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# Do advertised preferences predict the behavior of speed daters?

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## Abstract

Because researchers are making increasing use of data gleaned from Internet dating sites, it is important to know if the preferences people specify in Internet advertisements predict the choices that they actually make. HurryDate, a commercial speed-dating firm, collected data from over 10,000 people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s who participated in speed-dating events in cities across the United States. The present analysis compared these speed daters' advertised preferences with their decisions to attend particular events and their choices of potential partners at the events they attended. Findings indicated that speed daters' advertisements reflect frequently replicated sex differences and assortative patterns and that these advertised mate preferences predicted their decisions to attend particular events. Advertised preferences did not, in contrast, substantially predict decisions within events. These results support the conclusion that advertised preferences predict behavior in the mating domain in some contexts but not others.

The increasing popularity of Internet dating and speed dating has given social scientists a potential windfall of new data. These services can provide large databases regarding the information that people report about themselves (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, in press), what they say that they want in a mate (Greenlees & McGrew, 1994), and who people actually select when given the opportunity to do so in contexts involving real consequences for daters (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2006, in press; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005).

Here, we present an analysis of data from a large speed-dating sample provided to us by HurryDate, a commercial firm. In response to

our request, HurryDate gave us information that they collected as part of their regular operations. In the speed-dating events involved in this sample, single men and women had 3-min interactions with up to 25 opposite-sex partners, deciding whether they wanted the opportunity to interact again with each person. When both people in a particular pair indicated that they would like to meet again, HurryDate exchanged their e-mail addresses, allowing them to reconnect after the event. HurryDate gave us this behavioral information as well as information from clients' posted online profiles, which contained information about themselves and their preferred features in a partner.

Our focus here is on the relationship between advertised mate preferences and (a) decisions to attend particular events and (b) decisions to pursue further, or not pursue, particular individuals at these events. At one extreme, people's advertised preferences might be of little predictive value with respect to the events they choose to attend or their choices within events, perhaps indicating that decisions to advertise a given set of preferences are motivated only by self-presentational

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concerns over what others would infer from their posted preferences. At the other extreme, advertised preferences might strongly predict both their choices of events and their choices of individuals within events, indicating that people have a high level of knowledge of their actual preferences and a strong motivation to advertise them accurately, perhaps to maximize the efficiency of their mate search.

In addition to contributing to the broader agenda of determining the relationship between what people say they want—here, in advertisements—and how they actually behave (cf. Murphy, Allen, Stevens, & Weatherhead, 2005), the analysis of these relationships is particularly important in the context of continued research that uses advertised and other stated preferences as a central methodological component in studying human mate choices. To date, the literature on mate choice has relied heavily on hypothetical questions and self-report data for obvious reasons, such as the fact that random assignment to condition is essentially impossible. In a recent review of the literature, Cooper and Sheldon (2002) identified this as a potential shortcoming in the mate choice literature. It is therefore important to gain greater insight into the relationship between self-report data and actual mate choices. The explosion of Internet-based dating provides one source of data that can be used to investigate this relationship.

Here, we look at three kinds of data: advertised preferences posted by HurryDate clients, the composition of the HurryDate events that people in our sample chose to attend, and the yes or no decisions made by participants with regard to potential individual matches at HurryDate events. We begin by investigating whether speed daters in our sample provide answers to hypothetical questions of mate preference in their advertisements that show the kinds of sex differences (e.g., women placing greater emphasis than men on potential mates' income) and assortative patterns (the tendency to prefer individuals who are similar to oneself on some set of traits, e.g., religious people preferring religious partners) observed in other samples. Then, we investigate (a) the extent to which advertised preferences predict average features of people at the events

attended by different individuals and (b) the extent to which advertised preferences predict the features of those whom speed daters chose within events. These analyses allow us to assess the strength of the relationship between advertised preferences and behavior in two different contexts—decisions to attend particular events and decisions to select different individuals within events.

## Method

### *Participants*

HurryDate, which operated mainly in large cities in the United States at the time of this study, provided raw data from the 12,892 individuals who comprised their entire database for the time applicable to this study. We deleted cases for those for whom substantial inconsistencies existed in their data (e.g., those coded as male but whose matches were all or predominantly male), unusually young or old participants (men younger than 23 and older than 50 years and women younger than 22 and older than 47 years, who were more than 2 *SDs* from the mean), people for whom we had little or no data on their potential selectees (i.e., people for whom we did not have information on at least two of their potential selectees, typically because they had filled out HurryDate's online profile but had not attended any events or had attended an event that included mostly people who had not filled out a profile), and people who said "yes" to more than 90% of their potential selectees or said "no" to more than 90% of their potential selectees (i.e., people who did not provide useful discriminations at events). This resulted in omitting about one third of the cases, leaving us with  $N = 8,961$  (53.1% female), all of whom had filled out profiles, attended events with some others who had filled out profiles, and provided some degree of useful discrimination at events.

### *Survey measures*

In the ordinary course of its business, HurryDate collected survey data online from their clients in the form of posted Web-based profiles. These items included information about

the person as well as information about the features of their preferred match. Of the items collected, we analyzed those concerning age, height, body types, education, income, whether they had been married, whether they had children, racial or ethnic category (African, Asian, European, Hispanic, other), and religion (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, other, none).

HurryDate gave clients categorical choices to express their preferences with respect to racial or ethnic category and religion. We scored these items using values between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating that the person stated they would not like a person in that category, 1 indicating that the person stated they would solely prefer a person in that category, and intermediate values indicating that the category was one of a number of preferred categories. Because both the racial or ethnic category and the religion choices contained five possible answers, we coded responses indicating a lack of preference (or a preference for all categories) as 0.2 for each category.

### *Procedure*

Individual speed-dating sessions took place during the evening, typically at clubs and bars in metropolitan areas in the United States. Participants usually paid a fee of around US\$35 to participate. HurryDate typically allowed a maximum of 25 men and 25 women to register for each event. HurryDate organizers stratified events by age (25–35 and 35–45 were typical), though not always symmetrically (e.g., men 35–45, women 30–40). HurryDate targeted specific subpopulations for some events (e.g., “Black HurryDate” and “Jewish HurryDate”).

HurryDate clients arrived for the event and organizers assigned each a number and gave them a corresponding numbered tag to wear. Event organizers also gave each participant a sheet of paper for indicating those people they encountered who they wished to see again. Organizers typically allowed for some mingling among participants during a short period of time preceding HurryDate sessions.

When the sessions began, event organizers gave participants 3 min for face-to-face interactions. After 3 min, both participants circled either “yes” or “no” on their record sheets

underneath the number that corresponded to the label worn by the person with whom they had just interacted. One sex (usually the men) then changed seats, a process that continued until each man had interacted with each woman. After the event, participants entered their yes or no responses online from home based on their record sheets. HurryDate then processed these data, producing matches when a given man and woman both indicated a positive response to one another. Subsequently, participants could find out who their matches were, view these individuals’ online profiles, and send e-mail to their matches.

HurryDate provided information from a large number of sessions over the course of several months during 2003. The authors were not involved in designing the profile-based survey items used by HurryDate, collecting the data, or conducting the sessions.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive statistics and sex differences for advertised mate preferences*

We presented the characteristics of the HurryDate sample elsewhere in detail (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005) and we summarize them here. Men were 33.8 years old on average; women averaged 31.4 years of age. The individuals were 83% European American, 6% Asian American, 4% Latino American, 3% African American, and 3% other. People in the sample were well educated (averaging about 17 years of education) and had relatively high incomes (men reported average salaries around US\$84,000 and women around US\$53,400). About a third of the sample reported no religious affiliation, around 29% were Catholic, 26% Protestant, 9% Jewish, and less than 4% some other religious affiliation. The characteristics of the subsample analyzed here are nearly the same as those in the somewhat larger subsample previously reported.

The advertised mate preferences and *t* tests for sex differences of the included sample are summarized in Table 1. With respect to height, women were more restrictive in their preferences than men. Men on average indicated preferences for women between 4 ft

**Table 1.** Mean advertised mate preferences by sex

Feature	Units	Sex						Sex difference ( <i>t</i> )
		Men			Women			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	
<b>Height</b>								
Low	Inches	57.2	6.19	3,973	67.1	5.22	4,536	-80.0***
High	Inches	73.7	6.29	3,973	78.5	4.49	4,536	-40.6***
<b>Age</b>								
Low	Years	25.4	3.23	3,984	28.7	4.12	4,539	-40.8***
High	Years	35.8	4.35	3,983	38.2	5.16	4,538	-23.3***
Prior marriage	0-1 <sup>a</sup>	0.39	0.21	3,980	0.35	0.25	4,534	8.7***
Existing children	0-1 <sup>a</sup>	0.27	0.25	3,981	0.25	0.25	4,535	3.5
<b>Income</b>								
Low	US\$(1,000)	1.74	9.60	3,981	11.4	24.6	4,535	-23.3***
<b>Education</b>								
Low	Years	11.8	2.39	3,981	13.4	2.84	4,535	-28.7***
<b>Racial or ethnic category</b>								
African	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.14	0.09	3,981	0.12	0.11	4,535	8.7***
Asian	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.18	0.10	3,981	0.13	0.11	4,535	21.9***
European	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.34	0.28	3,981	0.48	0.36	4,535	-19.0***
Hispanic	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.18	0.11	3,981	0.15	0.13	4,535	13.2***
Other	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.15	0.08	3,981	0.12	0.10	4,535	14.8***
<b>Religion</b>								
Catholic	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.21	0.14	3,981	0.23	0.19	4,535	-3.9***
Protestant	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.23	0.16	3,981	0.26	0.23	4,535	-7.7***
Jewish	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.19	0.12	3,981	0.17	0.17	4,535	4.3***
Other	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.17	0.08	3,981	0.14	0.10	4,535	14.0***
None	0-1 <sup>b</sup>	0.21	0.15	3,981	0.20	0.20	4,535	1.6

<sup>a</sup>0 = unwanted, .5 = no preference, 1 = preferred. <sup>b</sup>From 0 = not wanted to 1 = exclusive.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

9 in. and 6 ft 2 in. (encompassing the entire range of heights among the female Hurry-Daters), and women on average limited their advertised preferences to men between 5 ft 7 in. and 6 ft 6 1/2 in. (equivalent to the 13th to 99.9th percentiles of male HurryDaters). In addition, when given a list of potential body types to choose from (e.g., "tall and thin," "round," "toned," "average"), men were more likely than women to express a desire for specific body types, typically for thinner bodies over heavier ones—56% of men and 74% of women expressed no preference among the body types (these data are not shown in Table 1). Men on average desired younger women, while women on average

desired older men (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Further, women were more likely than men to place a meaningful floor value on their potential mates' education and income, though neither sex did so with frequency—41% of men and 65% of women stated a preference for at least a high school education, and 4% of men and 21% of women stated a preference for at least US\$30,000 in annual income.

With respect to race, participants overall preferred those of European descent and women were more likely to state racial preferences than men. Few in the sample expressed religious preferences (around 19% of men and 35% of women), though when they did they were most likely to indicate that they would

prefer Christians, and women were more likely than men to favor Christians over Jews and those with other religions.

*Relationship of advertised preferences to assortative features*

In these analyses, we sought to determine the extent to which assortative motives drove the decision to advertise a given set of preferences. Table 2 shows correlations between the advertised preference and the advertiser’s own value on that item for both men and women and reveals that most aspects of HurryDaters’ advertised preferences were substantially assortative. HurryDate clients were especially likely to advertise assortative preferences with respect to age, height, and religion. In addition, both sexes advertised moderately assortative preferences with respect to prior marriages and children, educa-

tion, and race. Women but not men advertised assortative preferences with regard to income.

*Predicting features of opposite-sex event participants*

This section uses individuals’ own features and advertised mate preferences as simultaneous predictors of the average features of potential opposite-sex selectees at HurryDate events. In such analyses, individuals’ own features would be predictive of their potential selectees’ traits in cases in which populations vary systematically by residential area. For example, larger cities in the United States tend to have higher percentages of those of African descent and Jews, and their residents tend to have higher salaries; the Northeastern United States has more Catholics, while the Southern United States has more Protestants. Other traits go together because HurryDate designs its events accordingly. HurryDate occasionally held events with individuals exclusively of African descent and Jewish religion, in addition to holding events with different age sortings. Sorting events on age had the consequence of simultaneously sorting on features tied to age—prior marriages, having children, and, to a lesser extent, income.

Advertised preferences provide additional information on the extent to which individuals are either seeking events based on individual criteria or matching advertised criteria to local conditions. Most obviously, the former could occur when HurryDate arranges events based on particular criteria. For example, a Jewish person looking for a Jewish match might seek out a Jewish-only event. Or, a younger woman who prefers older men might seek out an event pairing younger women with older men.

We did not have full information for each individual or event. In particular, for many individuals, we have profile information only for a subset of the people they encountered, usually because not every person at every event had filled out a profile. Consequently, for each regression in this section and in the following section, we limited our analyses to individuals for whom we had information on the feature in question for at least two people for whom they expressed interest and two

**Table 2.** *Correlations between advertised preferences and own features by sex*

Feature	Men		Women	
	Correlation	N	Correlation	N
Height	.41***	3,899	.42***	4,478
Age	.78***	3,983	.85***	4,538
Previous marriage	.26***	3,752	.32***	4,290
Have children	.25***	3,736	.29***	4,364
Income	.02	1,470	.36***	1,178
Education	.21***	3,786	.25***	4,321
Race				
African	.15***	3,794	.28***	4,344
Asian	.15***	3,794	.23***	4,344
European	.17***	3,794	.23***	4,344
Hispanic	.13***	3,794	.21***	4,344
Other	.10***	3,794	.13***	4,344
Religion				
Catholic	.34***	3,181	.44***	3,855
Protestant	.40***	3,181	.51***	3,855
Jewish	.42***	3,181	.59***	3,855
Other	.14***	3,181	.20***	3,855
None	.33***	3,181	.45***	3,855

\*\*\**p* < .001.

people for whom they expressed a lack of interest. This limitation ensured that we had at least a minimal measure of the wider features of their potential selectees.

The results are shown in Table 3. The variables for which both the individuals' own features and their advertised preferences were predictive are those areas in which HurryDate provides explicit sorting—age (including prior marriage and having children, which are strongly related to age), race, and religion. Here, apparently, HurryDaters not only entered events based on HurryDate design and residential differences but also because of idiosyncratic preferences captured well by their advertised preferences. So, for example, younger women with advertised preferences for older men really did attend events with men who were older, on average, than the men at events attended by younger women with advertised preferences for younger men.

For income and education, events were somewhat assortative but not meaningfully responsive to advertised preferences. Some level of income sorting would appear as a result of age sorting, but educational level did not relate significantly to age in our sample, so the educational sorting is likely to be purely a product of residential differences (e.g., those in larger cities tend to have more education). Advertised preferences carried little predictive power either because people did not seek events that were sorted on these characteristics or, more likely, because they were unable to express these preferences even when they would have liked to—our sample contained no events specifically limited to individuals of a particular income or education level.

For height, neither own features nor advertised preferences substantially predicted event averages for potential opposite-sex selectees. Here, not only were there no events based on height, but, additionally, height is not strongly related to features that are the bases of specialized events (age, race, and religion) and does not vary strongly with different residential areas.

### *Predicting features of selectees*

In this section, we use three variables to simultaneously predict the average features of indi-

viduals' selections within HurryDate events: the event average for potential opposite-sex selectees (the item we predicted in the prior section), the individuals' own value on the feature in question, and the individuals' advertised preferences. The dependent variable was the proportion of selected individuals with a given trait when the trait was categorical (e.g., race) or the average for the trait when it was not categorical (e.g., height). We limited these analyses in the same manner as in the previous section (including only people where we had data on the feature for two or more potential selectees in both the selector's "yes" and "no" categories) and further limited them by excluding irrelevant individuals who encountered no individuals with the feature in question—that is, for example, when predicting the proportion of selected individuals who were Catholic, we included only people who we knew had attended events with opposite-sex Catholic attendees.

The results are shown in Table 4. In each case, of course, event averages account for a substantial portion of the variance in people's selections—one can only say "yes" to someone who actually showed up. Little meaningful assortment occurred in individuals' selections. Further, the advertised preferences rarely helped predict whom individuals chose at their events.

Only with regard to race were advertised preferences predictive, and even then, they were not strongly predictive. In general, then, while we previously found small assortative choosing on the basis of race and height (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005), the present analyses suggest that these trends are partially assortative (based on the selector's own race and height) and partially based on differential advertised preferences (which, as we saw earlier, are themselves partially assortatively determined).

## **Discussion**

### *Summary and future directions*

HurryDate clients posted advertised preferences that were substantially assortative and contained typical sex differences. Their advertised

**Table 3.** Regressions predicting event averages by sex, showing standardized betas (and squared semipartial correlations)

Selectees' feature	Own feature	Advertised preference	N	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Men</b>				
Height	.02 (.001)	.01 (.000)	3,873	.001
Age	.52*** (.100)	.32*** (.040)	3,972	.629
Previous marriage	.29*** (.079)	.19*** (.033)	3,712	.148
Have children	.21*** (.041)	.17*** (.026)	3,697	.089
Income	.29*** (.081)	.07 (.005)	764	.087
Education	.11*** (.011)	.07*** (.005)	3,742	.020
<b>Race</b>				
African	.43*** (.178)	.09*** (.008)	3,757	.204
Asian	.12*** (.016)	.07*** (.005)	3,757	.023
European	.23*** (.050)	.10*** (.011)	3,757	.070
Hispanic	.15*** (.020)	.09*** (.008)	3,757	.033
Other	.02 (.000)	.06*** (.003)	3,757	.004
<b>Religion</b>				
Catholic	.16*** (.023)	.10*** (.009)	3,084	.046
Protestant	.16*** (.022)	.09*** (.006)	3,084	.045
Jewish	.36*** (.107)	.31*** (.076)	3,084	.318
Other	.05 (.003)	.07*** (.006)	3,084	.009
None	.17*** (.025)	.03 (.001)	3,084	.034
<b>Women</b>				
Height	.03 (.001)	.00 (.000)	4,426	.001
Age	.22*** (.014)	.60*** (.097)	4,513	.630
Previous marriage	.25*** (.055)	.22*** (.042)	4,217	.142
Have children	.20*** (.035)	.19*** (.034)	4,285	.096
Income	.30*** (.077)	.05 (.002)	760	.106
Education	.12*** (.012)	.05 (.002)	4,252	.018
<b>Race</b>				
African	.38*** (.135)	.19*** (.035)	4,275	.224
Asian	.10*** (.009)	.09*** (.008)	4,275	.020
European	.23*** (.049)	.12*** (.014)	4,275	.080
Hispanic	.18*** (.031)	.06*** (.003)	4,275	.040
Other	.03 (.001)	.04 (.002)	4,275	.003
<b>Religion</b>				
Catholic	.16*** (.021)	.10*** (.007)	3,671	.049
Protestant	.11*** (.010)	.17*** (.021)	3,671	.060
Jewish	.32*** (.066)	.37*** (.091)	3,671	.381
Other	.04 (.001)	.06*** (.003)	3,671	.006
None	.14*** (.017)	.08*** (.005)	3,671	.037

Note. Predictors were entered simultaneously.  
 \*\*\**p* < .001.

preferences were predictive of the features of those at the events that they attended in cases where HurryDate set up events to allow them to act on such preferences (e.g., women with

advertised preferences for older men attended events with men who were older on average than the men at events attended by women who advertised preferences for younger men,

**Table 4.** Regressions predicting selectees' features by sex, showing standardized betas (and squared semipartial correlations)

Selectees' feature	Event average	Own feature	Advertised preference	<i>N</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
<b>Men</b>					
Height	.62*** (.381)	.07*** (.003)	.07*** (.004)	3,873	.399
Age	.89*** (.296)	.03*** (.000)	.06*** (.001)	3,972	.921
Previous marriage	.77*** (.527)	.05*** (.002)	.02 (.001)	2,856	.631
Have children	.69*** (.440)	.06*** (.003)	.06*** (.004)	2,159	.521
Income	.80*** (.582)	.00 (.000)	-.03 (.001)	764	.635
Education	.73*** (.528)	.03 (.001)	.03 (.001)	3,742	.551
<b>Race</b>					
African	.38*** (.143)	.08*** (.007)	.14*** (.020)	1,499	.188
Asian	.55*** (.298)	.06 (.003)	.11*** (.011)	2,016	.343
European	.64*** (.394)	.03 (.000)	.09*** (.008)	3,298	.443
Hispanic	.69*** (.449)	.05 (.002)	.04 (.001)	1,947	.495
Other	.46*** (.213)	.00 (.000)	.04 (.001)	1,803	.218
<b>Religion</b>					
Catholic	.75*** (.540)	.02 (.000)	.05*** (.002)	2,980	.574
Protestant	.76*** (.549)	.01 (.000)	.01 (.000)	2,945	.577
Jewish	.77*** (.505)	.04 (.002)	.04 (.002)	1,739	.627
Other	.46*** (.207)	.03 (.001)	-.01 (.001)	1,484	.209
None	.73*** (.516)	.03 (.001)	.02 (.000)	2,971	.544
<b>Women</b>					
Height	.50*** (.253)	.09*** (.007)	.06*** (.003)	4,426	.273
Age	.85*** (.270)	.04*** (.000)	.08*** (.001)	4,513	.892
Previous marriage	.71*** (.441)	.06*** (.003)	.02 (.001)	3,578	.544
Have children	.65*** (.392)	.06*** (.003)	.07*** (.004)	2,348	.477
Income	.73*** (.476)	.02 (.000)	.07 (.004)	760	.566
Education	.59*** (.341)	.06*** (.003)	.02 (.000)	4,252	.363
<b>Race</b>					
African	.56*** (.216)	.08 (.004)	.14*** (.016)	1,113	.449
Asian	.31*** (.097)	.09*** (.008)	.13*** (.017)	2,625	.140
European	.48*** (.218)	.09*** (.007)	.12*** (.013)	3,802	.281
Hispanic	.49*** (.225)	.04 (.002)	.04 (.002)	1,989	.260
Other	.34*** (.115)	.01 (.000)	.09*** (.007)	2,491	.123
<b>Religion</b>					
Catholic	.66*** (.424)	.03 (.001)	.03 (.001)	3,449	.455
Protestant	.67*** (.428)	.03 (.001)	-.01 (.000)	3,383	.453
Jewish	.71*** (.298)	.05 (.001)	.08*** (.003)	2,297	.617
Other	.43*** (.181)	.01 (.000)	.03 (.001)	1,612	.183
None	.67*** (.428)	.04 (.001)	.01 (.000)	3,602	.456

Note. Predictors were entered simultaneously.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

an outcome HurryDate allows for by holding events with different age ranges). Nonetheless, advertised preferences were of little or no predictive value in determining the features

of potential matches who were chosen at HurryDate events, except with regard to race. Instead, as we previously reported, choices at events for both men and women were largely

based on widely shared mate preferences centering on physically attractive, younger partners (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). Of course, because our sample included only speed daters from cities in the United States, we have no information on the international generalizability of the findings reported here. Furthermore, given that our data were provided by only one company, it is not clear whether the findings would be replicated in another study in the United States.

Given that our findings include that advertised preferences predict attending events yet have little predictive power regarding behavior within events, we do not find support for simple views stating that advertised preferences are either of little overall predictive value or of substantial overall predictive value. Instead, it appears that human mating psychology is, like many other aspects of human psychology (Ross & Nisbett, 1991), sensitive to the situation.

Acknowledging that there are no data that specifically support any given interpretation, we offer three possibilities future research might address in order to locate the source of the disconnect between advertised preferences and partner selection at speed-dating events. First, it might be the case that the lack of ready information within speed-dating events regarding features such as education, religion, and income makes it difficult for daters to express their preferences with regard to these features. That is, perhaps speed daters would like to choose based on these preferences but do not have the requisite information about other people so that they can do so. Perhaps if someone had furnished information about religion and income to the speed daters, our results would have looked very different. A second possibility derives from findings that people often infer that people who are attractive have other positive traits (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). It is possible that people use physical attractiveness as a proxy for physically unobservable traits, including personality traits, for which they are also searching. A third possibility is that the speed-dating environment triggers changes in underlying preferences. For example, the social environment of a club

or bar containing a large number of single, appropriately aged members of the opposite (and same) sex might cause individuals to change their mating preferences in this context relative to their preferences when these same individuals are constructing their profiles or deciding to attend an event, actions that typically take place at home or work. Speed daters' focus on physical attractiveness within events with little sex difference suggests the possibility that people at these events might be pushed toward using their "short-term" as opposed to "long-term" criteria for mate selection, given that short-term mate selection criteria are, for both sexes, focused strongly on physical attractiveness (Buss, 2003).

Because researchers have successfully moved speed dating into the laboratory environment (e.g., Fisman et al., 2006), it should be possible to vary the context to investigate these or other possible explanations. There might be situational variables that will encourage behavioral preferences to correspond much more closely to advertised preferences. Substantial additional work will be required to address these possibilities. Increasing the amount of time people have to interact could also be useful. Three minutes might be insufficient for discovering information people report as being important, such as religion. Perhaps people would choose on these dimensions if given sufficient time to obtain the relevant information about other speed daters. Another potentially interesting set of questions involves the relationship between advertised preferences and search patterns on online dating sites. The search parameters people use, the individual profiles people choose to click on, and the characteristics of those contacted by searchers all constitute data that could yield insight into actual preferences, which could then be related to advertised preferences.

#### *Implications for researchers and daters*

Mating researchers and daters often assume that self-reported preferences are a straightforward window into individuals' actual preferences. Our findings reveal one context in which this is not true: Within speed-dating events, most people choose partners primarily

based on physical attractiveness and observable features that are pervasively attractive to speed daters without regard to individual differences in advertised preferences. Nonetheless, even among speed daters, advertised preferences are not wholly unrelated to behavior, given that they do predict the events daters choose to attend.

As in other lines of inquiry (Hancock et al., 2007), there is truth in advertising, but it is not without important limits—and these limits arise to a greater extent in some contexts than in others. Researchers and daters who read online advertisements can have some confidence that the posted preferences reflect genuine behavioral preferences to some degree in some contexts. Nonetheless, such advertisements should not be taken by researchers or daters as definitive, and indeed, researchers should engage in greater efforts to defend assumptions that stated preferences reflect revealed preferences in relevant contexts.

Given that it is apparently the case that speed daters either do not often seek or generally ignore information on nonobservable characteristics like education and religion within events, we offer two additional pieces of advice for daters. First, those who believe that learning about such characteristics is critically important in searching for their mate might make more explicit attempts to lead their conversations into these areas, perhaps even preparing questions or comments beforehand. Second, those who feel that their personalities, educations, incomes, family orientations, and other nonobservable features drive their mate value more than physical

attractiveness should not rely primarily on speed dating to find potential mates, though it can surely be a fun, interesting, and potentially fruitful addition to more traditional search strategies for many daters.

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