Syllabus for
Mate choice research: Methods, theories, and controversies
Psychology 650, section 3

Instructor: Geoffrey Miller, Assistant Professor of Psychology
Where: Room 156, Psychology Department, Logan Hall, SW Main Campus
When: Fridays 9:30 to noon, beginning August 23

Overview
This is a methodological course focused on how to do good research about human mate choice. The course will offer qualified graduate students a chance to develop a deeper understanding of current empirical and theoretical controversies in this lively research area.

We will read and discuss some high-quality journal papers from the last five years, and consider a range of research methods: studies of fitness markers (e.g. fluctuating asymmetry, intelligence), policy capturing, studies of single’s ads and mating markets, Brunswikian analysis of cue use and cue integration, individual differences in mate preferences and mate value, the age-sex demographic profiles of sexual display, and the study of psychopathologies as a window onto mate preferences. We will assess the most sophisticated recent work in evolutionary psychology, and some of the strongest empirical criticisms of that work.

The course aims to help graduate students initiate and improve their own empirical research programs, whether in human or animal mate choice, or in any related area of social cognition, judgment and decision-making, sexual behavior, behavioral ecology, or clinical practice concerning sex and relationships.

Instructor contact details:
Dr. Geoffrey Miller, Assistant Professor
Psychology, Logan Hall 160
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1161, USA
(505) 277-1967 (office)
(505) 277-1394 (dept fax)
gfmiller@unm.edu
http://www.unm.edu/~psych/faculty/gmiller.html
Office hours: Tuesdays, 9:00 to 10:30 am, Psych. Dept., Logan Hall 160 (ground floor)

Course mechanics
We will meet once a week for two and a half hours. I expect punctuality – allow plenty of time for parking! There will be a 10-15 minute break about half way through each meeting. If you have to miss a class for any reason, please let me know by email as soon as you know you’ll be absent.

Background knowledge/prerequisites:
This course assumes that you have a decent understanding of evolutionary psychology, sexual selection, and a few basic results from mate choice research. If you’d like to review this sort of material, I’d recommend my book:

… and I’d also recommend any of the following as background reading:

**Grading: depends on three kinds of work for this course**

60% of grade: one term paper. APA format, c. 5,000 words (20 pages double spaced), methodologically oriented, including a critical assessment of a research literature and an outline of a possible study: 10% for initial abstract and outline, 20% for rough draft, 30% for final draft, to be completed in successive months on dates to be announced soon. Extra credit for submitting the paper for publication to a reputable journal (e.g. as a theoretical note, literature review, etc.)

40%: class participation and in-class critical analyses of readings. I expect regular attendance, knowledge of assigned readings, active participation and intellectual engagement, and well-prepared presentations concerning the readings.

no exams

**Details on the term paper**

The term paper determines 60% of your course grade. You can choose any
The final paper should be about 4,000 to 6,000 words, plus references. I care more about clarity, insight, research, and the flow of argument than about length per se.

Please plan to submit the rough draft and the final draft in standard APA (American Psychological Association) research paper format. This means computer-printed, double-spaced, single-sided, in 12 point Arial (preferably) or Times Roman font, with a proper title page, abstract, references, and page numbering. Consult the *APA Publication Manual* (4th Edition) for more details.

For graduate students, my goal is for you to produce a paper that you could turn around and submit to a decent journal as a review or commentary piece to improve your C.V., and that you would be proud to submit in an application for a post-doc, tenure-track job, or clinical internship.

You’ll get extra credit if you actually submit the term paper for publication in a reputable journal. Please provide a copy of your submission cover letter.

To make sure that you are thinking, researching, and writing the paper on a good schedule throughout the semester, I require the following:

1. **October 4: Provisional Abstract/outline/bibliography due.** A provisional topic statement/abstract (one paragraph), provisional outline of paper (about a page), and provisional bibliography.

   The bibliography should list about 10 to 20 references (not all from the syllabus here!), that you have actually read, with brief notes about their relevance to your paper. In the abstract, just let me know what you think you’ll probably write about. If you change your mind, no problem, just tell me in an email later. But I want you to have some topic in mind by this date. Pick a topic that you feel passionate about – you’ll have to live with it for several months! This topic statement/outline will determine 10% of the course grade.

   After you submit this outline and bibliography, come to my office hours at least once for my feedback. This is very important; I will try to make sure your paper looks viable and will try to give you some useful suggestions and references. This outline and bibliography will determine 10% of the course grade. Late submissions will be penalized.

2. **November 8: Rough draft due.**

   This should be a full-length, APA format draft of your term paper – the sort of thing you would submit as your final draft in most other courses. After I get this rough draft, I will write comments and suggestions on it and return it to you as soon as I can. This should allow you to submit a really good final draft, and I hope it will help you improve your writing generally. This rough draft will determine 20% of the course grade. Late submissions will be penalized.

3. **December 6: Final draft due.**

   This should be a highly polished document in correct format with no spelling or grammatical errors. It should represent the culmination of three months of research, thinking, and writing about a topic that passionately interests you. The final draft will
determine 30% of your course grade. Late submissions will be penalized. I will try to grade final drafts by the last days of exams.

**Structure of the term paper:** The ideal paper would the following elements:

- **Title page:** a decent, descriptive, memorable title, and all other information required for APA format.
- **Abstract page:** a concise, punchy abstract that interests the reader in your paper.
- **Introduction:** Start with a bang. Pose the problem that interests you, and how you’ll approach it. Say where you stand, and why the reader should care. Be specific and clear; mix the theoretical and methodological level of discourse with real-life examples and issues; know when to be funny and when to be serious.

**Body of the paper:** depending on what you’re writing about, this could include a literature review, a series of arguments, an overview of relevant ideas and research from a related area or field, a series of methodological analyses, criticism, and suggestions, or anything that advances your points. If you include literature reviews, don’t do generic overviews – review the literature with a purpose, critically, as it pertains to your topic.

- **Research proposal:** ideally, towards the end of your paper, you could sketch out a new empirical way to resolve one or more of the issues you’ve raised in your paper. This could be a brief outline of an experiment, an observational method, a meta-analysis or re-analysis of existing data, a computer simulation, or any other method you think would be appropriate. If your proposal is good and you’re still around UNM next semester, we could go ahead and do the work and publish it!

**Bibliography:** Only include things you’ve read. If you haven’t read them and have only seen them cited by others, then use the format (name, date; as cited in: name, date). If your bibliography includes good, relevant papers and books that I haven’t heard of before, I will be impressed.

**Notes on the assigned readings**

Readings for each week will be copied by the instructor and distributed at least a week ahead of time to each student.

I tried very hard to find recent, methodologically interesting journal papers from high quality journals. Some data on the readings are on the next page: almost all were published since 1997; very few were cited by me in *The mating mind* or known to me before preparing this course. I suspect many of them might be new to you as well.

The readings have been arranged week by week according to the theoretical mate choice question being addressed, in conjunction with the empirical methods being used to address them. Most weeks, there are about 40 to 50 pages of actual reading to be done (not counting references sections of the papers.) This should take two to three hours. My intention is for you to have a very broad exposure to the state of the art in mate choice research methods. Some of the readings are harder than others; some weeks require more reading than other weeks. **Please do not take this course if you cannot commit an average of three hours a week to the readings.**

I originally expected to use my book *The mating mind* as a primary textbook for this seminar. However, I decided it would be better to focus on methodological issues here, and my book is weak on covering such issues. So it has been relegated to
supplementary reading.

For each reading, one student will be assigned to offer a 5-minute constructively critical assessment of the paper’s ideas, methods, findings, and implications. This must be accompanied by a one-page handout for the others students. Please bring enough hand-outs for everyone. The assessment must not simply summarize the paper. Assume that the other students have read the paper fairly attentively, and want to know what you think of it. After each 5-minute report, we will have a class discussion about the paper.

The major educational benefits of the course depend on you doing the readings on time, to benefit maximally from the class discussion. If you don’t read them, you won’t learn much; if you do read them attentively, you’ll learn a lot. I expect all of each week’s required readings to be completed well before class, so you have time to digest them, think about them, compare and contrast them, and prepare intelligent comments and questions about them. Last-minute reading on Thursday night will not result in good comprehension or good in-class discussion.

Sources from which readings were taken

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<th>Journal/Magazine/Book</th>
<th>Number of Readings</th>
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<td>Evolution &amp; Human Behavior</td>
<td>20 papers</td>
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<td>J. Personality &amp; Social Psychology</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Human Nature</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Current Anthropology</td>
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<td>Psychological Science</td>
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<td>Intelligence</td>
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<td>Personality &amp; Social Psych. Bulletin</td>
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<td>Trends in Ecology and Evolution</td>
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Years in which readings were published:

2002: 12 readings
2001: 10
2000: 12
1999: 8
1998: 9
1997: 2
1996: 4
1995: 2
before 1995 0
Schedule of topics and readings week by week:

**Week 1 (August 23): Introduction and overview**
No assigned readings before first class.

**Week 2 (August 30): Fitness indicator theory and mate choice**

**Week 3 (September 6): Faces, voices, and fluctuating asymmetry**

**Week 4 (September 13): Ovulatory cycle effects on female preferences**
Chavanne, T. J. & Gallup, G. G., Jr. (1998) Variation in risk taking behavior among


**Week 5 (September 20): New Methods for studying body preferences**


**Week 6 (September 27): Intelligence, sexual selection, and sex differences**


**Week 7 (October 4): Brunswik’s lens model: Cue use and cue integration in mate choice**


**NOTE:** Abstract-outline of term paper due on Oct. 4.
(no class Oct 11: fall break)

**Week 8 (October 18): Beyond questionnaire studies: Policy capturing, market trade-offs, and video methods in mate choice research**

**Week 9 (October 25): Single’s ads, mating markets, and mate search**

**Week 10 (November 1): Individual differences in mate preferences and mate value**
Gangestad, S. W., & Simpson, J. (2000). The evolution of human mating: Trade-offs and strategic pluralism. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 23*, 573-644. [Note: You only need read the actual article on pp. 573-587. The voluminous commentaries are not included in this copy. The authors’ response and references are included, but they need not be read.]
Week 11 (November 8): Field studies of altruism, heroism, and status

NOTE: Rough draft term paper due on Nov. 8.

Week 12 (November 15): Demographics, display, and narcissism

Week 13 (November 22): Fantasy, fiction, and psychosis

Note: I will probably be away at conferences in New Zealand on this date (Nov. 22); somebody else will be appointed to run this discussion.

(no class Nov. 29: Thanksgiving)

Week 14 (Dec 6): Psychopathology and puzzles


**NOTE: Final term paper due on Dec 6.**

**Note for students who took any of my previous graduate seminars:**
There are some papers from those courses that you may want to review as relevant to mate choice research:

**Papers from my grad seminar in spring 2002 ‘Social Psychology and Evolution’**


**Papers from my grad seminar in autumn 2001 ‘Products and preferences’**


