



Intergenerational Gender Preferences in Romantic Partner Selection: An Indonesian Perspective

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Interpersona, 2025, Vol. 19(1), 116–134, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.14257>

Received: 2024-03-26 • **Accepted:** 2024-12-09 • **Published (VoR):** 2025-06-30

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Abstract

Trends in the transition of gender role expectations that have occurred in the last few decades have slowly shifted the views regarding the characteristics that are deemed important in a romantic partner. Both evolutionary and contemporary perspectives are considered in the effort to better understand changes in these shifts. This study aims to explore these shifts by comparing data from two generations based on the year of marriage. Using a cross-sectional design, 279 Indonesian heterosexual married adults ($M_{age} = 39.95$; $SD = 10.23$) completed the Mate Preferences Questionnaire. Participants were grouped by the year of marriage: the senior group ($n = 96$; married before 2000) and the younger group ($n = 163$; married after 2000). Their responses were analyzed using a two-way ANOVA. The study results show that based on sex differences, there were no significant differences between the senior group and the younger group in romantic partner preferences. However, when considering the time of marriage, participants in the younger group prioritised certain criteria more strongly than those in the senior group. These included maintaining order, being ambitious, and having good prospects in terms of intelligence and finances. The interaction between gender differences and marital duration showed significant differences in the importance of similar education levels as well as good education and intelligence. The study highlights the impact of evolving gender role expectations on the process of selecting romantic partners.

Keywords

married couples, gender roles, romantic partner preferences



Background

Partner selection is a critical process, especially in human long-term romantic relationship, as it influences the offspring's biological traits while offering potential benefits, including physical protection, access to resources, or social status (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). Research suggests that males and females typically have distinct preferences when selecting a romantic partner, with these preferences shaped by a combination of biological, ecological, social, and situational factors, such as availability of the potential mates (Takayanagi et al., 2024). While preferences in partner selection may shift over time, evolutionary psychology offers a framework that explains the underlying reasons why certain criteria are prioritised over others by males and females.

Evolutionary perspective views that males and females place different preferences in choosing a mate (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Henshaw et al., 2022). When describing specific partner preferences, evolutionary psychology explains preferences by pointing to the psychological mechanisms involved in mate selection, arguing that certain preferences were advantageous for reproductive success and survival, and therefore benefiting individuals. From an evolutionary perspective, mate preferences are driven by survival through sexual selection—a reproductive investment and a byproduct of adaptation that has evolved alongside pair-bonding in our more modern ancestors (Bode & Kushnick, 2021). For example, males generally prefer females with a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of approximately 0.7, where the waist is significantly narrower than the hips, as this physical trait is believed to signal optimal fertility and reproductive health (Myers & Twenge, 2019). On the other hand, females tend to prefer male partners whose physical traits suggest strength, as they are evolutionary driven to seek a partner capable of providing resources and protection (Furnham & Cuppello, 2024).

However, rapid sociocultural changes in contemporary societies may disrupt how evolutionary needs, such as mate selection based on physical and resource-based traits, are fulfilled. These shifts challenge traditional pathways of satisfying these needs by altering gender roles, economic dynamics, and social expectations, which could lead to a redefinition of what individuals prioritise in relationships. Buss and Schmitt (2019) suggest several premises that challenge evolutionary theories in how they lack specificity and causal explanations. These theories are too broad in their scope, failing to address certain domains such as mate value, mate familiarity, similarity, or parenting that may play a role in long-term mate preferences. They also lack a clear explanation for why people pursue long-term partnerships based on equity or complementarity. A recent study highlights that, alongside physical attractiveness, personality and religious compatibility are significant factors in mate preferences (Furnham & Cuppello, 2024). These findings suggest that shared values and personality alignment may also play crucial role in enhancing reproductive success and long-term relationship sustainability. Other studies also pointed that sexual orientation may also play a factor in determining

preferred partner's traits (Lippa, 2007; Veloso et al., 2014). With shifting sociocultural changes, more factors are bound to override or modify such evolutionary tendencies.

From a historical perspective, the evolutionary-driven need for resources and protection has been reflected in how females often prioritize social and economic stability as key factors when selecting a partner (e.g. Thomas et al., 2020). This is due to the restricted economic access caused by the demands of traditional gender roles which gives more exclusive positions for men to work and earn money; marriage then becomes the means for women to have a stable income. Meanwhile, males tend to prioritize fertility as seen through physical appearance in choosing a partner for balanced reciprocity (Devenport et al., 2023). However, these gender differences in mate preferences are not universal and are shaped by cultural and regional contexts (Ember et al., 2019; Buss & Schmitt, 2019), suggesting that sociocultural factors play a crucial role in how evolutionary preferences are expressed.

This transactional approach to marriage aligns with Becker's (1973) theory, which remains a relevant framework for understanding resource and trait exchanges involved in marriage (Chao & Wang, 2021). The theory asserts that marriage functions as a formal exchange or barter of resources between two individuals. It views marriage as a transaction where each partner provides valuable resources (such as: economic support, social status, or reproductive potential), in return for complementary benefits. However, with society's increasing aspirations for gender equality, a transformation of gender roles has started to occur and potentially transforms the dynamics of marriage transactions. The increasingly open access to education, health, economics, social culture, and other strategic fields provides great opportunities for females to contribute to various fields (Furstenberg, 2015). The increase in women's contribution to education and the industry is also accompanied by a shift in expectations in choosing a romantic partner (Marici et al., 2023). In the past decades, numerous international studies have indicated a concomitant increase in women's preferences to seek partners who are able to contribute to household domestic work (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Magda et al., 2024).

The present study is conducted in Indonesia. Aligned with the international trend, Indonesia is also witnessing emerging patterns of women's increasing participation in the workforce, which may significantly reshape marriage dynamics, gender role expectations, and therefore, mate preferences. Various social changes have emerged in Indonesia as a result of modernization in Indonesia, including a significant increase in women's participation in careers (Himawan et al., 2019; Himawan, Underwood, et al., 2022) and a growing tendency for women to continue working after marriage (Utomo, 2012). These shifts reflect broader transformations in societal values, where professional achievement and economic independence for women are increasingly prioritised. At the same time, there is also increasing public attention to gender equality (Kementerian Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak [Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection], 2019), which further enhance women's career involvement. This shift may challenge

long-standing norms about male breadwinners and female homemakers, which is then reflected in the set of criteria preferred for mate selection.

This study is specifically aimed at exploring differences in men and women's preferences amongst married couples in the eras from before and after gender equality was rampantly socialized in society. The rise in gender equality aspirations in Indonesia is one of the factors that play a big role in instigating this change. In particular, the Indonesian Presidential Instruction No. 9 that was introduced in 2000 appears to formally legitimate government support towards gender mainstreaming in national development. Since the introduction of this law, there has been a growing aspiration for gender equality, particularly evident in the significant rise in women's participation in higher education and careers compared to levels before the year 2000 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010, 2016a, 2016b). Therefore, the present study will provide a comparative analysis of whether there exist differences in romantic partner preferences between men and women who were married before and after 2000.

Furthermore in this study, couples who were married before 2000 will be categorized as the "senior group", and couples who married after 2000 will be categorized as the "younger group". The difference between groups is assumed to occur due to increased aspirations for gender equality in the last few decades, which may have influenced differences in romantic partner preferences between the two generations. Therefore, this study aims to identify gender differences in romantic partner preferences among married couples who were married in the era before and after the gender equality movement was socialized in society. The hypotheses of this research are as follows.

H₁: Gender is a significant variable in determining differences in romantic partner preferences.

H₂: Time of marriage (senior group and younger group) is a significant variable that determines differences in romantic partner preferences.

H₃: There is an interaction effect between gender and time of marriage in determining differences in romantic partner preferences.

Method

Participants

Participants were selected through a means of purposive sampling with the following inclusive criteria: 1). being men or women who were legally married and 2). having heterosexual orientation. The minimum sample size required to achieve sufficient statistical power was 280 participants, which was determined from G*Power 3.1.9.7 for an α value of .05 and an effect size of .25 (Faul et al., 2009). The survey collected data from a total

of 309 participants. However, 30 individuals reported a non-heterosexual orientation, resulting in a final sample size of 279 participants ($M_{age} = 39.95$; $SD = 10.23$).

Design

This research is a cross-sectional study comparing two sample groups based on gender and year of marriage: men and women and groups who were married before (senior group) and after (younger group) 2000. Each participant was examined in terms of their romantic partner preferences. The higher the obtained preference score for each indicator, the greater it showed the importance of that indicator as a romantic partner preference.

Instruments

The questionnaire comprises two parts. The first part asks for participant demographic data while the second part is the Mate Preferences Questionnaire. Participant demographic data includes age, gender, domicile, ethnicity, and time of marriage (before 2000 or after 2000).

The Mate Preferences Questionnaire was originally used by Hill (1945) and Christensen (1947). Despite its age, the criteria have remained relevant and have been used without modification until more recent studies (Boxer et al., 2015; Buss & Schmitt, 2019). This survey consists of 18 statement items that measure important factors for someone when seeking a romantic partner. Participants responded by assigning a score (0 = not relevant or not important; 1 = desirable, but not very important; 2 = important, but not necessary; 3 = very necessary) on each statement. This instrument has been translated into Indonesian by the author through a back translation procedure. This measurement is deemed valid and reliable through previous studies (Bhagal et al., 2019; Conroy-Beam et al., 2019).

Procedure

The survey was conducted online from November – December 2021. Data collection was carried out through questionnaire distribution via Google Forms. The questionnaire contains the instrument-derived items that the researchers used to collect data. The questionnaire link was distributed to participants via the LINE, Whatsapp, and Instagram applications. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants were asked to review the consent form to participate in the study, which contained brief information regarding the study as well as data confidentiality. Access to participate in the study would be granted after the participant agrees to participate in the study. In this survey, participants were asked to include demographic data and answer questions from the study's instruments. As an appreciation, participants had the opportunity to take part in a lottery with a total prize of IDR 1,000,000 for ten randomly selected winners. The ethical aspects of this

study were evaluated by the Ethic Committee, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Pelita Harapan.

Data Analysis

The analysis used the Two-Way ANOVA with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 program, to observe if there were main effects and interaction effects of gender and age at marriage on romantic partner preferences. The Pearson correlation test was used as additional data analysis to test the correlation between research variables.

Results

Participant Characteristics

The total number of participants in this study was 279 participants; 18.9% ($n = 53$) males in the senior group, 22.6% ($n = 63$) women in the senior group, 28.3% ($n = 79$) men in the younger group, and 30.1% ($n = 84$) women in the younger group. The four groups showed homogeneous distribution as they met the goodness of fit, $\chi^2(1, n = 279) = .210, p = .647$. In terms of ages, participants in senior group ($M_{age} = 48.39; SD = 6.05$) were older than those in younger group ($M_{age} = 33.94; SD = 8.34$).

Women predominated the participant groups, both in the younger (54.31%) and senior (51.53%) groups. The majority of participants' domicile distribution was on the Island of Java (81.4%), while the rest were from Sulawesi (8.2%), Sumatra (3.2%), Kalimantan (2.9%), Papua (2.9%), and Bali and Nusa Tenggara (1.4%). The majority of participants are of Javanese ethnicity (35.1%), followed by Chinese (30.5%), Batak (9%), Betawi (6.5%), Bugis (4.7%), Sundanese (4.7%), Papuan (1.1%), Minang (0.7%), and the remainder were classified as other minor ethnicities (7.7%). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Preferred and Non-Preferred Characteristics in Choosing a Partner

The ranking was carried out based on gender and the time of marriage, the obtained results are shown in Table 2. Physical health is the prioritized characteristic of men across generations in choosing a partner, while stability and emotional maturity are the characteristics most considered important for women across generations. Religious similarity, which was considered as an important characteristic for men in senior group in choosing a partner, was not shown among men in the younger group. However, for men in the younger group, the desire to home and children appears to be an important characteristic. For women, the financial prospects of a partner and similarity in religion appear to be important characteristics, that were previously not given much thought to

the senior generation women. All individuals agreed to place political attitudes as the least preferred characteristic in choosing a partner.

Table 2 illustrates the ranking of romantic partner preferences for men and women from the Younger Group and the Senior Group. Table 3 presents the complete descriptive scores for romantic partner preferences based on gender and marriage group.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Senior group				Younger group			
	Males (n = 53)		Females (n = 63)		Males (n = 79)		Females (n = 84)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ethnicity								
Chinese	18	34	33	52.4	12	15.2	22	26.2
Javanese	17	32.1	15	23.8	37	46.8	29	34.5
Betawi	2	3.8	1	1.6	6	7.6	9	10.7
Batak	7	13.2	6	9.5	6	7.6	6	7.1
Bugis	0	0	1	1.6	7	8.9	5	6
Papua	2	3.8	0	0	1	1.3	0	0
Minang	0	0	1	1.6	0	0	1	1.2
Sunda	1	1.9	1	1.6	6	7.6	5	6
Other ethnicities	6	11.2	5	7.9	4	5	7	8.3
Domicile/Regions								
Sumatra	6	11.3	0	0	2	2.5	1	1.2
Java	41	77.4	54	85.7	64	81	68	81
Kalimantan	1	1.9	2	3.2	3	3.8	2	2.4
Sulawesi	2	3.8	4	6.3	5	6.3	12	14.3
Bali & Nusa Tenggara	1	1.9	2	3.2	0	0	1	1.2
Papua	2	3.8	1	1.6	5	6.3	0	0

Table 2
Ranking of Romantic Partner Preferences for Men and Women from the Younger Group and Senior Group

Criteria	Senior group		Younger group	
	Men (n = 53)	Women (n = 63)	Men (n = 79)	Women (n = 84)
Most important criteria	1. Good health (M = 2.74, SD = 0.593)	1. Mutual attraction, love (M = 2.79, SD = 0.531)	1. Good health (M = 2.76, SD = 0.560)	1. Emotional stability and maturity (M = 2.90, SD = 0.368)
	2. Mutual attraction, love (M = 2.72, SD = 0.632)	2. Emotionally stability and maturity (M = 2.79, SD = 0.513)	2. Emotional stability and maturity (M = 2.73, SD = 0.571)	2. Good financial prospect (M = 2.85, SD = 0.478)
	3. Similar religious background (M = 2.66, SD = 0.831)	3. Pleasing disposition (M = 2.78, SD = 0.456)	3. Desire for home and children (M = 2.70, SD = 0.667)	3. Same religion (M = 2.85, SD = 0.526)
Least important criteria	16. Good looks (M = 1.60, SD = 0.968)	16. Good housekeeper and cook (M = 1.57, SD = 0.979)	16. Similar educational background (M = 1.63, SD = 1.015)	16. Good housekeeper and cook (M = 1.58, SD = 0.881)
	17. Similar educational background (M = 1.43, SD = 1.047)	17. Good looks (M = 1.57, SD = 0.856)	17. Good looks (M = 1.61, SD = 8.38)	17. Good looks (M = 1.51, SD = 0.768)
	18. Similar political background (M = 0.96, SD = 1.126)	18. Similar political background (M = 1.17, SD = 1.071)	18. Similar political background (M = 0.86, SD = 0.984)	18. Similar political background (M = 0.93, SD = 1.027)

Table 3
Romantic Partner Preferences Based on Gender and Time of Marriage

Variable	Gender						Time of Marriage					
	Men			Women			Younger Group			Senior Group		
	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank
Good health	2.75	.571	1	2.78	.507	6	2.8	.495	2	2.71	.590	2
Mutual attraction, love	2.70	.687	2	2.79	.552	4	-1.240	2.74	.656	5	.569	1
Similar religious background	2.68	.775	3	2.80	.584	2	-1.397	2.77	0.641	3	0.737	4
Emotional stability and maturity	2.68	.628	4	2.86	0.438	1	-2.744**	2.82	0.483	1	0.605	3
Desire for home and children	2.67	.706	5	2.76	.589	7	-1.227	2.74	0.627	4	0.678	4
Dependability	2.59	.676	6	2.78	.530	5	-2.644**	2.72	0.593	6	0.634	6
Pleasing disposition	2.55	.680	7	2.70	0.602	9	-1.924**	2.63	0.686	9	0.581	7
Refinement, neatness	2.49	.704	8	2.54	0.664	10	-.632	2.63	0.638	10	0.715	10
Good financial prospect	2.43	.858	9	2.79	.513	3	-4.271**	2.71	0.626	7	0.818	8
Ambition & industriousness	2.37	.842	10	2.75	.521	8	-4.547**	2.65	0.634	8	0.806	9
Education, intelligence	2.17	.887	11	2.52	0.734	11	-3.600**	2.48	0.714	11	0.941	12
Sociability	2.08	.896	12	2.29	.838	12	-2.088	2.17	0.865	12	0.883	11
Good housekeeper and cook	1.93	.858	13	1.58	.921	16	3.307**	1.75	0.884	15	1.74	0.943
Chastity	1.92	1.070	14	1.92	1.168	14	-0.013	1.83	1.147	14	2.04	1.075
Favorable social status	1.83	.958	15	2.2	.86	13	-3.406**	2.03	0.906	13	2.03	0.955
Good looks	1.61	.889	16	1.54	.805	17	0.677	1.56	0.802	17	1.59	0.905
Similar educational background	1.55	1.029	17	1.74	1.080	15	-1.489	1.62	1.038	16	1.70	1.089
Similar political background	0.90	1.040	18	1.03	1.050	18	-1.057	0.9	1.004	18	1.08	1.097

p* = .05, *p* = .001.

Romantic Partner Preferences Based on Gender and Time of Marriage

The results of the Two-Way ANOVA for each partner preference characteristic can be seen in Table 4. The results generally show that several romantic partner preference characteristics are determined by gender, while others are determined by the time of marriage. Specifically, there was an interaction effect between gender and time of marriage to explain preferences regarding similar educational backgrounds (see Figure 1). These findings provide support for all three study hypotheses.

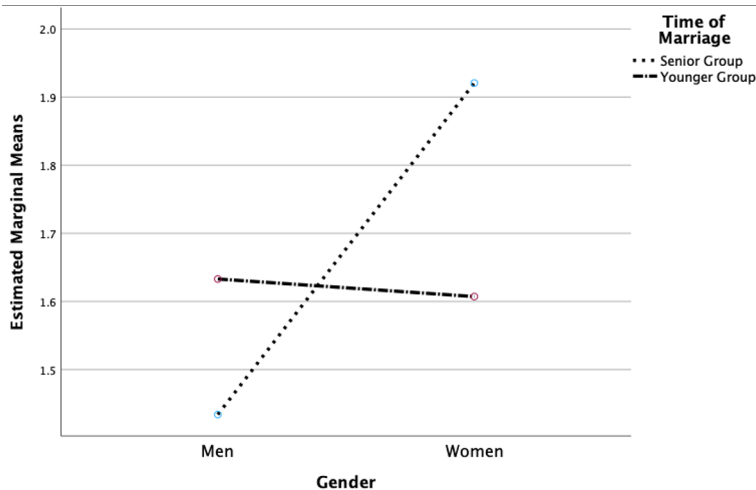
Table 4
Two-Way ANOVA Results for Each Romantic Partner Preference Characteristic

Characteristic	Gender (F)	Time of Marriage (F)	Gender x Time of Marriage (F)
Good housekeeper and cook	10.695**	0.001	0.021
Pleasing disposition	4.815**	0.000	3.031
Sociability	4.007*	0.138	0.049
Similar educational background	3.240	0.200	4.005*
Refinement, neatness	0.566	11.058**	0.031
Good financial prospect	20.714**	7.989**	1.601
Chastity	0.009	2.338	0.547
Dependability	6.942**	0.860	0.004
Emotional stability and mature	7.759**	3.483	0.022
Desire for home and children	1.618	0.411	0.084
Favorable social status	11.411**	0.022	0.034
Good looks	0.384	0.073	0.094
Similar religious background	1.735	0.825	0.228
Ambition, industriousness	21.628**	6.091**	0.182
Similar political background	1.213	1.867	0.323
Mutual attraction, love	1.395	0.075	0.028
Good health	0.061	2.029	1.130
Education, intelligence	14.209**	9.649**	0.287

p* = .05. *p* = .001.

Figure 1

Interaction Effect of Gender and Time of Marriage Toward Similar Education Background



Based on gender, men showed a significantly stronger preference for partners who can manage household tasks, such as being a good housekeeper and cook. In contrast, women placed significantly greater importance on finding a partner with stable emotions, a pleasing disposition, dependability, sociability, industriousness, favorable social status, as well as good intelligence and financial prospects. Based on the time of marriage, participants in the younger group placed significantly greater importance on finding a partner who is neat, intelligent, financially stable, and ambitious.

In particular, we observed the interaction effect between gender and marital status, $F(1, 275) = 4.005, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .014$, in terms of the preference for having partner with a similar educational background (see Figure 1). The main effect for gender, $F(1, 275) = 3.240, p = .073, \eta_p^2 = .012$, or time of marriage, $F(1, 275) = .200, p = .655, \eta_p^2 = .001$, for the preference of having partner with a similar educational background was not observed. The significant interaction effects reveals nuanced differences in how each group prioritises educational similarity in a partner. Specifically, women in the senior group emphasised the importance of having a partner with a similar educational background, whereas women in the younger group placed less priority on this aspect. Conversely, men in the senior group seemed to view educational similarity as less essential, while men in the younger group showed an increased expectation for a partner with a similar educational background.

Discussion

This study focuses on exploring differences in partner preferences between generations in Indonesia based on gender and time of marriage. Overall, participants across different gender and generational groups consistently emphasized the importance of emotional stability, mutual attraction, similar religious backgrounds, and good health as key criteria in selecting partners. This finding may indicate how evolutionary needs for reproduction and security are being met through evolving methods. Aligned with findings by Lippa (2007), the emotional aspect and affective experience appeared to be the dominant characteristics in partner selection. Furthermore, good health seems to be one of the key preferred indicators for partner preference (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2020; Tskhay et al., 2017), often prioritized even over good looks. With advancements in medical science, indicators of reproductive potential are likely better assessed through various health indicators (Tybur & Gangestad, 2011) rather than physical appearance. However, while these findings originated from different cultures and prioritized intelligence as a top characteristic in partner selection, participants in this study ranked it 11th, suggesting that intelligence is a less dominant factor in their partner preferences. Furthermore, religious background is regarded as one of the most important criteria for participants in this study, whereas it is given less priority in the international context (Lippa, 2007). This finding reflects Indonesia's cultural uniqueness, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining social and cultural harmony (low in individualism and long-term orientation) over individual success and achievement (Hofstede Insights, 2021). It also underscores how deeply religious affiliation is embedded in Indonesian society (Himawan, Martoyo, et al., 2022), influencing even the selection of romantic partners.

Despite the universal criteria in partner selection, this study identified three key findings related to romantic partner preferences: 1) gender plays a significant role in shaping differences in partner preference, 2) shifts in sociocultural trends in society affect differences in partner preference, and 3) there is an interaction effect between gender and time of marriage in shaping partner preferences.

Concerning gender differences, it is interesting to note that, although physical attractiveness is often prioritized by males in partner selection (Gao et al., 2017; Lippa, 2007; Meltzer et al., 2014), male participants in our study ranked good looks as one of the least important criteria in their partner preferences. This finding aligns with a previous study on Indonesian males (Himawan & Pratiwi, 2023), which found that while physical attractiveness is prioritized in the context of casual dating, it is not considered a key criterion for long-term relationships. In other words, this finding may suggest that the evolutionary need for reproduction and security may be better satisfied by good health and having favorable psychological traits, such as mutual love, and emotional stability. Compared to the women participants, men in this study placed greater importance on having a partner who is a good housekeeper and cook. On the other hand, this study found that women placed good financial prospects as one of the top (3rd rank)

criteria in selecting a marriage partner. These findings highlight traditional gender role expectations that are predominant in Indonesian society (Himawan & Surijah, 2022; Smith-Hefner, 2019), which continue to influence partner preferences. In traditional gender roles, the division of labor places men as the family breadwinners, while women are responsible for domestic tasks. Furthermore, compared to the men, women in the study placed significantly greater importance on having a partner with higher social status, intelligence, and ambition. While these attributes align with the traditional expectation of men as breadwinners, this preference may also reflect the persistence of hypergamous marriage norms, where an ideal union is seen as one in which a man holds a higher socioeconomic status than a woman. This finding corresponds with previous studies (Himawan, 2020; Himawan & Surijah, 2022; Mangkey & Himawan, 2024) emphasizing the deeply ingrained gender hierarchies that continue to shape relationship dynamics in Indonesia.

When comparing partner preferences among those in the younger and senior group, this study found that participants who married more recently (after the year 2000) placed greater importance on having a partner who is neat, intelligent, ambitious, and has good financial prospects. These attributes may be closely linked to a person's ability to succeed in the workplace or entrepreneurial ventures. Economic challenges in building a household (Azzam et al., 2024; Nobles & Bottenheim, 2008) may explain why those who are in the younger group place greater emphasis on these expectations. These challenges may also compel women to contribute financially to the family, usually in the role of a secondary earner (Mangkey & Himawan, 2024; Utomo, 2012).

The expectation for women to contribute financially to the family is further supported by the finding that men in the younger group increasingly prioritize having a partner with a similar educational background. This finding aligns with previous research, which indicates greater acceptance among men of women's roles in careers (Himawan & Pratiwi, 2023; Himawan et al., 2024). It is worth noting that such preference was not observable among women. Although conclusive explanations cannot be drawn at this stage due to limited data, two plausible arguments may account for this result. First, women in the younger group may not feel the same need for educational parity, possibly because they prioritize other traits, such as emotional stability or social status. Second, the decreased importance of similar educational backgrounds among women may reflect their response to navigating marriage within the context of idealized hypergamous norms. As women's participation in higher education has increased (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2016b; Putri et al., 2020), it has become less likely for them to find partners with equal or higher educational qualifications (Himawan, 2020). This may explain why women no longer prioritize educational similarity in a partner, even though they continue to value intelligence highly.

In general, this study highlights how partner preferences in Indonesia are shaped by both universal and culturally specific factors. While marriage among Indonesians is

driven by the need to satisfy evolutionary imperatives, it is also shaped by important sociocultural expectations that adapt to changing economic demands. Thus, marital relationship is not only seen as a means of reproduction and companionship but also as a key institution for preserving cultural values and social harmony.

Several limitations are noted in this study. First, although the Mate Preference Questionnaire has been widely used in international contexts (Boxer et al., 2015; Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Furnham & Cuppello, 2024), it may not fully capture the characteristics of preferred marriage partners in Indonesia. Indigenous values and cultural practices unique to Indonesia may shape a distinct set of criteria for partner selection that the scale may overlook. For example, similar ethnicity, or receiving approval or blessing from parents and extended family (Himawan et al., 2021), may be important characteristics in choosing a partner among Indonesians. Furthermore, we were unable to conduct additional analysis as we did not collect key demographic information, such as participants' economic status, region of residence (urban or rural), which may have influenced their responses. Grouping the time of marriage also has limitations as it is less sensitive in categorizing those who were married approximately to 2000—they may have been exposed to views of gender equality closer to that time. Collecting data on married couples may also potentially be biased considering that they have to rely on their memory when choosing partners in the past, which could also be influenced by the length of their marriage. Finally, although the study was conducted with a sufficient sample, non-random sampling techniques may have limited the generalizability of the study results.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided an important perspective regarding the criteria of partner selection among Indonesian society across gender and generational groups. In general, this study sheds light on how partner preferences in Indonesia are shaped by both evolutionary and sociocultural factors. Participants appeared to universally agree on emphasizing the following key criteria in partner selection: emotional stability, mutual attraction, and good health, which may correspond to their needs for security and successful reproduction. However, sociocultural values placed on marriage, such as the hypergamous norm of marriage, and changing sociocultural trends in response to shifting economic demands, also play a critical role in shaping these preferences. Traditional gender roles remain influential, with men often favouring domestic capabilities and women prioritizing financial prospects and social status in a partner. At the same time, the increasing emphasis on similar educational backgrounds among men in the younger generation suggests a growing acceptance of more egalitarian partnerships. This highlights the complex interplay between enduring evolutionary drives and the dynamic social and economic forces shaping modern relationships in Indonesia.

The present study offers several theoretical recommendations. First, future research should consider adapting the survey instruments to be more culturally sensitive to the Indonesian population. Second, since this study relies on participants' recollections of partner preferences before marriage, future studies could employ longitudinal or time-series data collection methods to capture more accurate patterns over time and to reduce reliance on retrospective memory. Lastly, incorporating key demographic variables, such as: ethnicity, income, education, and religious affiliation could provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of partner preferences in Indonesia.

This study also offers some practical insights for professionals working in relationship counseling, family planning, and social policy in Indonesia. Understanding that partner preferences are shaped by both evolutionary needs and sociocultural factors, including traditional gender roles and economic pressures, can help counselors design more culturally sensitive programs that address these dynamics. For instance, relationship counseling can benefit from acknowledging the persistent hypergamous norms and traditional gender expectations while promoting more egalitarian values, particularly among younger generations. Additionally, recognizing the increasing importance of educational parity among men could lead to targeted interventions encouraging gender-neutral perspectives on partner selection and career aspirations in younger generations.

Funding: The authors have no funding to report.

Acknowledgments: The authors have no additional (i.e., non-financial) support to report.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Ethics Statement: The ethical aspect of this study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Pelita Harapan, Indonesia.

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