

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON MATE SELECTION:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The mate selection process in American society has been characterized as individualistic and personality centered (Winch, 1971), which suggests that two individuals decide by themselves, and ideally on the basis of love, to marry. In fact, many other variables are in operation. According to Winch, the two principles of ethnocentric preference and incest avoidance, in joint operation, define a field of eligibles from which one may choose a marriage partner. Homogamy (homos, same + gamia, marrying) is a consequence of the principle of ethnocentric preference. Coombs defines homogamy as "primarily a reflection of the desire, conscious or unconscious, for each person to associate with those who share his basic values" (1962: 155).

If the field of eligibles is defined through the principles of incest avoidance and ethnocentric preference, then how is the selection of a mate made from the field of eligibles? According to Winch, there is evidence to support his theory that this choice is made on the basis of the "complementarity of personal needs" (1971: 488).

An added dimension of the mate selection process can be gained by focusing on the roles played by parents and peers. While the individual chooses his or her potential

spouse on the basis of his or her standards (in which the parents are often influential), Goode suggests that the person he or she chooses "is likely to be more eligible as a mate according to general social norms and as judged by peers and parents, than the average individual with whom the youngster formerly indulged in love-play" (1959: 43; my emphasis). The problem to be investigated, then, is what role do parents play in the mate selection process in American society, and how is their influence manifested?

The Importance of the Problem

Because of the contention that mate selection in our society is a matter of individual choice, little attention has been paid to the role of parents and peers in this process. Many researchers agree with Winch's theory (1971) that in a society with a relatively isolated nuclear family, the family plays only a minimal role in mate selection. He finds this to be true of American society. Despite Winch's assertion, a substantial number of researchers (Udry, 1972; Goode, 1968; Sussman, 1953; Coombs, 1962) acknowledge that the roles of parents and peers are influential in determining mate selection, and it appears to be a common belief that parents and peers are instrumental in supporting the norm of homogamy. Little research evidence

exists, however, that describes just how their influence is exerted in a society which stresses the ideology of an individual choice based on "love."

In spite of the extensive literature in the field of mate selection, only minimal research has been undertaken regarding parental influence on mate selection. The most recent study was undertaken by Coombs in 1962. It appears, then, that a definite need exists for a more up-to-date study. Since there is a lack of literature and research regarding the subject matter, an exploratory study was undertaken to gain insight into this theoretically important area.

Review of the Literature

In American society, marriage is considered a very important life goal. The individual is inundated by the media concerning the importance of marriage. In addition, there are often great pressures from friends and relatives concerning marriage plans. The pressures on a female to make a "good match" may be greater than those exerted on a male, because a female's status is defined by the social position of the male she marries, and in terms of her relationship to her husband. Parsons described this derived status by pointing out that "the woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children . . ." (Parsons, in Coser, 1964: 257). This characteriza-

tion may be changing somewhat due to the rise of feminism, but marriage still appears to be a desired goal in our society.

Our marriage oriented society expects a young person to date and eventually marry someone who is compatible, thus assuring marital happiness. Young people commence dating at an increasingly early age and with greater frequency than has been true in the past. Kephart (1966) found in his study of college students that more than half of his sample (both male and female) had had their first date by the age of thirteen, and were soon thereafter dating frequently.

Dating, although a fairly recent innovation, is very important in American society because it is one of the first steps in the mate selection process. Dating has also been characterized as "the 'window-shopping'-period--it carries no commitment to buy the merchandise on display" (Winch, 1952: 435).

According to Leonard Benson, the idea of dating has emerged because of new social conditions. He describes these as: "the growth of an adolescent youth culture; the general stress on love in contemporary society; the rise of sex equality; and voluntarism in mate selection" (1971: 52). One of the reasons for the increasing importance of dating in our society is the stress on romantic love as the basis for marriage. In order to fall in love, individuals must

associate with each other.

The steady rise in frequency of dating is a reflection of the changing nature of courtship behavior during the past two centuries. The norm in colonial America assumed that "parents were responsible for the marriage arrangements of their children" (Burgess, et al., 1971: 267). As the economic and social conditions of the young nation changed, so did the mating behavior. By the early 1800's, increasing emphasis was placed on freedom of choice of the marital partner. Near the end of the nineteenth century, "the expectation of companionship between boys and girls before marriage was well established" (Burgess, et al.: 1971, 267). This trend toward less parental control in the mate selection process has continued until today parents ideally do not exert any direct control over the courtship process. This, however, does not imply that parents do not affect their child's selection of a marriage partner. Instead, the influence is more indirect, and can be manifested by three general means. The parents may attempt to control the social contacts of their offspring; they may oppose a match and attempt to break it up; or the child may consciously or unconsciously select a mate who he or she feels will meet the approval of the parents (Burgess, et al., 1971: 298). The parents usually communicate to their children, through socialization, those standards which they find acceptable; in other words, they transmit their ex-

pectations.

The concept of force of expectations holds that "the behavior of a person in a particular situation is motivated by attitudes and ideas formed in his various experiences from birth to the time of acting in that situation" (Burgess, et al., 1971: 241). Although Burgess et al. theorized that the force of expectations was the most powerful single pressure on mate selection, they also postulate that presently in the United States every type of parental role in mate selection may be found (Burgess, et al., 1971: 298). Of these, the most prevalent is the positivistic role in which the parent "assisted and encouraged the development of relationships of which they approved and advised rather than dictated the child's choices" (Blood, 1972: 290).

We may find, then, that parental roles generally will be positivistic and democratic, as supported by Bates in his study, "Parental Roles in Courtship" (1942). This view is further confirmed by Sussman's (1953) assertion, stemming from his study of parents, that parents more often discouraged, rather than prohibited, marriages of which they disapproved. In those rare cases where parents acted in an authoritarian manner by prohibiting marriages, their offspring often eloped or were secretly married (Bates, 1942: 484).

Furthermore, parents may be seen as instrumental in upholding the idea of homogamy. By teaching their children standards for selecting a partner, they insure, perhaps unconsciously, that the individual chosen will be a member of their social class, racial group, religious group, or from the same general background. Children are inculcated with certain characteristics of a desirable match, and therefore, although parents do not insist that they choose a certain mate, their values are transmitted to their offspring. The resulting idea is often expressed: "I trust you to choose the 'right' person."

Through this "trust," then, parental influence has become indirect rather than direct. According to Bates (1942), at least a generation ago most children were bound to experience direct parental control on mate selection, yet a generation later he found that through the indirect control over the associations of their offspring, parents would help determine an appropriate field of eligibles. The process of mate selection, then, increasingly is based on self-selection, but the selection is often from a group of eligibles which are chosen by utilizing the values instilled by the parents. Goode supports this contention when he suggests that "In our society, parents threaten, cajole, wheedle, bribe, and persuade their children to 'go with the right people,' during both the early love play and later courtship phases. Primarily, they seek to control love

relationships by influencing the informal social contacts of their children: moving to appropriate neighborhoods and schools, giving parties and helping make out invitation lists, by making their children aware that certain individuals have ineligibility traits (race, religion, manners, clothing, and so on)" (1968: 256).

While parents may "seek to control love relationships" in the same manner, "the peer group can support or undercut parental influence, depending on whether the general values of parents and peer groups are alike or different. When the values are essentially the same, the individual will, presumably, suffer only minimal conflict finding a proper kind of love partner. But when parents and peers differ, the potential for conflict is great, depending upon the influence and meaningfulness of each of the pressure groups for the individual" (Bell, 1967: 126).

In other words, if Bell and Goode are correct in their description of the role parents and peers play in the mate selection process, parents and peers act as legitimizers and validators of the individual's feelings of "being in love," which is then used as the final criterion for selecting a marriage partner from the field of eligibles. While "being in love" may be perceived as self-defined, there is reason to believe that awareness of love must be validated and legitimized by significant others (e.g. Cohen, 1964).

This study will view the parents' roles as legitimizing or sanctioning. This behavior is characterized by Nadel as "any tendency to deviate on the part of one actor will be met and corrected by the punitive sanctions provided by the other; conformity or 'normality' will in turn be rewarded and hence reinforced" (Nadel, 1965: 51). We might expect, then, that parents will act to validate or invalidate their offspring's selection of a potential mate, rather than dictating the choice, and that their indirect influence will be manifested in two ways: by the standards they instill in their children and by their role as validator.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Research Design

Since there is a lack of literature and research, especially contemporary research, regarding the problem of interest, an exploratory study was undertaken. An exploratory study seeks "to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it, often in order to formulate a more precise research problem or to develop hypotheses" (Selltitz, et al., 1959: 50). Since the goal of the study was to achieve insight into parental influence on mate selection, this particular research design appeared to be the most feasible and appropriate.

Selection of the Sample

The sample consisted of fifty married students (twenty-five males and twenty-five females) who were enrolled at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University during Fall and/or Winter quarter of the 1973-1974 academic year. As a list of married students could not be obtained from the registrar because of confidentiality of records, the selection of subjects was made in the following manner. A systematic random selection of 270 names was made from the student directory by employing a table of random numbers to select the first name, and

then counting off every sixtieth name, in order to reach a total of 270 out of a student body of roughly 16,000. It was felt that 270 names would include at least 50 married students. Names were eliminated if the address given in the student directory was on-campus, on the assumption that students living on-campus were unmarried, and if any had married since the directory was published, their number would be quite small. Also, names were eliminated from the list if there was no number listed. It is recognized that this procedure introduced a bias in the population selected for study.

There are three possible reasons why an individual might not have a telephone number listed. The first is that he or she had a telephone, or planned to have one installed, but the number was not known at Fall registration, when information for the directory was gathered. It is doubtful that there are any significant differences between these individuals and others listed in the directory. The second possibility, that the student might not be able to afford a phone, may in fact introduce a bias, in that individuals with lower-middle or lower class backgrounds may be excluded. However, there is a substantial proportion of class IV and V subjects in the sample. The third possibility is that individuals who value their privacy might not have a phone, or might have an unlisted phone number. If this is the case, a bias might have been

introduced if such individuals were numerous. However, since the number of names excluded was very small, it follows that the proportion of married students excluded was also very small, and therefore if a bias was introduced, it was minimal.

The students chosen were contacted by phone and each was asked whether he or she was married. If the answer was positive, he or she was asked to meet the researcher at a mutually convenient time. All but four male subjects agreed to be interviewed. The four who refused gave lack of time as their reason. Interviews were conducted in the subject's home, his or her school office, or the researcher's office.

After each individual was interviewed, permission was sought to mail his or her parents a questionnaire. Of the fifty subjects interviewed, forty-three gave permission. Reasons given for refusal included a concern that their parents not be bothered, or that their parents would not respond to a questionnaire. One subject felt that her parents had "bad feelings" about her marriage and did not want to re-open the subject. In all cases, the subjects' feelings were respected, and no pressure was applied for their compliance.

A questionnaire, with a cover letter explaining the study, was mailed to the parents of those students who had granted permission. Due to a lack of time and finances,

only one mailing was made. If both parents were living, two questionnaires were sent, with a request that each parent fill out a questionnaire. (Nine parents were deceased.) In the one case of divorced parents, a questionnaire was sent to each parent. One parent was eliminated from the sample because she was living outside of the United States. At first it was felt that step-parents should be asked to fill out a questionnaire, but after the interviews were conducted, it became apparent that in those cases of subjects who had step-parents, the step-parents had little influence because they had not been a part of the family for a long period. A total of seventy-six questionnaires were sent. Of these, fifty-five were returned, a return rate of seventy-two per cent (See Table I).

The Instruments

The interview instrument consisted of a combination of fixed-response and open-ended questions, and also included two scales: a scale measuring attitude toward discipline exercised by parents, and a scale measuring belief in feminism (See Appendix II). These scales, however, were not used in the analysis of the data.

Excluding the scales, the final interview schedule consisted of eighty items, many of which were added after pre-testing the original schedule. The original interview

TABLE I
RETURN RATE OF PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRES

	<u>Student Refusals</u>	<u>Number Mailed</u>	<u>Number Returned</u>	<u>Return Rate</u>
Male	3	34	23	67.65%
Female	4	42	32	76.10%
TOTAL	7	76	55	72.30%

schedule was revised considerably after pre-testing, and it was at this point that the decision was made to add the two scales (See Appendix I and II).

The first part of the final interview schedule was aimed mainly at getting background data, including such variables as sex, age, urban-rural background, social economic status of the parents and the subjects themselves, and items indicating how often parents and subjects communicated by visiting, writing, or phoning. The other items were open-ended questions concerning courtship behavior and relations with parents during the pre-marriage stage. The final summary question was, "Do you think your parents had any influence on who you dated or married, and what was the influence?"

The Parental Questionnaire

The parental questionnaire consisted of twenty-nine fixed-response and open-ended questions concerning parental perception of influence on the child's courtship (See Appendix IV). This questionnaire was pre-tested on parents of married children in the Blacksburg area. After pre-testing, a few minor alterations were made (See Appendix III and IV). It was hoped that by getting input from both the parents and their offspring, two perspectives would be gained; that is, parental perception of their influence and the offspring's perception of parental influence.

Characteristics of the Sample: Student Respondents

Age

In this category, there was a very wide range (twenty-three years) since the youngest subject was nineteen and the oldest forty-two. The average age was 24.4 years, and the median age 23.1 years. There was not much difference between the ages of mates; the average difference was 1.4 years and the maximum difference was five years. Table II illustrates selected age characteristics of the subjects and their mates. Since there was quite a range in age, it might also be expected that there would be a wide range in length of time the respondents had been married. This was the case: a range of one month to eighteen years.

Class Standing

Twenty-two (44%) of the sample were graduate students, of which sixteen (73%) were enrolled in a Master's program and twenty-seven per cent in a doctoral program (See Table III). Fifty-two per cent of the sample was comprised of undergraduate students. The large number of graduate students in the sample reflects the fact that a larger proportion of graduate students are married.

The subjects were enrolled in thirty-two different

TABLE II
 SELECTED AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBJECTS AND THEIR MATES

<u>Age</u>	<u>Age of Subject</u>	<u>Age of mate</u>	<u>Age at Engagement*</u>	<u>Age at marriage</u>
20 and under	9	4	25	25
21 to 25	26	34	21	23
26 to 30	10	7	2	2
31 to 35	4	4	0	0
35 and over	1	1	0	0
TOTAL	50	50	48	50

*Two subjects indicated that they were never formally engaged.

TABLE III
PRESENT CLASS STANDING OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS

<u>Class</u>	<u>Number of Subjects</u>	<u>Percentage of Sample</u>
Freshman	4	8%
Sophomore	3	6%
Junior	10	20%
Senior	9	18%
Graduated	2*	4%
Master's	16	32%
Doctoral	6	12%
TOTAL	50	100%

*These two individuals had graduated and are presently enrolled in non-degree granting programs.

majors. For clarification and simplification, these majors were classified according to the colleges within the university. The following results were obtained: eleven (22%) were enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences; eleven (22%) in the College of Business; seven (14%) in the College of Agriculture; seven (14%) in the College of Education; six (12%) in the College of Engineering; five (10%) in the College of Home Economics; and three (6%) in the College of Architecture.

Quarterly Cumulative Average

Possibly because of the large proportion of graduate students included in the sample, the mean Quarterly Cumulative Average (QCA) 3.22 was quite high. Surprisingly, the mode for the sample was 4.0, probably again reflecting the large proportion of graduate students. Forty-four per cent of the sample had a QCA of 3.5 or above, which seems quite unusual. It has been postulated that marital status may be related to academic performance, that is, that married students tend to perform better than single students. In a review of the literature, Marshall and King (1966) found that the findings were inconclusive. Some studies indicated that married students achieved higher academically, some that single students achieved higher, while others concluded that there was no difference, and that marital status was not related to academic

achievement. Since the results of these studies are contradictory, we can only speculate whether marital status, class standing, or some other variable is in operation.

Religion

The sample was comprised mainly of Protestants (See Table IV) with Catholics making up the second largest group. There were no Jewish students included in the sample. One respondent gave his religious preference as "other," stating that he felt he was religious but that he could not classify himself as any of the given categories, as he felt that he had developed "my own kind of religion."

The subjects and their parents were about equally distributed into the different religious classifications except for the category "none." Eight (16%) of the respondents placed themselves in this category, while only four (8%) classified their mothers in this manner, and three (6%) classified their fathers as having no religious preference. The fairly high number of no preference in religion possibly reflected the disenchantment felt by youth toward organized religion. Or possibly, they perceive themselves as having no religious preference, but in actual fact would fit into one of the other categories.

Social Economic Status

It was decided to view the social economic status of

TABLE IV
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF RESPONDENT, MATE, AND PARENTS

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Respondent</u>	<u>Mate</u>	<u>Mother</u>	<u>Father</u>
Protestant	32 (64%)	36 (72%)	34 (68%)	37 (74%)
Catholic	9 (15%)	7 (14%)	13 (26%)	9 (18%)
Other	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
None	8 (16%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	3 (6%)
TOTAL	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)

the parents as the indicator, since this indicated the background in which the students were raised, and because students are still in the process of establishing their own status. Hollingshead's Two Factor Index of Social Position was used to measure SES (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958). This index utilizes father's occupation and education, and assigns a weight to each factor. In this manner, a researcher may determine class status. The continuum obtained may be broken into five social classes, with Class I being the highest and Class V the lowest.

A fairly large proportion (16%) of individuals were ranked in Class I (See Table V). This might be a true reflection of the social economic background of the respondents, since college students are generally from upper-middle and middle class backgrounds. There is some question though, whether students might tend to idealize their father's occupation with the consequence that the rank assigned by utilizing Hollingshead's Index may be higher than their actual SES status.

The distribution of the social classes was fairly normal, with almost as large a Class V distribution as Class I. Five (10%) of the sample were ranked as belonging to Class V. This was not expected, since a college population is generally seen as being middle-class in background. The inclusion of Class V individuals in the sample may show the changing nature of the background of

TABLE V
SOCIAL ECONOMIC STATUS OF SUBJECTS

<u>Social Class</u>	<u>Number of Subjects</u>	<u>Percentage of Sample</u>
I	8	16%
II	8	16%
III	18	36%
IV	11	22%
V	5	10%
TOTAL	50	100%

college students, that is, that more lower class students have the opportunity to attend college.

Rural Urban Background

The majority of respondents (50%) were raised in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, cities ranging from a population size of 50,000 to metropolitan areas (See Table VI). A fairly large proportion (28%) were raised in rural areas, ranging from open country to towns with less than 2,500 inhabitants. Twenty-two per cent were raised in medium sized towns or cities with populations size ranging from twenty-five hundred to 49,999. Although the largest number of respondents are from urban areas, there are a substantial number of respondents with rural backgrounds, and consequently, we have a diverse sample in terms of rural-urban background.

The sample, then, is reasonably diverse, except in the areas of race and religion, which are distorted primarily because of the kind of students attending V. P. I. & S. U. There are, in fact, very few Jewish and Black students in attendance, and the Catholic population is quite low. The average respondent, therefore, was a white, middle-class urban Protestant. A substantial number of respondents, however, were from rural backgrounds and/or lower or upper class homes.

TABLE VI
RURAL-URBAN BACKGROUND OF SUBJECTS

<u>Size of Town</u>	<u>Number of Subjects</u>	<u>Percentage of Sample</u>
Open Country	7	14%
Less than 999	4	8%
1000 to 2499	3	6%
2500 to 4999	1	2%
5000 to 9999	2	4%
10,000 to 49,999	8	16%
50,000 to 99,999	7	14%
Metropolitan	18	36%
TOTAL	50	100%

The student group was particularly diverse in terms of age, length of time married, and major subject of study. It is fair to say, then, that given the built in bias of a sample drawn from students at a state university, this sample exhibited a reasonable range of background characteristics.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, contingency tables will be utilized, and descriptive statistics will be employed to present the data. In addition, quotes from the student interviews and parental questionnaires will be used to illustrate the various ways in which parents attempted to, or actually influenced the mate selection process of their children. In this way, we may become more familiar with this theoretically important area, and may use the knowledge gained as a basis for specifying future research.

The data collected for this study supported many of the research findings of other studies on mate selection. For example, respondent marriages occurred between individuals with homogamous social characteristics. The data also showed that respondents feel that the choice of a marriage partner is an individual decision which is based on the personal characteristics of the mate. This was shown by the fact that forty-nine (98%) of the student respondents indicated that they themselves had had the most important influence on their choice of marriage partner. Forty-four (86%) indicated that they married because they found pleasure in their pre-marital relationship. Four students (8%) indicated that they had been seeing their prospective mates

often, and therefore decided to get married. The other three (6%) said that the marriage would solve problems. In one case there was a pre-marital pregnancy, and in the other two instances, the individuals were living together and partly because of parental disapproval, decided to marry.

Although the data supported many of the findings of previous research, they also supported the contention of this study: that parents do have influence on the mate selection behavior of their children. When students were asked who, other than themselves, exerted the most influence in their choice of a mate, sixteen (32%) said friends, fourteen (28%) said either mother, father, or both parents, eleven (22%) said none. The other responses were divided among siblings, relatives, spouse, other adults and self (See Table VII). Although friends were ranked higher by four per cent as the second individuals to influence choice of marriage partner, the results were different for the third most influential individual. Here twenty-four (48%) saw no one as influencing them, and twelve (24%) saw parents, whereas only five (10%) mentioned friends. The other individuals mentioned were siblings, relatives, and other adults.

Once again, we find evidence that individuals feel that the choice of marriage partner is a very personal one, and they make this choice on their own. Yet, when the students were asked whether their parents influenced who they dated

TABLE VII
 RANKING OF INDIVIDUALS CONSIDERED INFLUENTIAL
 IN THE DECISION TO MARRY

<u>Individual</u>	<u>Rank</u>		
	<u>First</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Third</u>
Self	49 (98%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Spouse	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)
None	0 (0%)	11 (22%)	24 (48%)
Father	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Mother	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Both Parents	0 (0%)	9 (18%)	10 (20%)
Siblings	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)
Relatives	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Friends	0 (0%)	16 (32%)	5 (10%)
Other Adults	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)
TOTAL	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)

or married, the overwhelming majority, thirty-five (70%) responded that their parents had influenced the choice of dating or marriage partner and only fifteen (30%) responded negatively (See Table VIII).

When parents were questioned as to whether they perceived themselves as influencing their child's choice of dating or marriage partner, twenty (36.3%) indicated yes, thirty-four (61.8%) felt that they had not, and one was not sure.

When asked the general question, "Do you think that most parents try to influence their sons or daughters to date certain kinds of people?" the following results were obtained. Thirty-three (60%) responded yes, eleven (20%) no, and eleven (20%) had no opinion. We find then, that sixty per cent of parents felt that parents generally attempt to influence the dating behavior of their children, while only thirty-six per cent felt that they themselves had exerted influence. Of the sixty per cent who felt that parents tried to influence dating, fifteen (45.5%) felt that they had been influential, seventeen (51.5%) felt they had not been influential, and one respondent (3%) was not sure (See Table IX). Of those who felt that parents do not try to influence dating, two (18.2%) felt that they were influential and nine (81.8%) felt they were not influential. There were ten parents who had no opinion, three (30%) of those felt they were influential and seven (70%) felt they

TABLE VIII
 PARENTAL AND STUDENT PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE

	<u>Students</u>	<u>Parents</u>
Influence	35 (70%)	20 (36.3%)
No Influence	15 (30%)	34 (61.8%)
Not Sure	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
TOTAL	50 (100%)	55 (100%)

TABLE IX

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF OTHER
PARENTS' INFLUENCE AND PERCEPTION OF OWN INFLUENCE

<u>Others'</u> <u>Influence</u>	<u>Own</u> <u>Influence</u>			<u>Totals</u>
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	
No Response	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Yes	15 (45.5%)	17 (51.5%)	1 (3.0%)	33 (60%)
No	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)	0 (0%)	32 (20%)
No Opinion	3 (30.0%)	7 (70.0%)	0 (0%)	10 (18%)
TOTAL	20	34	1	55 (100%)

were not influential. There appears to be a difference, then, between those parents who felt that parents generally try to influence and those who did not feel this way.

There was an even distribution of perception of influence and non-influence among parents who felt the norm was that parents do try to influence. An especially interesting finding was among parents who felt that the norm was not to influence dating behavior. Here, nine (81.8%) felt that they were not influential and only two (18.2%) felt they were influential.

Although twenty (36.3%) parents perceived that they influenced the mate selection process of their children, thirty-five students (70%) perceived their parents as being influential. How do we account for the differences in perception of influence between parent and child? It might be that parents influenced their children without realizing the extent of their influence. Although the child might not have verbalized these influences to the parent, he or she may have acted on cues received from parents. Another alternative was that parents were only considering direct influences when they responded to the questionnaire, thinking only of the situational influences, rather than the long term experiences of their children during socialization and the force of expectations of the parents. This might be a plausible explanation, since all the parents indicated that they had raised their children with standards and values to

help choose a marriage partner. Furthermore, judging from parents' comments on the questionnaires, they did indeed feel that they had influenced their children in indirect, and to some extent, direct ways.

The seventy per cent of students who perceived parental influence indicated that the influence was more indirect than direct. Thirty (85%) indicated that their parents had taught them standards and values. One respondent indicated that "because of the way I was brought up, I was taught certain values; therefore, I looked for similar values in other people. I wouldn't go out with someone extremely different." Other types of influences given involved discussion of dating partners with parents, the fact that parents informed the respondent if they did not approve of the individual dated, and parental opposition to dating of disapproved individuals.

It appears, then, that parents influence their childrens' dating and mating behavior through the process of socialization. They teach children the values and standards which they feel are relevant to dating and mate selection. By setting standards and approving or disapproving of individuals, they validate their childrens' choices. Parents indicated that they met most of their childrens' casual dates--forty-eight (87.3%) of them met most of the individuals dated by the child. A corresponding forty-three (86%) students indicated parental interaction with dates.

We may postulate from these high percentages that it is important for both the parents and the students that the individuals being dated are met by the parents.

Not only did parents interact, but also overwhelmingly approved of date selection. Twenty-nine (58%) students indicated that their parents approved of casual dates, twelve (24%) responded that parents did not approve, one that they usually approved and eight (16%) did not know. Parents perceived a higher approval rate: forty-three (78.2%) expressed approval, nine (16.4%) disapproval, and one respondent felt that she was not well acquainted with all of the individuals.

When the students were asked if they introduced their potential spouses to their parents, forty-nine (98%) indicated that that they had done so. The approval rate for mates was much higher than for casual dates. Forty-eight (98%) of students felt that their parents had approved of their mates. It appears then, that the more seriously a relationship is defined by the child, the higher percentage of individuals are met by the parents. Furthermore, the more serious a relationship (i.e. if the individual is viewed as a potential spouse), the higher the approval rate. Can it be that through cues received from parents, the students conform more to the standards set by parents in serious relationships? If this is indeed the case, we may conclude that parents, through the process of approval and disappro-

val, both influence and validate the selection of a mate for their children.

Types of Influence

Having established that students perceive their parents as influential in the mate selection process, how can we classify these influences? Burgess et al. (1971) offer three general categories: the controlling of social contacts, opposition to undesired matches, and the conscious or unconscious selection of a mate who the child feels will meet the approval of parents. These categories will be utilized in the discussion of data concerning types of influences.

Controlling Social Contacts

By controlling the social contacts of a child the parent defines a field of eligibles for the child, and is instrumental in supporting the principle of homogamy. The data suggest that control of social contacts can be manifested in at least two ways: by approval and disapproval of individuals, often expressed by inviting their childrens' friends to their homes, and by the parental expectations of background and personality characteristics.

Parents could encourage a given relationship by showing their approval and by encouraging further contact with the date. One mother's comment showed how this was mani-

fested. She felt that she showed her approval "by encouraging future dates and making them feel welcome by inviting them to our home." Parents overwhelmingly agreed that they showed their approval of an individual by inviting them to their home. Twenty-five (55.8%) indicated that they invited them home, and an additional eight (18%) indicated that they were friendly to those individuals of whom they approved. (It should be noted that not approving does not necessarily imply disapproving.)

The parents further controlled social contacts by communicating to their children their judgements of people with whom the children should not associate. According to one parental respondent, this is achieved "by encouraging or expressing disapproval of less desirables in various ways, subtle and otherwise." The general feeling is expressed by the following comments from parents: "From the time your children are young, I think most parents want them to associate with both boys and girls with character-- hopefully, that's what we parents do," or "Our daughter knew what type boys we expected her to associate with."

Parents indicate very strongly what types of people are considered undesirable. They expect their children to associate with people similar to themselves. When asked, "Did you expect your son or daughter to select a spouse from a background similar to their own?" the response was overwhelmingly positive. Forty-four (80%) said yes, six (10.9%)

no, and five (9.1%) had no opinion. It appears that children do indeed marry individuals from the same background. When parents were asked if their son or daughter-in-law was from the same background, forty-eight (87.3%) responded yes, four (7.3%) in some respects, and only one (1.8%) said no. There were four (7.3%) no responses. How much parents are responsible for the similarity cannot be measured with the data gathered; however, the literature suggests that parents are instrumental in maintaining homogamy (Eckland, in Sussman, 1974: 321).

The general feeling among parents is expressed by this mother's remark: "Most 'good' parents want their children to date persons of similar backgrounds." While parents tended to comment in general terms such as "pointing out the advantages of a relationship with a certain type of individual, as opposed to another," students gave more concrete statements regarding "type of individual." For example, one female student commented, "I wouldn't bring home guys with long hair," and another stated, "I couldn't bring home a hippie." Regarding religious background, one student said that she "wouldn't date a Catholic or a Jew, because I thought my parents wouldn't want me to date someone not Protestant." We might infer, then, that parents did indeed succeed in controlling the social contacts of their children, since the approval rate of individuals met by the parents was quite high.

Opposition to Undesired Matches

The data suggested that disapproval was much more overt than approval. Often, students would just assume that parents approved because they showed no signs of disapproval. Sixteen (32%) students stated that they knew their parents approved of individuals because there were no signs to the contrary. When asked how they knew that parents disapproved, of the twelve (24%) that said their parents disapproved, nine (75%) stated that parents verbalized their disapproval and three (25%) said that parents showed disapproval in their actions. None of the students said that they did not know. It appears then, that parents may be silent when they approve, but are quite direct about their expressions of disapproval.

The students were asked how they reacted if their parents indicated they disapproved of a date. Four (33.3%) of the respondents indicated that they yielded to their parents, and six (50%) either tried to argue or persuade their parents. Two (16.6%) ignored their parents. Since ten (83.3%) reacted in some way, either by yielding or by trying to persuade their parents, we might postulate that students attached importance to their parents' reactions, and wanted to please them.

Parents, in turn, did not prohibit marriage, but rather, discouraged marriage. This finding supports Sussman's (1953) contention that parents more often dis-

courage marriages than prohibit them. The sample was unusual, because in general, the students tended to view the parents very positively. They divulged very little information about open conflict between the generations. Despite the lack of conflict, there were quite specific signs of discouragement from parents.

According to the student respondents, there was discouragement of marriages, but the discouragement was not very effective. Twelve marriages were discouraged, but it appeared that the opposition was not so much to the mate, but to the time of marriage. Eleven of the twelve students (92.3%) felt that their parents discouraged the marriage, but indicated that their parents approved of the mate. In general then, those parents who discouraged a marriage tended to do so because of timing rather than because of the prospective mate.

There was one case of a female Catholic respondent whose parents were very opposed to her marriage to a divorced Catholic man. The irony of the situation was that because she was living with him, they encouraged the marriage. They would rather have her married to a man of whom they disapproved than have her "living in sin." One may postulate that in extenuating circumstances (living together, unwanted pre-marital pregnancy), parents may encourage a match of which they disapprove because of ex-

pediency and social propriety.

Disapproval of, and opposition to, an individual was, however, expressed by parents in a few cases. The categories of the three types of influences suggested by Burgess et al. were not mutually exclusive because often, parents would try to break up a relationship by attempting to control the social contacts of their children. For example, one father indicated that he showed his disapproval "by asking him [the son] not to go to their home and not to bring that person to my home." One parent indicated that he showed his disapproval "by telling my son what I did not like about his date." Another parent opposed one of his daughter's dates "by telling her he didn't seem the right type of guy for her."

When asked how parents discouraged the dating of a certain individual, one parent stated "by showing my dislike for this person when he brought them to my home." A mother "refused to let her go everywhere he [the date] asked her to go. [we] made it known at home that we were not fond of the boy." One mother said that although she did not discourage her daughter from going out with anyone, "I would have had they been black."

Although parents did not often admit that they discouraged their children from dating or marrying anyone, when they objected, they made their wishes quite clear to their children. When parents were asked if they had any

friends or relatives who directly influenced their sons or daughters not to marry, seventeen (30%) said yes. Means of discouragement included forbidding the child to see the opposed individual, having the child visit out of town, and indicating that an individual was not "good enough." In one extreme case, the parents allowed an abortion, so that a pre-marital pregnancy would be terminated; therefore, there would be no social pressure for the marriage.

We find, then, that parents do indeed discourage those matches of which they disapprove. According to these parents, however, there were not many matches of which they disapproved, indicating that parents are mostly successful in controlling the social contacts of their children.

Effect of Parental Approval on Mate Selection

Of the thirty-five student respondents who indicated that their parents influenced their mating or dating behavior, thirty (85%) indicated that their parents had taught them values and standards with which to choose a mate, and that these had indeed affected their choice of a mate. The students generally, whether they perceived parental influence or not, perceived a very high rate (96%) of parental approval of their eventual selection of a mate. We can say, therefore, that whether they knew it or not, the students succeeded to a remarkable degree in fulfilling their parents' expectations.

This desire to please parents is reflected in one female student respondent's comment, "You look for parental approval, and want approval when you're dating or plan to marry." Another male student respondent also expressed this feeling: "When you consider getting married, you imagine how your parents would react to it." The desire to please parents was expressed by one respondent who said "my parents were against smoking and drinking, so I never dated anyone who smoked or drank."

Parents also expressed the feeling that their children chose mates who would meet their expectations. One parent commented, "by the standards we set for ourselves, we believe this influenced our son to look for a person that met these standards. This he knew would please us, and in the end be better for him."

We find then for our sample, that parents do indeed influence the mate selection of their children in both direct and indirect ways. The indirect ways are more prevalent, and often are not recognized by either the parent or the child. The three types of influences discussed earlier, although not mutually exclusive, offer the researcher a useful basis for classifying types of parental influences. When these three types of influences are examined, we find that there is support for Goode's contention that the mate selected "is likely to be more

eligible as a mate according to general social norms and as judged by . . . parents" (Goode, 1959:44).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

We have found evidence to support the thesis that parents do influence their children's choice of marriage partner. Although this research suggests that mate selection is perceived by respondents as an individual choice and as personality-centered, when we probe deeper we find that parents have significant input into the process. This study, thus, questions Winch's contention that "we should anticipate little participation by persons other than the bride and groom, and should expect the choice to be made on the basis of mutual congeniality and mutual love" (Winch, 1971: 262), and other "individual choice" explanations of the process of mate selection in American society.

We find instead that parents do indeed participate in their children's mate selection by first helping determine an appropriate field of eligibles and then, through indirect means, these same parents act as validators and legitimizers of their children's "choice" of a potential marital partner. Our findings do, then, support other researchers' assertions that parents are influential in determining mate selection (e.g., Goode, 1959; Sussman, 1953; Coombs, 1962; Udry, 1971).

Although parents in contemporary society apparently do

not play as active a role as parents in Colonial America (Burgess, et al., 1971), it is fallacious to assume that they do not have an impact on their children's choice of mate. Rather than directly and dogmatically determining the choice, their influence is apparently indirect and is manifested through the force of expectations which are a part of the socialization experience. This indirect parental influence can partly be understood within the context of the typology suggested by Burgess et al., 1971: namely, through the control of social contacts, direct and indirect opposition to an undesired match and the conscious selection by the child of a mate who he or she feels will meet the approval of parents.

In these ways, parents play important roles in the mate selection process of their children. Through validating and legitimizing their children's choice, they insure that their children choose someone who the parents define as acceptable and who meets the standards set by parents.

The findings of the study are further explicated when viewed within the sociological research dealing with other substantive foci, such as social roles, small groups, socialization and kinship. Some sociologists (e.g., Parsons, 1949) suggested that the adolescent peer group serves as a "weaning mechanism" for emancipation of the adolescent from the dependence of the family. An empirical study of this hypothesis was undertaken by Charles Hobart (1958) who con-

cluded that this hypothesis was valid for males, but not for females. He suggested that the concept of "weaning mechanism" was in need of modification. The present research suggests that parents continue to play an important role as a reference group even beyond adolescence, and that parents act as validators of their child's choice of spouse.

In validating the choice of mate, parents set and/or enforce standards for behavior. The family can be viewed as a small group and this study may be related to small groups research. The way in which the parents attempt to influence mate selection has important ramifications for the student of small groups. It is an illustration of one of the hypotheses of small groups theory that "the small group strongly influences the behavior of its members by setting and/or enforcing standards (norms) for proper behavior by its members" (Berelson and Steiner, 1964: 331).

This setting and enforcing of norms is one of the functions of the family. The family, through the process of socialization, provides continuity of the society's culture. The implications of this study for socialization theory is that it appears that parents are "successful" in the socialization process because they influence the behavior of their children in an area which has characteristically been viewed in American society as very personal--the choice of a mate. If parents have such strong influence regarding mate selection, it may be postulated that their influence

overall, in the lives of the children is very pervasive. Since it is generally accepted that "opinions, attitudes and beliefs are 'inherited' from one's parents, [that] people learn them early in life and the learning persists into adulthood" (Berelson and Steiner, 1964: 562), this study suggests that parents do, indeed, have very great influence on the lives of their children, greater, perhaps, than many sociologists have perceived.

The family in contemporary American society has often been characterized as less influential because it has lost many of its functions, since many of the needs which have previously been provided by the family are now met by outside agencies. Parsons and Bales (1955) have suggested that because of this decrease of family functions, a new type of family structure has developed. They characterize this new type as "one in which the family is more specialized than before, but not in any general sense less important, because the society is dependent more exclusively on it for the performance of certain of its vital functions" (Parsons and Bales, 1955: 9).

It is possible that one significant change is that the family has become more expressive, since some of its instrumental functions have been relegated to the larger society. Parsons and Bales allude to a similar idea when they state that "the two generations are, by virtue of the isolation of the nuclear family, thrown more closely on each other"

(Parsons and Bales, 1955: 20). The implications of the present study for the study of the family and kinship may be that kinship relations are still situationally significant and consequently, the parents still influence mate selection. Two studies undertaken during the 1950's by Sussman (1953) and Young and Wilmott (1957) supported the thesis that kinship relations are still strong in industrial society. The present study tends to support the idea that kin still exert an influence on the decision of who to marry and that the family, contrary to predictions of a decline, may still exert great general influence on the lives of young people.

Conclusions

Although contemporary ideology in American society holds that the selection of a mate is an individual choice, seventy per cent of the student respondents perceived parental influence on their choice of dating or marriage partner. It is suggested by the literature that sociologists have tended to accept the characterization of mate selection as being individual centered and have ignored the important roles played by parents.

It is recognized that a student sample is not representative of the population of the United States, and therefore, it is suggested that further studies be undertaken with a representative sample to ascertain if students might

be an unique group, perceiving parental influence, while other groups may respond quite differently. Additional variables which might be examined include socio-economic status, race, sex, religious affiliation, ethnic group, and age at marriage to ascertain whether there are differences among individuals with different social characteristics.

It is also suggested that men and women in all stages of the mate selection process be chosen as subjects, since they would be experiencing the influence, rather than looking back on it. Furthermore, a larger representative sample should be selected in order to test the significance of relationships between independent and dependent variables. It might also be useful to construct a scale of parental influence, possibly developing the various issues raised by the present research. This researcher feels that further research in the neglected area of parental influence on mate selection can prove to be illuminating, rewarding, and beneficial to the field of the sociology of the family.

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APPENDIX I
PRE-TEST STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Sex of respondent _____

Age _____ Age at engagement _____ Age at marriage _____

Age of mate _____ Length of time married _____ Children _____

Major _____ Major of mate _____

Class standing _____ Class standing when married _____

Present Q. C. A. _____

Religion: Protestant _____

Catholic _____

Jewish _____

Other _____

How often, on the average, do you attend church?

- (1) never
- (2) seldom
- (3) once a month
- (4) once every two weeks
- (5) weekly
- (6) more than once a week

In terms of religion, do you classify yourself as:

- (1) devout
- (2) moderately devout
- (3) inactive

Religion of mate

- Protestant _____
- Catholic _____
- Jewish _____
- Other _____

How often on the average does your spouse attend church

- (1) never
- (2) seldom
- (3) once a month
- (4) once every two weeks
- (5) weekly
- (6) more than once a week

In terms of religion, do you classify your mate as

(1)	devout
(2)	moderately devout
(3)	inactive

Income of parents _____ per year

Occupation of father _____ Mother _____

For what percent of your childhood, if any, did your mother work?

(1)	not at all
(2)	part-time some of the time
(3)	full-time some of the time
(4)	part-time all of the time
(5)	full-time all of the time

Education of father _____ Education of mother _____

What proportion of your school expenses, if any, did you pay?

(1)	none
(2)	25% or less
(3)	26% to 50%
(4)	51% to 75%
(5)	more than 75%

Ethnic background of father: _____

Ethnic background of mother: _____

Ethnic background of mate: _____

What is the size of the town where you spent most of your life?

(1)	less than 5000
(2)	5001-10,000
(3)	10,001-20,000
(4)	20,001-50,000
(5)	50,001-100,000
(6)	over 100,000

Education of mate _____

Where were you living while dating your spouse

Home	_____
Away	_____
Both	_____

How many siblings do you have? _____ What is your rank? _____

What were their sexes _____

Did you date many (roughly how many) members of the opposite sex before marriage?

Did your parents approve of all these individuals?

How did they show their approval? disapproval?

Did they approve of your marriage partner?

How did they show approval? disapproval?

Did your parents encourage/discourage you to date certain members of the opposite sex? why? how?

Did you seriously date anyone other than your marriage partner?

Why did this (these) relationship(s) end?

Did you usually introduce your dates to your parents? Did they approve?

Are you very close to your parents?

Do you usually seek your parents' approval in decision-making?

Do you have many friends? Did your friends approve of your marriage? how do you know?

Do you consider yourself (your wife) to be a feminist?

APPENDIX II
STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Sex: (1) Male (2) Female

Age of Respondent _____

Age of Mate _____

Age at Engagement _____

Age at Marriage _____

Length of time married _____ months

Number of children _____

Ages of Children _____

Major _____

Class Standing _____ (1) F____ (2) So____ (3) Jr____
(4) Sr____ (5) Graduated _____

Class Standing when married _____

(1) F____ (2) So____ (3) Jr____ (4) Sr____
(5) Graduated _____

Present Q.C.A. _____

Mate's Q.C.A. _____ (if applicable)

Mother's Religion: (1) Protestant _____ (2) Catholic _____
(3) Jewish _____ (4) Other _____
(5) None _____Father's Religion: (1) Protestant _____ (2) Catholic _____
(3) Jewish _____ (4) Other _____
(5) None _____

How often, on the average, does your mother attend church?

(1) Never (4) Once every two weeks
(2) Seldom (5) weekly
(3) Once a month (6) more than once a week

How often, on the average, does your father attend church?

(1) Never (4) Once every two weeks
(2) Seldom (5) weekly
(3) Once a month (6) more than once a week

In terms of religion, do you classify your mother as:

- (1) devout (2) moderately devout (3) inactive

In terms of religion, do you classify your father as:

- (1) devout (2) moderately devout (3) inactive

How often, on the average, do you attend church?

- (1) never (4) Once every two weeks
 (2) seldom (5) weekly
 (3) Once a month (6) More than once a week

In terms of religion, do you classify yourself as:

- (1) devout (2) moderately devout (3) inactive

What is your religion?

- (1) Protestant (4) Other
 (2) Catholic (5) None
 (3) Jewish

What is your mate's religion?

- (1) Protestant (4) Other
 (2) Catholic (5) None
 (3) Jewish

What is your mate's occupation or major? _____

What is the highest year of education attained by your mate? _____

<u>Grade School</u>								<u>High School</u>				<u>College</u>				<u>Professional or Graduate</u>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

What is the highest year of education attained by your mother? _____

<u>Grade School</u>								<u>High School</u>				<u>College</u>				<u>Professional or Graduate</u>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

What is the highest year of education attained by your father? _____

<u>Grade School</u>								<u>High School</u>				<u>College</u>				<u>Professional or Graduate</u>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

What is your father's occupation? _____

What kind of organization does he work for:

- ____ (a) none, self-employed
- ____ (b) business or commercial enterprise
- ____ (c) governmental agency or bureau
- ____ (d) armed forces
- ____ (e) educational institution
- ____ (f) other

For what percent of your childhood, if any, did your mother work?

- ____ (1) not at all
- ____ (2) part-time some of the time
- ____ (3) full-time some of the time
- ____ (4) part-time all of the time
- ____ (5) full-time all of the time

What is your mother's occupation? _____

What kind of organization does she work for:

- ____ (a) none, self-employed
- ____ (b) business or commercial enterprise
- ____ (c) governmental or commercial enterprise
- ____ (d) armed forces
- ____ (e) educational institution
- ____ (f) other

What is your mother's income _____

What is your father's income _____

What is your (and spouse's) income _____

What proportion of your school expenses, if any (do) did you pay?

- (1) none
- (2) 25% or less
- (3) 26% to 50%
- (4) 51% to 75%
- (5) more than 75%

Graduate (if applicable)

- (1) None
- (2) 25% or less
- (3) 26% to 50%
- (4) 51% to 75%
- (5) more than 75%

Where did you live when you grew up?

- (1) open country
- (2) small village less than or equal to 999
- (3) large village 1000-2499
- (4) small town 2500-4999
- (5) large town 5000-9999
- (6) small city 10,000-49,999
- (7) large city 50,000-99,999
- (8) metropolitan area of 100,000 or more

Where were you living when you were dating your spouse?

- (1) home (2) away (3) both

How many siblings do you have? _____

What are their sexes? _____

What is your rank? _____

Roughly how many members of the opposite sex did you date casually (3 or less times) _____

How many people did you date more seriously? (3 or more times) _____

How many of the people that you dated did you consider as a potential spouse? _____

Why did (this) these relationship(s) end?

Where did you meet your spouse?

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) church | (5) at home |
| (2) general home community | (6) through friends |
| (3) school | (7) through relatives |
| (4) work | |

Did your parents meet any of the people you dated casually? _____

Did they approve at all of these individuals? _____

How do you know they approved?

How did you know they disapproved?

How did you react if they disapproved? _____

- (1) yield to parental wishes
- (2) tried to argue or persuade parents

While you were courting did you visit the home of your parents? _____

How often _____

Home of spouse's parents _____

How often _____

How long did you date your mate before marriage _____ months

During this period did your parents encourage you in any way to get married?

Did they discourage you from getting married? How?

Did your friends encourage you to get married? How?

Did your friends discourage you from getting married? How?

Did your parents approve of mate? _____ How did you know?

If they disapproved, how did you react?

- (1) yield to parental wishes
- (2) tried to argue or persuade parents

Why did you get married?

- (1) found pleasure in the relationship
- (2) pressure from close friends
- (3) pressure from parents
- (4) everybody expected us to get married
- (5) we'd been seeing a lot of each other and decided to get married
- (6) it solved a lot of problems

How far do you live from your parents? _____ miles

How far do you live from your in-laws? _____ miles

How often do you write parents? _____

- (1) never
- (2) seldom
- (3) once a month
- (4) once every two weeks
- (5) weekly
- (6) more than once a week

How often do you write in-laws? _____

How often do you communicate by phone with parents? _____

How often do you communicate by phone with in-laws? _____

Are both your parents living? _____

Are your parents divorced? _____

Which parent was awarded custody? _____

Which individual had the most important influence in helping you decide to marry your mate? _____

2nd most important _____

3rd most important _____

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| (1) father | (6) friends |
| (2) mother | (7) teachers |
| (3) both parents | (8) other adults |
| (4) brothers and sisters | (9) self |
| (5) relatives-cousins, aunts,
uncles, grandparents | |

Who is the most important to consult on dating problems?

2nd most important _____

Where were you born? _____

Please indicate your judgment regarding the discipline or control exercised by your parents in the following manner: If you consider your parents actual practice in regard to the particular supervisory or control activity discussed in a statement to be an example of Good Supervision on the part of your parents, please circle the word "Good" in the column to the right of the statements; if you consider your parents' practice an example of Fairly Good Supervision, circle the word "Fair"; and if an example of Poor Supervision, circle the word "Poor" in the column to the right of the statements. Please note that your judgments as to whether your parents' supervisory practice was good, fair, or poor should refer to your parents' actual practice, and not to the statement as it stands.

	Good	Fair	Poor
My parents tried to direct all my activities	1	2	3
My parents permitted me to make my own decisions.	1	2	3
My parents permitted me to do things on my own responsibility	1	2	3
My parents insisted upon choosing my friends for me	1	2	3
My parents gave me a great deal of freedom	1	2	3
My parents never punished me for disobeying his commands	1	2	3

	Good	Fair	Poor
My parents let me solve my own problems in difficult situations	1	2	3
My parents let me do anything I please	1	2	3
When I came home, my father often wanted to know where I had been	1	2	3
My parents closely supervised the out-of-school activities of his children	1	2	3
My parents would not allow me to decide important things for myself	1	2	3
My parents always required me to tell them where I was going and what I was about to do	1	2	3
My parents would not let their children go out often enough	1	2	3
My parents gave their children everything they wanted	1	2	3
My parents made me come home too early in the evening	1	2	3
My parents forced their children to do too many things against their will	1	2	3
My parents used too strict discipline upon their children	1	2	3
My parents too often insisted upon my doing things their way	1	2	3
My parents nagged me too much	1	2	3

You are requested to check from the following list those statements which you accept as expressing your own personal way of thinking and feeling. Opinions differ and your own view is as good as that of anybody else. If you feel in a certain way check the statements which express that feeling and leave other spaces blank. If there are statements which you accept and feel strongly about then check them twice.

Women have the right to compete with men in every sphere of economic activity.

As head of the household the father should have final authority over his children.

Disposal of real property of common earnings by the husband without his consent of the wife should be forbidden by law.

Parental authority and responsibility for discipline of the children should be equally divided between husband and wife.

The influx of women into the business world in direct competition with men should be discouraged.

The relative amounts of time and energy to be devoted to household duties on the one hand and to a career on the other should be determined by personal desires and interests rather than by sex.

Women have the right to decide for themselves what is proper in feminine dress.

A woman who continues to work outside the home after marriage is shirking her fundamental duty to home and children.

Retention by a wife of her maiden name is selfish and fanatical.

Contemporary social problems are crying out for increased social participation by women.

The husband should be regarded as the legal representative of the family group in all matters of law.

Women should not be allowed entire freedom in their choice of occupation.

Women should be given equal opportunities with men for vocational and professional training.

Regardless of sex, there should be equal pay for equal work.

A husband has the right to expect that his wife be obliging and dutiful at all times.

Do you think your parents had any influence on who you dated or married, and what was the influence?

APPENDIX III
PRE-TEST PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

PRE-TEST PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out this questionnaire by placing a check in the blank next to the answer which expresses your opinions and feelings. If the question does not have a blank, please answer the question in a few sentences or less. There are no right or wrong answers; we want to see what your opinions and feelings are.

Person(s) filling out this questionnaire.

mother
 father
 stepmother
 stepfather

1. Did you meet most of the individuals your son or daughter dated?

yes
 no
 other (please explain)

2. Did you approve of all the individuals you met?

yes
 no
 not applicable
 other (please explain)

3. How did you show your approval?

4. Did you disapprove of any of the individuals dated by your son or daughter?

yes
 no
 not applicable
 other (please explain)

5. How did you convey your disapproval?

6. Did you ever encourage your son or daughter to date a certain individual?

yes
 no
 other (please explain)

7. If you encouraged dating of a certain individual, how did you encourage your son or daughter to date this individual?

8. Did your son or daughter date this individual?

yes

_____ no
 _____ not applicable

9. Have you ever discouraged your son or daughter from dating a certain individual?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please specify)

10. If you discouraged your son or daughter, how did you do this?

11. Did your son or daughter continue to date this (these) individual(s) despite your disapproval?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable
 _____ other (please explain)

12. Did you ever encourage your son or daughter to marry a certain individual?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please explain)

13. If you encouraged your son or daughter to marry a certain individual, how did you do this?

14. Did your son or daughter marry this individual?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable

15. Have you ever discouraged your son or daughter from marrying a certain individual?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please explain)

16. If you ever discouraged the marriage, how did you do this?

17. Did your son or daughter marry this individual?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable

18. Do you feel that you were influential in determining who your son or daughter dated and/or married?

_____ yes

_____ no
 _____ other (please explain)

19. In what way do you feel you were influential?

20. Did you expect your son or daughter to select a spouse from a background similar to your own?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ no opinion
 _____ other (please explain)

21. Do you feel that you raised your son/daughter with certain values and standards to help them choose a marriage partner?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ no opinion
 _____ other (please explain)

22. Do you feel that your son or daughter-in-law is from a background similar to your own?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ no opinion
 _____ other (please explain)

23. Do you think that most parents try to influence their sons or daughters to date certain kinds of people?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ no opinion
 _____ other

24. If yes, how do you think they do so?

25. Do you personally know of someone, friends or relatives of yours, for example, who directly influenced their son or daughter to marry a specific person?

_____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other

26. If yes, how did they do so?

27. Do you personally know of someone, friends or relatives of yours, for example, who directly influenced their son or daughter not to marry a specific person?

_____ yes
 _____ no

_____ other

28. If yes, how did they do so?
29. If you have any additional comments, please write them down in this space.

APPENDIX IV
COVER LETTER FOR PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE
PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear _____,

I am presently working on my thesis for a master's degree at Virginia Tech. I have recently interviewed your son/daughter, _____, in connection with this project. To complete my research, I would appreciate your filling out the enclosed forms and returning them in the envelope provided at your earliest possible convenience.

My thesis, the questionnaire I used in interviewing your son/daughter, and the enclosed questionnaire have all been approved by my graduate committee. One of their demands was that I hold all information received in strictest confidence, and that I use no names in my research or thesis. Therefore, your replies, like those of your son/daughter, will remain completely anonymous. Your son/daughter will not, of course, ever see your questionnaire.

Please notice that there are two forms enclosed. I would very much appreciate it if one form could be independently filled out by each parent, but should this prove not possible, I would be happy to have only one form returned.

Finally, I respectfully request that you do not discuss your answers with your son/daughter at this time, as this might affect the outcome of the results. Please be assured that your cooperation in this project is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out this questionnaire by placing a check in the blank next to the answer which expresses your opinions and feelings. (The questions refer to your son or daughter who was interviewed. If you wish to make statements about your other children, please indicate that your replies refer to your other children.) If the question does not have a blank, please answer the question in a few sentences or less. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to see what your opinions and feelings are.

Person(s) filling out this questionnaire.

mother
 father
 stepmother
 stepfather

1. Did you meet most of the individuals your son or daughter dated?
 yes
 no
 other (please explain)
2. Did you approve of all the individuals you met?
 yes
 no
 not applicable
 other (please explain)
3. How did you show your approval?
4. Did you disapprove of any of the individuals dated by your son or daughter?
 yes
 no
 not applicable
 other (please explain)
5. How did you convey your disapproval?
6. Did you ever encourage your son or daughter to date a certain individual?
 yes
 no
 other (please explain)
7. If you encouraged dating of a certain individual, how did you encourage your son or daughter to date this individual?

8. Did your son or daughter date this individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable
9. Have you ever discouraged your son or daughter from dating a certain individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please specify)
10. If you discouraged your son or daughter, how did you do this?
11. Did your son or daughter continue to date this (these) individual(s) despite your disapproval?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable
 _____ other (please explain)
12. Did you ever encourage your son or daughter to marry a certain individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please explain)
13. If you encouraged your son or daughter to marry a certain individual, how did you do this?
14. Did your son or daughter marry this individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable
15. Have you ever discouraged your son or daughter from marrying a certain individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ other (please explain)
16. If you discouraged the marriage, how did you do this?
17. Did your son or daughter marry this individual?
 _____ yes
 _____ no
 _____ not applicable
18. Do you feel that you were influential in determining who your son or daughter dated and/or married?

yes
 no
 other (please explain)

19. In what way do you feel you were influential?

20. Did you expect your son or daughter to select a spouse from a background similar to his or hers?

yes
 no
 no opinion
 other (please explain)

21. Do you feel that you raised your son/daughter with certain values and standards to help them choose a marriage partner?

yes
 no
 no opinion
 other (please explain)

22. Do you feel that your son or daughter-in-law is from a background similar to your son's or daughter's?

yes
 no
 no opinion
 other (please explain)

23. Do you think that most parents try to influence their sons or daughters to date certain kinds of people?

yes
 no
 no opinion
 other

If yes, how do you think they do so?

24. Do you personally know of someone, friends or relatives of yours, for example, who directly influenced their son or daughter to marry a specific person?

yes
 no
 other

25. If yes, how did they do so?

26. Do you personally know of someone, friends or relatives of yours, for example, who directly influenced their son or daughter not to marry a specific person?

yes
 no
 other

27. If yes, how did they do so?
28. If you have any additional comments, please write them down in this space.

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PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON MATE SELECTION:
AN EXPIORATORY STUDY

by

Magdalena Heyburgh

(ABSTRACT)

The data gathered for this exploratory study of parental influence on mate selection supported the thesis that parents influence their childrens' mate selection. Fifty married university students were interviewed and fifty-five of their parents returned mailed questionnaires. Although students indicated that they, themselves, had chosen their spouses, seventy per cent of the students percieved parental influence on their choice of mate. Thirty-six per cent of the parents felt that they had influenced their childrens' choice of a spouse. It was postulated that parents through socialization and by acting as validators of their childrens' choices--by encouraging approved matches and discouraging opposed matches, exerted influence. Three types of influence were found which were classified according to Burgess' typology of parental influence: controlling of social contacts, opposition to disapproved matches, and the child's conscious desire to choose a mate his or her parents would approve. In these ways, by determining an appropriate field of eligibles, the parents

directly and indirectly had input into their childrens' choice of mates. The great majority of parents met the individuals dated and/or courted by their children. Of these parents, most approved of the individuals met; if they disapproved they communicated their feelings very overtly.

The "individual choice" explorations of mate selection are questioned, and it is suggested that a study with a larger representative sample be undertaken to ascertain parental influence on mate selection for the population.