

Original Article

**VARIATION IN WOMEN'S MATING STRATEGIES  
DEPICTED IN THE WORKS AND WORDS OF JANE AUSTEN**

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**Abstract**

We hypothesize that distinct mating strategies are identifiable in the female characters created by popular British author Jane Austen. Although Austen wrote her novels in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and consequently the novels reflect social constraints not applicable to similarly aged women in modern Western societies, we contend that research participants can accurately identify the mating strategies of characters and express relationship preferences consistent with their own fitness interests. Austen's characterizations of women's mating strategies are remarkably similar to depictions in the modern literature of evolutionary psychology. We use personality descriptions of four primary characters assembled from passages in Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. When selecting characters with whom to form a hypothetical long-term romantic relationship, participants preferentially chose those who successfully established long-term relationships in the novels. Participants generally favored characters who exemplified short-term mating strategies, such as those who generally valued partners more so for the direct benefits they provided rather than emotional connection, for non-committed sexual relationships. These results provide stronger empirical support of our hypotheses than earlier efforts.

**Keywords:** Literary Darwinism, Jane Austen, mating strategy, sexual selection

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## **Introduction**

Jane Austen, considered the originator of the Regency (1811-1820) romance, was a subtle satirist and shrewd analyst of human behavior. Her novels consistently maintain their popularity (Harman, 2009). They are all love stories (Boyd, 1998), as Austen writes about young women entering society and the marriage market with the goal of finding a suitable mate (Barash & Barash, 2005). Austen's perennial prominence may result from her focus on the challenge of obtaining the right romantic partner and her adeptness at accurately depicting human experiences in this important endeavor (Boyd, 1998).

Austen's depiction of human universals are, of course, framed by her cultural and historical context (Carroll, 2001), which is the social gentry class of early 19th century England (Harman, 2009). Austen's characters did not casually date as modern women and men do; gentry girls were socially isolated until making their social debut at age 16 at a grand ball. They would then attend formally structured and chaperoned dances, assemblies, and dinner parties to meet marriage-minded gentlemen (Stasio & Duncan, 2007). Men needed to establish themselves financially to be marriageable, typically reaching courting age at 21. Eldest sons usually inherited the family estate; younger brothers had to obtain independent standing and resources.

Promiscuity, at least for women, was unacceptable. Divorce was very expensive and women bore the preponderance of the associated shame. Of course, novels written about well-behaved people who follow all the social rules and carefully avoid misadventures would presumably not be that interesting, marketable, or even realistic. Thus, morally principled characters, as well as of crafty females, male and female flirts, and male seducers also inhabit Austen's novels (Klingel Ray, 2006).

### *Literary Darwinism*

In recent decades, literary scholars have promoted the use of evolutionary theory for understanding products of human culture, including literary fiction (e.g., Boyd, Carroll, & Gottschall, 2010; Carroll, 1995; Wilson & Gottschall, 2005). Many works in the emerging field of Literary Darwinism follow the humanist tradition of qualitative descriptive analysis (e.g., Fisher & Cox, 2010); others have utilized the empirical and quantitative methods of the social sciences (e.g., Carroll, Gottschall, Johnson, & Kruger 2009). All of these works illuminate how evolutionary themes pervade many of the continuously popular literary works, ancient sagas, and the oral traditions of contemporary peoples in non-industrial societies. Literary Darwinists promote the importance of analyzing life history goals, such as reproduction, and examining and individual differences in life history strategies, such as mating and parenting (Carroll, 2005).

Literary Darwinists investigated alternative male mating strategies depicted in late 18th and early 19th century British Romantic literature in a series of empirical studies (Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2003; Kruger & Fisher, 2005a; Kruger & Fisher, 2005b; Kruger & Fisher, 2008). In these studies, it was shown that proper and dark heroes in these novels respectively resemble men with long-term and short-term mating strategies (Kruger et al., 2003). Moreover, the findings suggest that both female and male readers can distinguish these strategies based on a brief personality sketch assembled from passages in the novels. That is, people associate the proper hero with attributes that indicate a successful long-term, low risk and high parental investment male mating

strategy and the dark hero with attributes of a high-risk, high mating effort mating strategy (Kruger & Fisher 2005a; Kruger & Fisher 2005b). When imagining themselves interacting with these characters, people express preferences and make choices consistently that would be beneficial to their own reproductive success. For example, women preferred proper heroes for long-term relationships but increasingly favored the dark heroes as the relationship length decreased (Kruger et al., 2003). Men preferred the proper hero as a business partner, son-in-law, and companion for their girlfriends on a weekend trip out of town (Kruger & Fisher, 2008).

#### *Variation in Women's Mating Strategies*

Women also vary in their mating strategies (e.g., Quinlan, 2001). Bailey and colleagues (2000) found noticeable variation among women's sociosexuality, which refers to one's openness towards engaging in casual sex. This finding is notable because the vast majority of research on sociosexuality examines between-sex differences, with men consistently having higher scores than women (Bailey et al., 2000). In addition, women's mating strategies may be complex and contingent on their circumstances, possibly even more so than those of men. Many women may opt to tradeoff an ideal reproductive partner against a cooperative child-rearing partner, leading to mixed strategies of marrying or forming other long-term relationships while also engaging in short-term sexual unions (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Despite these advances in our understanding of female mating strategies, research on individual differences in women's allocation of effort towards mating and parenting is scarce, especially in terms of how literary characters exemplify these strategies.

#### *Mating Strategies Exemplified by Austen's Characters*

Jane Austen is well known for her rich descriptions of female protagonists and their varied experiences in their quest for male partners (Harman, 2009), and thus, it seems natural to explore women's mating strategies as depicted in her texts. Her intuitive understanding of women's reproductive concerns has attracted the attention of Literary Darwinists (e.g., Boyd, 1998; Carroll, 2005). For example, Barash and Barash (2005, p. 41) describe her as "the poet laureate of female choice." Furthermore, Austen's insights include characters' strategies being contingent on their physical attractiveness (Barash & Barash, 2005), female competition including misinformation and competitor derogation (Stasio & Duncan 2007), and mate preferences that mirror the descriptions summarized by modern evolutionary psychologists (Barash & Barash, 2005; Stasio & Duncan, 2007). Based on the fact that Austen's novels focus on interactions that have fitness benefits (e.g., attracting a mate, competition for a desired mate), we propose that her characters should be immediately comprehensible to young adults, such that they would understand the various mating strategies the characters employ.

#### *Hypotheses*

As mentioned, Austen's novels exemplify social norms of early 19th century England (Carroll, 2001) that may contrast with those encountered by similarly aged women in modern Western societies. However, we propose that modern readers will express relationship preferences consistent with their own fitness interests. We predict

that men will prefer characters for long-term, committed relationships who successfully established long-term relationships in the novels, (i.e., Jane Bennett and Fanny Price, described below). We expect men will prefer characters that are imprudent, careless, and flirtatious for non-committed sexual relationships, such as a one-time sexual affair and as an extra-pair sexual partner when cheating on their own partner (i.e., Lydia Bennett and Maria Bertram). We predict this pattern both in evaluations of each character's attractiveness for various relationships, and in direct choices between characters. We also predict that preferences for an intermediate romantic relationship of two months will fall between those for long-term commitment and one-time sexual affairs.

We further hypothesize that women will intuitively identify the pattern of male relationship preferences, because this knowledge would facilitate their own mating strategies. Moreover, we predict that both men and women should also be wary of short-term or opportunistic female strategists as partners for their hypothetical sons. These short-term strategists may be more likely to have sexual affairs or abandon their families, and thus cuckold their mate and divert time and resource investment from other possible recipients in his family.

In our initial study (Strout et al., 2010), we found weak support for these hypotheses. Men preferred the long-term strategist (Jane Bennett) to the flirty Lydia Bennett for both a long-term committed relationship and a short-term relationship, but did not have a preference for a one-night sexual relationship. Men preferred the short-term strategist (Maria Bertram) to the commitment-seeking Fanny Price for a one-night sexual relationship, but did not show a preference for other relationships. However, in a third comparison (Emma Woodhouse from *Emma* and Mary Crawford from *Mansfield Park*), men did not indicate any relationship preferences.

In the current study, we use a refined set of character descriptions, with passages copied directly from the novels. We have also removed the comparison of characters from two different novels. We expect that these enhancements to the stimuli will increase the sensitivity of study participants in comprehending the characters' mating strategies and responding accordingly.

In the preliminary study we included characters portrayed in two of Jane Austen's texts, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, exemplifying variation in women's mating strategies. *Pride and Prejudice* revolves around the romantic exploits of the five Bennett sisters. Only a male relative can inherit the Bennett estate, even if he is more distantly related. Mrs. Bennett has no sons and is eager to find suitable husbands for her daughters. Each daughter is unique in temperament and behavior. In both the preliminary and current study we decided that although Elizabeth Bennett is the central character, we chose to focus on her sisters Jane and Lydia because of their starkly contrasting personalities and mating strategies.

Jane Bennett is 22 years old at beginning of the story. She is educated and refined but has a less lively mind than her sister Elizabeth; Jane is equally sensible but sweeter and more reserved. She is the most beautiful young lady in the neighborhood but takes a passive approach toward relationships. This situation is coupled with an overbearing mother. Although she does not actively pursue Mr. Bingley when they are likely in love with each other, they end up happily married. Lydia Bennett, the youngest sister, is 15 years old at the beginning of the story and vastly different from her sister Jane. Rather than waiting for men to express an interest in her, she directly pursues potential mates without discretion. Austen describes Lydia as young, headstrong, and frivolous, with a passion for socializing and flirting with nearby military officers.

*Mansfield Park* follows the experiences of a young woman who is raised by her affluent relatives, as she has an alcoholic and disabled father. Fanny Price, the central character, is 18 at the beginning of the novel. Her standard of living is far lower than that of her rich aunt and uncle, who raise her but treat her as socially inferior to her four cousins. Her behavior is often motivated by her desire to please others. She harbors deep affections for her cousin Edmund, but represses them knowing that these feelings would displease her benefactors. She is sensitive, shy, intelligent, and virtuous, and she refuses to marry a man she cannot respect. She is trustworthy and everyone's confidant. Edmund eventually realizes his love for Fanny, she reveals her own feelings, and they marry happily. Maria Bertram is Fanny's cousin and three years older. Maria is very beautiful, and actively uses her beauty to her advantage, in marked contrast to Jane Bennett. Maria is engaged to Mr. Rushworth, a wealthy but foolish young man. Yet, when Henry Crawford expresses his interest in her (despite her engagement), she competes with her sister Julia for Henry's attention. After both of her romantic relationships deteriorate, she ends up living with her aunt.

As mentioned, the preliminary study served as an initial investigation into preferences for Austen's female characters according to desired relationship length. However, our methodology was not as strong as it could have been, in that we contrasted characters from different novels and used passages that were rather short. We have refined the passages, and the characters used for comparisons are from the same novels. This latter change may improve the participant's ability to readily comprehend the variance in the mating strategies of the characters, given that Austen contrasted the characters against each other within her novels.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Undergraduate participants ( $N = 341$ ; 230 female,  $M$  age = 20,  $SD$  age = 3) at two public universities in Michigan completed anonymous surveys at their convenience over the Internet to fulfill a course requirement. There was no significant sex difference in age. Participants described their ethnic descent as White/Caucasian (89%), Hispanic (3%), African American (2%), Asian (2%), Native American (1%), Pacific Islander (one participant), and as "other" (3%). Respondents identified themselves as Christian (62%), including Catholic (40%), Protestant (14%), Evangelical (4%), Orthodox (4%), and as having no religious affiliation (19%), Jewish (4%), Buddhist (1%), Latter Day Saints (one participant), and as having an "other" religious affiliation (14%).

### *Procedure*

Participants read brief passages describing the personality characteristics of the two female characters from Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and two female characters from *Mansfield Park*. These descriptions were assembled directly from passages found throughout the novels. It is important to note that for all four characters, we avoided directly describing characters' actual depicted behaviors in romantic or sexual relationships to prevent bias. We also excluded what we identified as direct information on the character's physical appearances (though see Discussion). Although these characteristics are relevant to both mating strategies and the dramatic content of the novels, we intended to solely focus on behavioral patterns. Separate survey sections

contained descriptions of two characters with contrasting personalities from each novel, and characters were not identified in the survey.

Passage 1A: Jane Bennett (*Pride and Prejudice*)

She was all loveliness and goodness, her understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating. Every sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to her. She would willingly have gone throughout the world without believing that wickedness existed. Her delicate sense of honor was matched with the most generous and forgiving heart in the world. She was a most willing listener. Her feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and there was a constant complacency in her angelic air and manner. Her look and manner were open, cheerful and engaging. She was firm where she felt herself to be right. With all possible mildness, she declined interfering in other people's issues.

Passage 1B: Lydia Bennett (*Pride and Prejudice*)

She was always unguarded and often uncivil, prone to boisterous exclamations. She had an imprudent, wild giddiness and was stubborn, ignorant, idle, vain, and absolutely uncontrolled. In a voice rather louder than any other person's, she would enumerate the various events of the day to anybody who would hear her. She seldom listened to anybody else for more than half a minute. Her mind was more vacant than those of her sisters.

Passage 2A: Fanny Price (*Mansfield Park*)

Eternally gracious, she was always anxious to suggest some comfort to others. Exceedingly timid and shy, she was rendered speechless at expressions of affection. Few young ladies of her age could be less called on to speak their opinion. She was soon beyond her knowledge, and was very happy in observing all that was new, and admiring all that was pretty. She was not often invited to join in the conversation of the others, nor did she desire it. Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions. Being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, she came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them.

Passage 2B: Maria Bertram (*Mansfield Park*)

She was indeed the pride and delight of them all. She was to be pitied on occasion; not for her sorrow, but for her want of it. Fully established among the belles of the neighborhood, her vanity was in such good order, that she seemed to be quite free from it, and gave herself no airs; while the praises attending such behaviour served to strengthen her in believing she had no faults. No one loved to lead better than she. To see only the

expressive profile of the man she desired as he turned with a smile to another woman, or to catch the laugh of the other, was a perpetual source of irritation.

We counterbalanced the order of characters. Both men and women were asked to rate how much they would like and get along with each of the characters. Men indicated how attractive they perceived each character would be for three types of relationships: a long-term committed romantic relationship, a short-term (2-month) romantic relationship, and a one-time sexual affair, using a labeled 11-point decile scale ranging from 0% to 100%. Men were also asked which character within a pair they would prefer: “to accompany you to a party,” “for a formal date,” “for sexual relations,” “for marriage,” “as a mother,” “for engagement to your 25-year-old son,” “to introduce to your parents as your partner,” and “to cheat on your partner with? (Assuming you are already in a romantic relationship).”

Similar to men, women indicated which character within a pair they would prefer: “to accompany you to a party,” “for engagement to your 25-year-old son,” and “to leave alone with your boyfriend or husband for an evening.” Women also indicated which character within a pair they thought would be preferred by men for: a sexual affair, marriage, as a mother to their children, and to have an affair with (i.e., cheat on their partner with).

### *Analyses*

We created a 2 (character) x 2 (participant sex) Mixed Design Analyses of Variance model to examine the extent to which participants predicted liking and getting along with characters, in separate analyses for each novel. Then, for men, we again created two (i.e., one for each novel) separate 3 (relationship type) x 2 (character) Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance models to examine the attractiveness of characters for each type of relationship. We used paired-sample *t*-tests to determine the simple effects by relationship type. Finally, we conducted binomial comparisons for the choice items where women and men reported preferences

### **Results**

Both men and women reported that they would generally like Jane more than Lydia,  $F(1,339) = 531.97, p < .001$ , and would get along better with Jane compared to Lydia,  $F(1,339) = 584.49, p < .001$ . There were no main effects of participant sex or interactions between participant sex and character. Both men and women indicated that they would generally like Fanny more than Maria,  $F(1,339) = 30.21, p < .001$ . Overall, for this comparison, women also liked both characters less than men,  $F(1,339) = 5.48, p = .02$ , but there was no interaction between participant sex and character. Both men and women reported that they would get along better with Fanny than with Maria,  $F(1,339) = 65.23, p < .001$ . The interaction between participant sex and character did not reach statistical significance, although there was a weak trend such that men, more than women, predicted they would get along with both characters,  $F(1,339) = 2.87, p = .091$ .

Effect of Relationship Type on Attractiveness

For items pertaining to Jane and Lydia’s attractiveness to men, Jane was more preferred overall to Lydia,  $F(1,220) = 96.73, p < .001$ , but the longer the relationship under consideration, the stronger the preference for Jane became,  $F(2,220) = 83.38, p < .001$  (see Figure 1). There was also a main effect for relationship type,  $F(2,220) = 10.67, p < .001$ ; men found the characters more attractive for sexual affairs than for longer relationships. Men did not show a preference for one-time sexual affairs,  $t(110) = 0.44, p = .687, d = .04$ , but preferred Jane for a short-term romantic relationship,  $t(110) = 8.30, p < .001, d = .78$ , and a long-term committed romantic relationship,  $t(110) = 15.94, p < .001, d = 1.51$ .

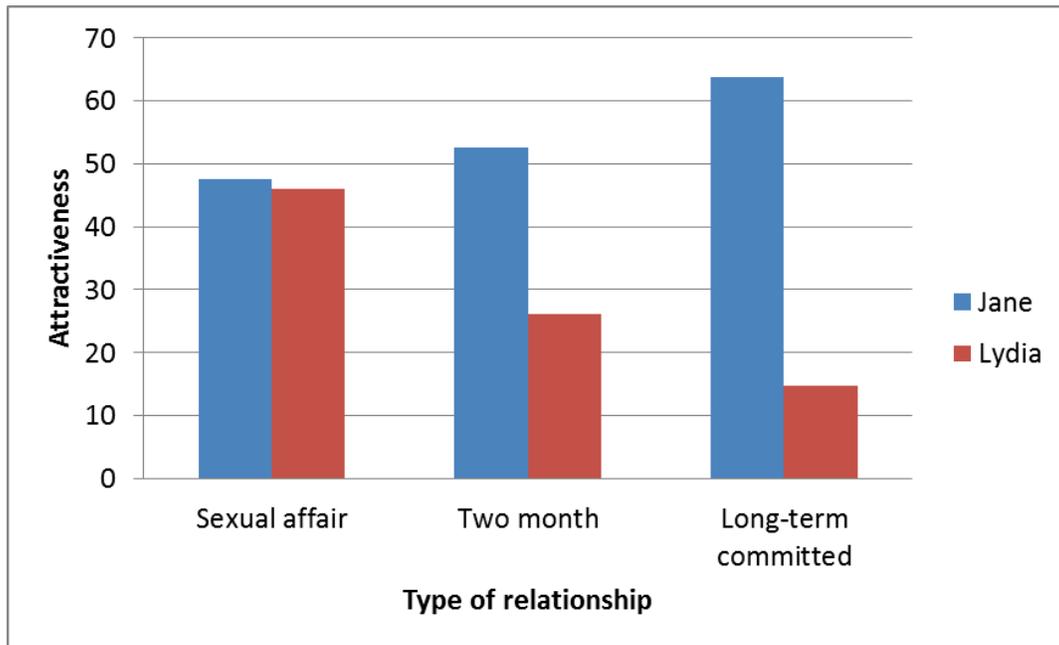


Figure 1. Men’s mean attractiveness ratings for characters in *Pride and Prejudice*.

For items pertaining to Fanny and Maria, there were no main effects for character or relationship, but the shorter the relationship under consideration, the greater the tendency for men to prefer Maria over Fanny,  $F(2,220) = 32.25, p < .001$  (see Figure 2). Men preferred Maria more for a one-time sexual affair,  $t(110) = 5.66, p < .001, d = .53$ , and a short-term romantic relationship,  $t(110) = 2.93, p = .004, d = .28$ , but preferred Fanny for a long-term committed romantic relationship,  $t(110) = 2.21, p = .029, d = .21$ .

In post-hoc analyses, we collapsed data across the characters with the same mating strategy. Participants rated characters with a long-term mating strategy more attractive overall than characters with a short-term mating strategy,  $F(1,220) = 28.16, p < .001$ , and gave higher overall attractiveness ratings for sexual affairs than for long-term committed relationships or short-term relationships,  $F(2,220) = 5.70, p = .004$ . The predicted interaction between characters' mating strategy and relationship length on attractiveness ratings was significant,  $F(2,220) = 89.34, p < .001$ . Characters with long-term mating strategies were preferred for long-term committed relationships,  $t(110) = 11.34, p < .001, d = 1.41$ , and short-term relationships,  $t(110) = 4.13, p < .001, d = .47$ .

Characters with short-term mating strategies were preferred for sexual affairs,  $t(110) = 2.84, p = .005, d = .32$ .

*Preferences Between Characters*

Women showed clear distinctions for both sets of characters in their preferences for relationships and their predictions of men’s preferences for relationships (see Table 1). Women preferred Jane for a party companion, to leave alone with their boyfriend or husband for an evening, and especially as a daughter-in-law. Women nearly universally thought that men would prefer Jane for marriage and as a mother to their children, yet about 90% also thought that men would prefer Lydia for non-committed sex and also a sexual affair partner when cheating on their partner.

Women made a similar set of distinctions between Fanny and Maria, though these were not as strong as for the contrast between Jane and Lydia. Fanny was preferred as a daughter-in-law, and as an evening companion for their boyfriend or husband, yet Maria was preferred as a party companion. The pattern of predictions for male preferences was replicated; women thought that men would prefer Fanny for marriage and as a mother to their children, but prefer Maria for non-committed sex and a sexual affair partner when cheating on their partner.

**Table 1.** Proportion of Women Selecting Each Character for Various Roles

	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>		<i>Mansfield Park</i>	
Predictions for women’s preferences				
	Jane	Lydia	Fanny	Maria
Party companion	61**	39	38	62**
Daughter-in-law	97**	3	80**	20
Companion for partner	75**	25	87**	13
Predictions for men’s preferences				
Non-committed sex	14	86**	10	90**
Marriage	98**	2	77**	23
Mother to his children	99**	1	82**	18
Extra-pair sex partner	10	90**	11	89**

Note: \*\* indicates  $p < .001$ , preferred character is annotated

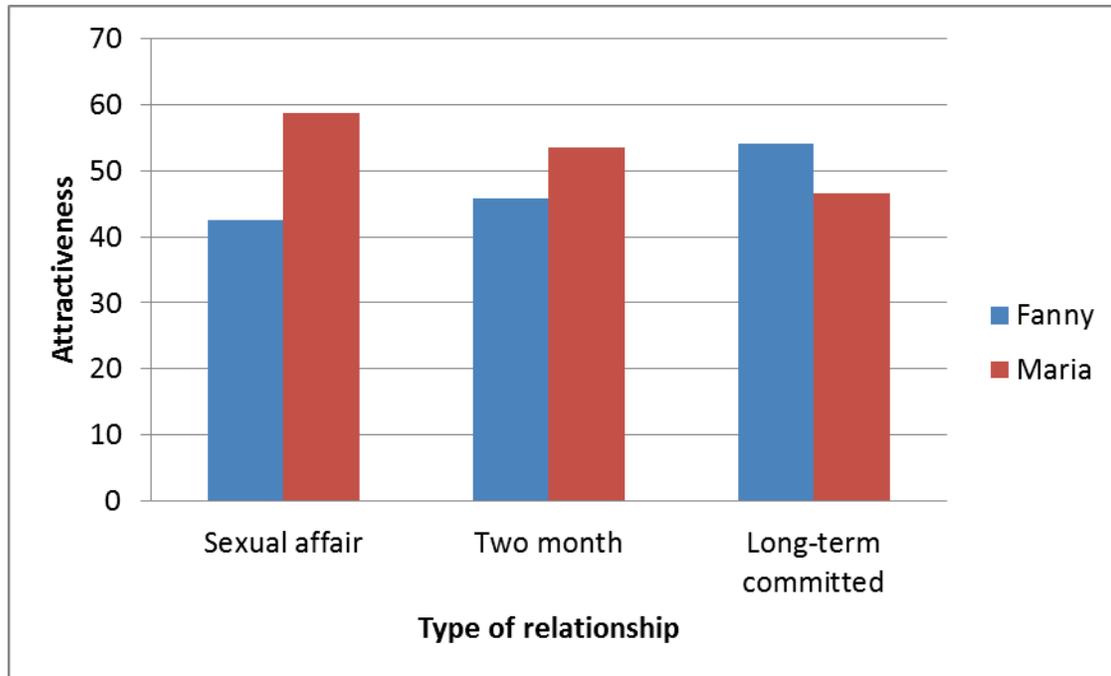
Men also showed a pattern of preferences for characters, although not as consistently as women. They preferred Jane for a party companion, and had strong preferences for Jane as a daughter-in-law, to introduce to their parents as their partner, for marriage, and as a mother to their children (see Table 2). Men were less consistent in their preferences for uncommitted sexual relationships, with a weak tendency to favor Lydia (that approached statistical significance;  $p = .087$ ) and no clear favorite for an extra-pair sex partner ( $p = .34$ ). These results suggest a general male tendency to avoid Lydia more so than they did for any of the other characters.

In comparison, men had clear preferences for characters from *Mansfield Park* for every type of relationship. Fanny was favored as a daughter-in-law, to introduce to their parents as their partner, for marriage, and as a mother to their children. Maria was favored as a party companion, for non-committed sex, and as an extra-pair sex partner.

**Table 2.** Proportion of Men Selecting Each Character for Various Roles

	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>		<i>Mansfield Park</i>	
	Jane	Lydia	Fanny	Maria
Party companion	72**	28	32	68**
Daughter-in-law	92**	8	70**	30
Non-committed sex	41	59	35	65*
Marriage	94**	6	75**	25
Introduce to parents	94**	6	67**	33
Mother of children	94**	6	74**	26
Extra-pair sex partner	45	55	27	73**

Note: \* indicates  $p < .01$ , \*\* indicates  $p < .001$ , character preferred annotated



**Figure 2.** Men's mean attractiveness ratings for characters in Mansfield Park.

### Discussion

Despite writing in the early 19th century and depicting a world with social constraints that contrast with those of today, Jane Austen created novels that remain popular. One key to their pervasive popularity may be the way the characters are described, and more particularly, how the characters were created to depict a variety of women's mating strategies. Some characters, such as Jane Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice* and Fanny Price from *Mansfield Park* seem to typify women interested solely in long-term relationships, who would fall in love and marry before they would engage in sexual relations. These women are passive in their mating strategies, waiting for men to approach and select them, rather than pursuing men actively.

Other characters, such as Lydia Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice* and Maria Bertram from *Mansfield Park*, actively engage in flirtation and pursuit of a potential mate, and they engage in short-term relationships. We hypothesized that participants' ratings for a character's attractiveness would be a function of the mating strategy the character exemplifies in the text, even when this information is excluded from the descriptive passage. All of the significant results provide support for this hypothesis. For example, men's preferences increased for the characters representing a long-term strategy as the duration of the hypothetical relationship increased, albeit more strongly for the Jane-Lydia comparison than the Fanny-Maria comparison. We intentionally chose characters we believed to exemplify distinct strategies, and also compare characters from the same novel. Using more ambiguous characters or comparing ones from more disparate works may hinder reader's abilities to distinguish strategies.

We predicted that participants would hypothetically interact with the characters in ways that would be consistent with their own fitness interests. Thus, we predicted that men would prefer Jane and Fanny for long-term committed relationships, including marriage and having children. We also expected men to prefer Lydia and Maria for non-committed sexual relationships, such as a one-time sexual affair and as an extra-pair sexual partner when cheating on their own partner. We found this to be correct using both a continuous measure for each character and a forced-choice selection between the characters. However, men seemed to have an aversion to Lydia, such that they only considered her for an extra-pair sex partner, or for an uncommitted sexual interaction. Moreover, approximately half of the men still considered Jane for these two types of interactions, and thus, there was no strong preference for Lydia, even when the interaction was very brief and primarily sexual.

We expected men to express the strongest preferences for the long-term commitment female strategists for long-term committed relationships, the strongest preferences for the short-term or opportunistic female strategists for a one-time sexual affair, and intermediate preferences for an intermediate romantic relationship of two months. We did not find this result for the Jane-Lydia comparison. Men preferred Jane for the hypothetical long-term and, albeit a little less strongly, for the short-term relationship, but there was no preference for the brief sexual relationship. Again, this finding suggests men perceived Lydia very negatively (see below).

In comparison, our prediction was supported for the Fanny-Maria comparison, as men preferred Fanny for the long-term relationship, and preferred Maria for the short-term relationship, and even more so for the brief sexual relationship. Maria Bertram is described as "fully established among the belles of the neighborhood." When preparing the character descriptions, we did not interpret this statement to be about physical features, but it is a reasonable assumption that a "belle of the neighborhood" would be physically attractive. Maria had the same overall attractiveness as Fanny Price, the other character from *Mansfield Park*, whose physical features were not described. Our hypothesis was that preferences for relationships with the characters would be a function of the length/type of relationship under consideration, and this is exactly what we found. Maria may have been considered more attractive overall because of her presumed physical appearance, yet Fanny was preferred for long-term committed relationships and Maria was preferred for one-time sexual affairs.

This issue may be relevant to a lesser extent for Jane, who is described as "all loveliness and goodness." We expected that this would be interpreted in the context of the personality description forming the rest of the passage. If some participants

interpreted this as a cue of physical attractiveness, it may have boosted attractiveness ratings for Jane overall, yet it would not account for the predicted shift in preferences by relationship length. The results for the Jane-Lydia comparisons replicate our original findings (Strout et al., 2010), and we now find support for our hypotheses in the Fanny-Maria comparisons, contrasting with our previously non-significant results.

We predicted and found that women would identify the aforementioned pattern of male preferences for the characters, because this knowledge would facilitate their own mating strategies. Our findings clearly suggest that women are able to predict mate preferences, which may mean that women know what personality features to highlight, depending on their mating strategy. For example, if seeking a long-term, committed relationship, women may attempt to demonstrate that they possess attributes such as those listed for Jane and Fanny, whereas if seeking a short-term or brief, sexual relationship, they will exhibit the traits used to describe Maria (and less-so, Lydia). Our results showed stronger distinctions by women as a function of the proportions of responses, although the level of statistical significance is also in part a function of the greater statistical power for women given that there were over twice as many women as men.

It is notable that the findings are strongest for the Jane-Lydia comparison. Why did men perceive Lydia so negatively? It could be that the personality descriptions used for Lydia are more strongly associated with a short-term strategy. For example, the description for Lydia indicates that she is giddy, impulsive, and vain. Narcissism, which is usually perceived as a negative trait, is associated with promiscuous sexual behaviors in both men and women (Webster & Bryan, 2007). It is also possible that she is described in a manner that is not feminine; for example, she is loud, rather than quiet and demure (e.g., Ward & Sethi, 1986). Men may avoid someone who seems so immature, as being in a relationship with her may adversely impact their social reputation. Lydia is noted to be 15 in the novel and quite young to be making her romantic debut; although we did not mention her age in her description, readers may wonder about this. More likely, though, is the fact that she is described very unfavorably. She is said to be ignorant, a poor listener, and unintelligent, all of which are negatively evaluated personality characteristics. It remains interesting, though, that although she is described so negatively, approximately half of the men preferred her for a hypothetical short-term and a brief, sexual relationship. Overall, both men and women indicated that they liked the characters associated with a long-term strategy better than those associated with a short-term strategy, a pattern which was replicated when asked with whom they would get along. It could be that we tend to like and imagine getting along best with those who are most reliable, stable, and who would not potentially poach a mate. The negative portrayal of Lydia's personality may be a limitation for this study. It may be useful to include more positive or neutral passages, if available, in the description of Lydia used in any future work.

Finally, we expected men and women would express strong preferences for female characters exemplifying long-term commitments as daughters-in-law. Daughters-in-law who are prone to seeking short-term relationships, or brief sexual encounters, might subject their mates to cuckoldry. From the view of the parents (i.e., our participants imagining who they would prefer as a daughter-in-law), it makes sense to want a hypothetical son to marry a woman who would be faithful, thereby increasing paternity certainty and one's inclusive fitness. Moreover, often daughters-in-law assist with caring for elderly parents (although not as much as daughters; Merrill 1993). If the daughter-in-

law was similar to Lydia, it would be unlikely to receive any care as an aging parent, whereas someone like Jane would provide far better assistance.

One other avenue for future research would be to explore how women's own mating strategies relate to the way they perceive the characters. For example, women who are currently pursuing a mate for a long-term relationship may look upon Jane and Fanny less favorably, as they represent hypothetical rivals by pursuing a similar mating strategy. Likewise, women who are engaging in casual sexual relationships, and thus using a short-term mating strategy, may judge Lydia and Maria more harshly, given that they are employing a similar strategy. Therefore, future researchers might wish to gather information on the participants' own mating strategies and determine if they relate to one's perceptions of characters.

In conclusion, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to fully understand human nature. By using empirical psychological research methods to explore themes in literature, we sought to advance the development of literary studies from a Darwinian framework, while also shedding light on the intricacies of human female sexuality.

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