**Background**

Research on human mating has revealed both sex similarities and differences. Prominent similarities include a shared emphasis on finding a long-term partner, particularly one that is kind and loving. Prominent sex differences include men's greater emphasis on physical attractiveness and willingness to engage in short-term mating.

Next to nothing, however, is known about change over time in individuals' mating strategies and mate preferences.

In Study 1, we assessed emerging adults' beliefs about how their peers' mating orientations change as they develop from incoming college freshmen to graduating seniors.

**Method**

- Sample included 63 women and 40 men between 18 and 25 years of age.
- Participants provided open-ended responses to two questions:
  - How, if at all, do you think young men's and young women's romantic relationship desires (that is, what they want out of a romantic relationship) change as they develop from incoming college freshmen to graduating seniors?
  - How, if at all, do you think young men's and young women's partner preferences (that is, what they want in a romantic partner) change as they develop from incoming college freshmen to graduating seniors?

**Sample Response**

- Increased long-term mindset: "I think that as freshmen most people want just a relationship, and by the time they are seniors they are starting to look for someone who could be their life partner."
- Decreased short-term mindset: "I think as a freshman, most desires are for the here and now. I've noticed that most seniors are looking for more than sexual gratification like a younger student. I think they want more emotions and intimacy than one right stands."
- Increased emphasis on personality: "I think graduating seniors look for intellectual qualities rather than appearance qualities."
- Decreased emphasis on appearance: "As a freshman, we are looking for the 'hottest' person to hook up with and as seniors, I think that goes out the window and internal beauty becomes so much more attractive."

**Results**

At every age, both men and women allotted more mate dollars to faithfulness than to any other characteristic. They also tended to allot the fewest dollars to social popularity.

- Age was not associated with men's or women's recent number of sex partners (bottom left corner), or with their future number of sex partners (bottom, second from left).
- Age was not associated with the number of mate dollars allotted to mate characteristics, for either sex.

**Discussion**

Participants' responses in Study 1 portrayed a common assumption that young adults become more long-term oriented and less short-term oriented, and more focused on internal characteristics and less focused on external appearances, as they proceed through college.

"Studies 2 and 3, however, documented no age variation in 18-26 year olds' interest in long-term mating or short-term mating. Study 3 did document a lowered emphasis on physical attractiveness among 18-26 year olds relative to 18-19 year olds. The sex differences in short-term mating desires and emphasis on attractiveness were large within each age group.

We are now designing a 4-year prospective investigation of change and stability in mating desires during college.

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**Study 1: Beliefs About Age Variation in Mating Strategies and Partner Preferences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Sample Response</th>
<th>% of Men</th>
<th>% of Women</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Increased long-term mindset</td>
<td>&quot;I think that as freshmen most people want just a relationship, and by the time they are seniors they are starting to look for someone who could be their life partner.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I think as a freshman, most desires are for the here and now. I've noticed that most seniors are looking for more than sexual gratification like a younger student. I think they want more emotions and intimacy than one right stands.&quot;</td>
<td>38%</td>
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**Method**

- Study 2: 178 women and 118 men between 18 and 25 years of age.
- Participants completed a survey in which they were allotted 50 "mate dollars" to their idea of the ideal romantic partner.
- Each participant allotted 0 to 10 dollars for each of the following characteristics: ambition, desire for children, emotional stability, faithfulness, intelligence, physical attractiveness, potential for financial success, sense of humor, similar values, and social popularity.
- Participants completed the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI), a measure of attitudes toward and experience with casual sex.
- Study 3: 235 women and 94 men between 18 and 26 years of age.
- As in Study 2, participants allotted 50 mate dollars to design their ideal romantic partner.

**Studies 2 and 3: Actual Age Variation in Mating Strategies and Partner Preferences**

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