased for both sexes on the rating instrument from 2.23 to 2.57 ($d = 0-0.38$) for men and from 1.26 to 1.78 ($d = 0-0.41$) for women. “Ambition and industriousness” increased from 1.73 to 2.22 for men ($d = -0.41$) and from 2.09 to 2.61 ($d = -0.59$) for women, a cultural change also observed over the last quarter century in mainland China (Lei et al., 2011). Interestingly, the importance of “chastity” increased in importance, but only for Indian women ($d = -0.42$). This finding differs from other countries, such as mainland China and the United States, both of which experienced marked decreases in the importance of chastity over the past few decades (Buss et al., 2001; Lei et al., 2011).

3.3.2. Mate preferences that decreased in valuation over time

Only one mate quality showed a significant decrease in valuation—physical attractiveness. This mate quality decreased in importance for both sexes in the ranking instrument, from 5.84 to 7.58 ($d = -0.34$) for men, and from 7.37 to 8.59 ($d = -0.29$) for women. Because a parallel finding in devaluation was not documented for the variable “good looks,” and because the effect size was modest, this finding must be interpreted with caution.

3.4. Sex differences in mate preferences

3.4.1. Resources

Evolutionary psychological hypotheses predict sex differences in the importance of “good earning capacity,” “good financial

prospects,” and the qualities linked with resource acquisition, notably “social status” and “ambition and industriousness.” These were among the largest sex differences at both times; women (relative to men) placed substantially more importance on these qualities. The magnitude of the sex difference on “good earning capacity” reached d s of 1.22 and 0.92 in 1984 and 2009, respectively. The magnitudes of the sex difference for “good financial prospect” were -0.62 and -1.21 for the two time periods. These effect sizes are considered “large” by social science standards.

The sex differences in the importance of social status were moderate but consistent over time; d s were -0.44 and -0.34 for the two time periods. Similarly, “ambition and industriousness” showed moderate sex differences at both time periods, with d s of -0.41 and -0.54 . Similarly, women (relative to men) more strongly valued “education and intelligence” in a spouse at both time periods. Taken together, these results suggest strong continuity over time of sex differences in preferences for long-term mates who have financial resources, as well as qualities that may indicate future resource acquisition, such as social status, ambition, education, and intelligence (Buss, 2003, 2012).

3.4.2. Physical attractiveness and good housekeeper

Another evolutionary psychological hypothesis predicts that men (relative to women) more strongly value cues to fertility, such as physical attractiveness. Using the ranking instrument, the prediction was confirmed in both samples: d s = -0.48 and -0.30 for 1984 and 2009, respectively. Together with men’s preference for young spouses, these findings support the hypothesis that men (relative to women) place more importance on observable cues to fertility. Nonetheless, the rating instrument variable “good looks” showed no sex difference at either time period, with results indicating that it was “important, but not indispensable” for both sexes.

Significant sex differences occurred for “good cook and housekeeper” for both time periods. The magnitude of the sex difference was large and nearly identical from 1984 ($d = -1.03$) to 2009 ($d = -1.01$).

4. Discussion

Despite cultural changes in India over the past quarter century, results of the current research are consistent with the hypothesis that sex-specific mate preferences predicted by parental investment theory persisted over this time period. Several important limitations must be noted. First, the samples are not representative

of the vast and diverse country of India. The religious, cultural, and marriage system diversity in different parts of India, as well as diversity of caste within the same geographical regions, suggest extreme caution in generalizing the results found in this study. Second, the 2009 sample was slightly younger than the 1984 sample. The exceptionally low effect sizes of the correlations between mate preferences and age suggest that the slight age difference between the two samples did not significantly affect the results in a way that would alter the central conclusions. Although the participants' ages of our two samples are in some ways ideal because Indians marry—or consider getting married—in their 20s, future studies could fruitfully explore mate preferences over the lifespan. Finally, ratings and rankings have inherent psychometric limitations, which may be addressed using budget allocation methods (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsemeier, 2002). With these limitations in mind, we turn to the three central results of the study—the continuity of shared mate preferences, the robust sex differences, and cultural changes in mating values.

4.1. Continuity of shared mate preferences and the importance of love and mutual attraction

The current study found striking continuity of shared mate preferences from 1984 to 2009. On the ranking instrument, “kind and understanding” was the most desirable characteristic for both sexes at both time periods. For the rating instrument, “good health,” “mutual attraction–love,” and “education and intelligence” emerged as the most valued qualities for both sexes for both time periods. The importance of “mutual attraction–love” is especially interesting because India historically is a culture marked by arranged marriages—marriages in which love and mutual attraction are presumed to be secondary considerations. This finding contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that love is a cross-cultural universal emotion linked to committed

long-term mating (Buss, 1987; Frank, 1988; Jankowiak, 1995; Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992).

4.2. Cultural changes over time

Several cultural changes were revealed. The first and most robust was that modern Indians (relative to Indians studied in 1984) preferred to marry later in life. This shift in preferred age at marriage is mirrored by an increase in actual age of marriage in India. The latter findings support the validity of measures of expressed mate preferences, and suggest that the findings reflect actual change. This cultural change in preferring to marry later in life also is found in the United States (Buss et al., 2001).

Second, both sexes increased in the importance they attach to “ambition and industriousness” in a long-term mate. This shift may reflect an expanding middle class in modern India in which upward economic mobility is attainable for a larger portion of the population.

The findings revealed two other changes—an increase in valuation by both sexes in “creative and artistic” and “good cook and housekeeper.” The reasons for these shifts are not readily apparent.

4.3. Sex differences in mate preferences

The current study found strong support for the evolutionary psychological hypotheses about sex differences in mate preferences. Despite cultural changes in some values, men more than women continue to prefer mates who are younger and physically attractive. Youth is a known correlate of female fertility, which declines predictably with increasing age. Standards of physical attractiveness, which include smooth skin, white teeth, lustrous hair, symmetrical features, and low waist-to-hip ratio, are known to be linked to youth, health, and female fertility (Sugiyama, 2005). Thus, the current study supports a growing body of research

Table 2
Sex and cross-time differences in mate preferences: ranking instrument.

Mate preference		1984	Age	2009	Age	Sex diff. 1984		Sex diff. 2009		Cross-time diff	
						t	d	t	d	t	d
Kind & understanding	Male	1.79 (1.44)	0.20	3.29 (3.29)	0.03	-1.33	-0.27	3.34**	0.29	-2.93**	-0.33
	Female	2.31 (2.23)	0.18	2.41 (2.62)	0.05					-0.24	-0.03
Religious	Male	8.33 (4.10)	0.08	6.95 (3.82)	0.04	1.05	0.21	-1.02	-0.09	2.16*	0.25
	Female	7.46 (3.98)	0.20	7.29 (3.73)	0.05					0.30	0.03
Exciting personality	Male	7.65 (3.49)	-0.05	7.24 (3.14)	0.01	-0.41	-0.08	0.06	0.01	0.78	0.09
	Female	7.94 (3.56)	-0.05	7.23(3.14)	-0.07					1.49	0.17
Creative & artistic	Male	8.35 (2.91)	0.15	6.82 (2.95)	0.00	-0.18	-0.04	1.20	0.11	3.15**	0.36
	Female	8.46 (3.35)	0.04	6.51 (3.04)	0.07					4.21**	0.48
Good housekeeper	Male	6.00 (2.72)	0.27	6.28 (3.09)	0.00	-6.02***	-1.24	-8.67***	-0.76	-0.56	-0.06
	Female	9.63 (3.12)	0.09	8.74 (3.37)	-0.09					1.78	0.20
Intelligent	Male	5.35 (3.09)	-0.02	5.28 (2.96)	-0.01	2.03*	0.42	4.18***	0.37	0.14	0.02
	Female	4.13 (2.81)	0.01	4.24 (2.70)	-0.10					-0.26	-0.03
Good earning capacity	Male	10.33 (2.40)	0.10	9.80 (3.17)	0.06	5.96***	1.22	10.46***	0.92	1.05	0.12
	Female	7.07 (2.87)	0.07	6.96 (3.00)	-0.01					0.26	0.03
Wants children	Male	9.63 (3.11)	-0.18	8.85 (3.09)	-0.06	-0.03	-0.01	-5.14***	-0.45	1.53	0.17
	Female	9.65 (2.96)	-0.23	10.18 (2.79)	-0.22**					-1.26	-0.15
Easygoing	Male	7.95 (3.65)	0.01	8.47 (3.16)	-0.00	0.46	0.09	0.88	0.08	-0.97	-0.11
	Female	7.63 (3.29)	0.08	8.22 (3.22)	-0.03					-1.23	-0.14
Good heredity	Male	7.49 (2.74)	-0.17	8.06 (3.28)	0.02	-0.71	-0.14	-0.79	-0.07	-1.09	-0.12
	Female	7.91 (3.03)	-0.17	8.28 (2.92)	0.00					-0.84	-0.10
College graduate	Male	8.23 (2.88)	-0.03	8.05 (3.48)	-0.02	1.61	0.33	2.49*	0.22	0.34	0.04
	Female	7.22 (3.20)	0.06	7.31 (3.22)	0.12					-0.18	-0.02
Physically attractive	Male	5.84 (3.24)	-0.03	7.58 (3.58)	-0.05	-2.35*	-0.48	-3.35**	-0.30	-3.00**	-0.34
	Female	7.37 (3.15)	0.03	8.59 (3.23)	0.08					-2.53*	-0.29
Healthy	Male	4.07 (2.80)	-0.24	3.82 (3.23)	-0.01	-0.23	-0.05	-1.11	-0.10	0.49	0.06
	Female	4.20 (2.87)	-0.37*	4.14 (3.39)	0.10					0.13	0.01

Note: Mate preferences were ranked from 1 (most desirable) to 13 (least desirable); hence, low means reflect high desirability. Significance levels.

*** $p < .001$.

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$ (all two-tailed).

d = Cohen (1988) effect size index, with $|0.20|$ = small, $|0.50|$ = medium, $|0.80|$ = large.

Table 3
Sex and cross-time differences in mate preferences: rating instrument.

Mate preference variable		1984	Age	2009	Age	Sex diff. 1984		Sex diff. 2009		Cross-time diff	
						t	d	t	t	d	t
1. Good cook and housekeeper	Male	2.23 (0.72)	0.13	2.57 (0.61)	0.04	5.10***	1.03	11.46***	1.01	-3.31**	-0.38
	Female	1.26 (1.08)	-0.06	1.78 (0.94)	-0.04					-3.62***	-0.41
2. Pleasing disposition	Male	2.19 (0.73)	0.21	2.24 (0.74)	0.07	0.71	0.15	-1.19	-0.10	-0.43	-0.05
	Female	2.08 (0.78)	-0.12	2.32 (0.79)	0.03					-2.05*	-0.24
3. Sociability	Male	2.20 (0.63)	0.29	2.34 (0.77)	0.04	-0.71	-0.14	-4.11***	-0.36	-1.12	-0.13
	Female	2.30 (0.74)	-0.14	2.59 (0.59)	0.00					-3.13**	-0.36
4. Similar educational background	Male	1.84 (1.01)	-0.22	2.05 (0.91)	-0.01	-0.97	-0.20	-1.57	-0.14	-1.41	-0.16
	Female	2.02 (0.82)	0.07	2.18 (0.87)	0.08					-1.24	-0.14
5. Refinement, neatness	Male	2.18 (0.66)	-0.19	2.46 (0.68)	-0.07	-2.21*	-0.44	-2.04*	-0.18	-2.56*	-0.29
	Female	2.47 (0.66)	0.21	2.58 (0.62)	0.08					-1.17	-0.13
6. Good financial prospect	Male	1.50 (1.02)	-0.05	1.36 (0.97)	0.07	-3.06**	-0.62	-9.86***	-0.87	0.89	0.10
	Female	2.04 (0.72)	-0.15	2.15 (0.83)	0.11					-0.92	-0.11
7. Chastity (no previous sexual intercourse)	Male	1.89 (1.20)	-0.01	2.10 (1.12)	0.07	1.48	0.30	-0.73	-0.06	-1.17	-0.13
	Female	1.54 (1.12)	-0.19	2.18 (1.17)	0.01					-3.70***	-0.42
8. Dependable character	Male	2.14 (0.90)	0.05	1.77 (0.97)	0.10	2.05*	0.42	3.91***	0.34	2.33*	0.27
	Female	1.67 (1.26)	0.17	1.43 (1.01)	-0.11					1.52	0.17
9. Emotional stability & maturity	Male	2.41 (0.54)	-0.04	2.21 (0.80)	0.03	1.79	0.36	-2.32*	-0.20	1.62	0.18
	Female	2.13 (0.92)	0.35*	2.36 (0.72)	0.00					-2.09*	-0.24
10. Desire for home and children	Male	2.36 (0.72)	0.14	2.32 (0.78)	0.01	-2.05*	-0.41	-0.91	-0.08	0.31	0.04
	Female	2.63 (0.56)	0.03	2.38 (0.66)	0.05					2.55*	0.29
11. Favorable social status	Male	1.70 (0.76)	0.10	2.08 (0.83)	0.09	-2.19*	-0.44	-3.84***	-0.34	-2.77**	-0.32
	Female	2.04 (0.74)	0.21	2.33 (0.69)	0.17**					-2.89**	-0.33
12. Good looks	Male	1.95 (0.72)	-0.17	2.07 (0.84)	-0.01	0.28	0.06	1.64	0.15	-0.87	-0.10
	Female	1.91 (0.84)	-0.29*	1.95 (0.86)	-0.04					-0.31	-0.04
13. Similar religious background	Male	1.45 (1.09)	-0.05	1.81 (1.12)	0.07	-2.52*	-0.51	-3.24**	-0.29	-1.96	-0.22
	Female	2.00 (1.06)	-0.30*	2.11 (0.97)	0.04					-0.76	-0.09
14. Ambition & industriousness	Male	1.73 (0.95)	-0.11	2.22 (0.81)	-0.04	-2.01*	-0.41	-6.15***	-0.54	-3.61***	-0.41
	Female	2.09 (0.84)	0.05	2.61 (0.63)	0.09					-5.17***	-0.59
15. Similar political background	Male	0.59 (0.87)	-0.31	0.87 (0.97)	0.05	-1.03	-0.21	0.29	0.03	-1.80	-0.21
	Female	0.79 (0.99)	0.11	0.85 (0.85)	0.13*					-0.49	-0.06
16. Mutual attraction—love	Male	2.45 (0.70)	0.00	2.43 (0.78)	0.02	-0.07	-0.01	-2.87**	-0.25	0.17	0.02
	Female	2.46 (0.76)	-0.03	2.61 (0.60)	0.02					-1.56	-0.18
17. Good health	Male	2.77 (0.48)	0.13	2.77 (0.53)	-0.09	-0.35	-0.07	-2.06*	-0.18	0.08	0.01
	Female	2.80 (0.40)	0.06	2.85 (0.41)	-0.04					-0.82	-0.09
18. Education & intelligence	Male	2.43 (0.59)	-0.02	2.61 (0.57)	0.03	-3.83***	-0.77	-3.09**	-0.27	-1.87	-0.21
	Female	2.82 (0.43)	-0.12	2.76 (0.52)	0.06					0.86	0.10

Note: Mate preferences were rated from 0 (irrelevant or unimportant) to 3 (indispensable). Significance levels.

*** $p < .001$.

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$ (all two-tailed), d = Cohen (1988) effect size index, with $|0.20|$ = small, $|0.50|$ = medium, $|0.80|$ = large.

that supports the hypothesis that men across cultures have evolved mate preferences for female cues to fertility.

Women more than men in both samples valued resources in a mate, whether this was expressed as “good earning capacity” or “good financial prospects.” Furthermore, women more than men in both samples desired qualities known to be linked with resource acquisition—social status, education and intelligence, and ambition and industriousness. These results, combined with a growing body of other empirical findings (Buss, 2012), support the hypothesis that women have an evolved mate preference for mates who have the resources and resource-acquisition abilities to provide for them and their children.

Two other sex differences are noteworthy. Men more than women valued “good cook and housekeeper” in a potential mate. Women more than men valued mates who were “intelligent” at both time periods. These sex differences in mate preferences emerge in some cultures, such as mainland China, but not in other cultures, such as the United States and Sweden.

India is a country that has undergone substantial cultural changes over the past quarter of a century—both economically (e.g., a rapidly expanding middle class), maritally (e.g., a relative decline in the control parents exert over their children’s marital decisions), and socially (e.g., gender inequality). The current study suggests that some mate preference changes, such as an increase in the importance of ambition and industriousness, may be expres-

sions or manifestations of these cultural changes. In addition to providing provisional evidence for the evolution of cultural values, this study provides robust support for several key hypotheses about evolved sex differences in mate preferences. Despite the many cultural changes, women substantially more than men continue to value resources and resource acquisition potential in a mate. Men continue to value cues to fertility in a mate, notably youth and physical attractiveness. In sum, this study of mate preferences in one culture over a quarter of a century provides a unique window into both mating psychology and the evolution of cultural values.

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