

Perceptions of Your Partners, Caregivers and Relationships

The Phase II online questionnaire elicited an array of data, including participant ratings and/or perceptions of three important parts of your lives:

1. your partners (ideal and real);
2. your caregivers/parents (male and female); and
3. your relationships (ideal and real, and conflict within the relationship).

Participants rated—on Likert scales—individual attributes (e.g., “compassionate”) and attribute statements (e.g., “In an ideal relationship it is important ‘that we can confide all of our personal feelings to each other’”) corresponding to their partner (ideal and real), parent (male and female) and perceptions about relationship (ideal and real, and conflict within the relationship) descriptions.

Data for all but two sources of participant ratings (attributes and attribute statements for male and female caregivers/parents) correspond to the full sample of 122 participants. Data reflecting attributes and attribute statements for male and female caregivers/parents correspond only to the 105 participants (86.1% of the full sample) who identified as being raised by two parents, one male and the other female. The questionnaire design did not provide a mechanism for capturing descriptions of multiple caregivers (e.g., a biological mother and a biological father as well as a subsequent stepfather) for the 10 participants who identified as being raised in households with multiple caregiver constellations. Although the questionnaire posed questions to capture descriptions of sole biological parents, the responses of the 7 participants (5.7% of the sample) who identified as being raised by one female biological parent were not recorded by the online questionnaire database. The flow chart in Figure 1, found at the end of this section, illustrates and summarizes participant attribute and attribute statements.

Ideal and Real Partner Attributes

When asked about the importance of 20 attributes with respect to an “ideal partner,” the greatest number of participants rated as most important the five attributes, “stable”, “understanding of others”, “compassionate”, “affectionate” and “self-sufficient” (see Table 1). When asked to “realistically describe” their current partners, the greatest number of participants ranked—in descending order—the following five attributes most highly: “compassionate”; “stable”; “accomplished in his career”; “self-sufficient”; and “predictable” (see Table 2).

Stability, self sufficiency and compassion were the three top rated attributes that participants both wanted most in an ideal partner and actually found in their real partners.

Table 1. Ideal Partner Attribute Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attributes for ideal partner.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely"			
Attribute	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 21)
Question: "How much of each quality would you want in an ideal partner? Describe the kind of partner you would like to have, whether this describes your current partner or not." (N=122)			
Stable	120	98.4	1
Understanding of others	117	95.9	2
Compassionate	116	95.1	3
Affectionate	112	91.8	4
Self-sufficient	97	79.5	5

Table 2. Real Partner Attribute Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attributes of real partner.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely"			
Attribute	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 21)
Question: "How would you realistically describe your partner?" (N=122)			
Compassionate	103	84.4	1
Stable	100	82.0	2
Accomplished in his career	93	76.2	3
Self-sufficient	87	71.3	4
Predictable	85	69.6	5

The attribute of “accomplished in his career” moved up from a 13th place ranking (70 participants, 57.4%) as an important attribute of an ideal partner to take 3rd place as an important attribute of participants’ real partners. Likewise, “predictable” moved up from a 15th place ranking (43 participants, 35.3%) as an important attribute of an ideal partner to take 5th place (85 participants, 69.7%) among attributes of participants’ real partners. “Affectionate” dropped from its 4th place (112 participants, 91.8%) among attributes that participants desired in an ideal partner to a 6th place spot (84 participants, 68.9) among attributes of participants’ real partner.

Participants imbued physical attributes with less importance than positive internal or character-based attributes. Among attributes of ideal partners, the lowest number of participants cited as most important, “good looking” (ranked 16th, 31 participants, 25.4%) and “muscular” (ranked 19th, 20 participants, 16.4%). Among attributes of participants’ real partners, the lowest number of participants cited as most important, “good looking” (ranked 18th, 38 participants, 31.2%) and “muscular” (ranked 21st, 19 participants, 15.6%). The data suggests that “aggressive,” an attribute often deemed positive—especially among males—in the United States, was seen as pejorative in this sample: Respectively, among attributes of an ideal partner and attributes of participants’ real partners, the lowest numbers of participants (respectively 15 participants, 12.3% and 21 participants, 17.2%) identified “aggressive” as extremely important. “Aggressive” ranked 21st among ideal partner attributes and 20th among real partner attributes.

Parent Attributes & Attribute Statements

Participants who identified as being raised by two parents, one male and one female (N=105) rated their male parents as extremely: “self-sufficient”; “stable”; “predictable”; “accomplished in his career”; and “outgoing” (see Table 3). The lowest number of participants described their male parents as extremely affectionate (ranked 16th, 25 of 105 participants, 23.8% of 105), “good looking” (ranked 17th, 20 of 105 participants, 19.1% of 105) and “expresses tender feelings easily” (ranked 19th, 13 of 105 participants, 12.4% of 105).

The greatest number of participants rated their female parents as extremely: “compassionate”; “stable”; “understanding of others”; “affectionate”; and “expresses tender feelings easily” (see Table 4). The lowest number of participants described their female parents as extremely “forceful” (ranked 16th, 26 of 105 participants, 24.8%); “athletic” (ranked 17th, 16 of 105 participants, 17.1% of 105); and “aggressive” (ranked 18th, 17 of 105 participants, 16.2% of 105).

The top two attributes of male and female caregivers within this sub sample of 105 participants were consistency and stability. Stability proved to be the highest rated single attribute shared among participant descriptions of ideal and real partners, and male and female parents.

Table 3. Male Parent Attribute Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attributes of male parent.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely"			
Attribute	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 19)
Question: "How would you describe this [male] parent or caregiver?" (N=105)			
Self-sufficient	67	63.8	1
Stable	65	61.9	2
Predictable	58	55.2	3
Accomplished in his career	54	51.4	4
Outgoing	53	50.5	5

Table 4. Female Parent Attribute Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attributes of female parent.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely"			
Attribute	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 19)
Question: "How would you describe this [female] parent or caregiver?" (N=105)			
Compassionate	86	81.9	1
Stable	78	74.3	2
Understanding of others	76	72.4	3
Affectionate	75	71.4	4
Expresses tender feelings easily	69	65.7	5

Consistency, permanence and stability were the top quality generated from participant rating of attribute statements for their male and female caregivers.

With respect to male parents, the top five attribute statements, the ones with which the greatest number of participants most agreed (see Table 7), were as follows: “He was consistent in the way he treated me” (76 of 105 participants, 72.4% of 105); “I felt that he was a permanent and stable part of my life” (65 of 105 participants, 61.9% of 105); “Whether we had a lot of money or not, he generated an environment in which I did not worry about money” (62 of 105 participants, 59.1% of 105); “I could not express my true feelings to or around him” (59 of 105 participants, 56.2% of 105); and “He encouraged me to enjoy whatever it was that I chose to do” (46 of 105 participants, 43.8% of 105) (see Table 7).

The lowest number of participants showed the greatest agreement with the statements: “I felt as if he anticipated my needs” (ranked 13th, 20 of 105 participants, 19.1% of 105); “I always had to win or be the best at whatever I did—failure was not an option” (ranked 14th, 19 of 105 participants, 18.1% of 105); and “I felt free to confide in him and could share thoughts and feelings that were frightening, embarrassing or otherwise hard to discuss” (ranked 15th, 12 of 105 participants, 11.4% of 105).

Table 7. Male Parent Attribute Statement Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attribute statements for male parent.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, “Strongly Agree”			
Attribute Statement	Frequency	Percentage	Statement Ranking (of 15)
Question: “Thinking back on the relationship you had with the male parent or caregiver who raised you, rate the following statements.” (N=105)			
He was consistent in the way he treated me	76	72.4	1
I felt that he was a permanent and stable part of my life	65	61.9	2
Whether we had a lot of money or not, he generated an environment in which I did not worry about money	62	59.1	3
I could not express my true feelings to or around him	59	56.2	4
He encouraged me to enjoy whatever it was that I chose to do	46	43.8	5

With respect to female parents, the top five attribute statements, the ones with which the greatest number of participants most agreed (see Table 8), were as follows: “I felt that she was a permanent and stable part of my life” (95 of 105 participants, 90.5% of 105); “She was consistent in the way she treated me” (88 of 105 participants, 83.8% of 105); “She was warm and affectionate” (74 of 105 participants, 70.48% of 105); “I was always encouraged to explore interests and hobbies, even if those interests were unfamiliar or not of great interest to her” (68 of 105 participants, 64.8% of 105); and “She encouraged me to enjoy whatever it was that I chose to do” (66 of 105 participants, 62.9% of 105) (see Table 8). The lowest number of participants showed the greatest agreement with the statements: “I could not express my true feelings to or around her” (ranked 13th, 19 of 105 participants, 18.1% of 105); “I always had to win or be the best at whatever I did—failure was not an option” (ranked 14th, 13 of 105 participants, 12.4% of 105); and “I had to maintain a façade of perfection” (ranked 15th, 13 of 105 participants, 12.4% of 105).

Table 8. Female Parent Attribute Statement Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attribute statements for female parent.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, “Strongly Agree”			
Attribute Statement	Frequency	Percentage	Statement Ranking (of 15)
Question: “Thinking back on the relationship you had With the female parent or caregiver who raised you, Rate the following statements.” (N=105)			
I felt that she was a permanent and stable part of my life	95	90.5	1
She was consistent in the way she treated me	88	83.8	2
She was warm and affectionate	74	70.5	3
I was always encouraged to explore interests and hobbies, even if those interests were unfamiliar or not of great interest to her	68	64.8	4
She encouraged me to enjoy whatever it was that I chose to do	66	62.9	5

Ideal Relationship Attribute Statements & Real Relationship Satisfaction Ratings

Of greatest importance to the greatest number of participants were the following five attributes of an ideal relationship: permanence (114 participants, 93.4%); the ability to confide in one another (110 participants, 90.2%); having someone with whom to grow old (109 participants, 89.3%); sexual compatibility (97 participants, 79.5%); and having the same thoughts about finances/money (97 participants, 79.5%) (see Table 6). The lowest number of participants cited as most important being from the same socio-economic background (ranked 18th, 23 participants, 18.9%), being of the same race (ranked 19th, 22 participants, 18.0%) or being of the same ethnic background (ranked 20th, 12 participants, 9.8%).

Table 6. Ideal Relationship Attribute Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attributes of ideal relationship.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely Important"			
Attribute	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 20)
Question: "In an IDEAL relationship, how important to you would each of the following be? Describe the type of relationship that you would like to have, whether this describes your current relationship or not." (N=122)			
That our relationship is permanent	114	93.4	1
That we can confide all of our personal feelings to each other	110	90.2	2
That I have someone to grow old with	109	89.3	3
That I find my partner sexually compatible	97	79.5	4
That we have the same thoughts about finances and money management issues	97	79.5	5

In descending order, the five aspects of their relationships with which the most participants were most satisfied were their code of shared values, homes, influence over decisions made as a couple, the relationships they had with each other's families and management of finances (see Table 5). The one aspect of their relationships with which the greatest number of participants expressed having the least satisfaction was sex life (30 participants, 24.6%), followed by the way in which his partner's job affected their relationship (11 participants, 9.0%). However, this group of participants was overall "extremely satisfied" with their relationships. When asked the question, "How satisfied are you with your relationship in general?" 104 participants (85.2% of 122) indicated that they were extremely satisfied. The question "How satisfied would your partner say he is with your relationship in general?" yielded 108 participants (88.5%) who indicated that they thought their partners were extremely satisfied.

Table 5. Real Relationship Satisfaction Attribute Statement Frequencies: Frequency of highest Likert scale participant ratings of attribute statements for real relationship satisfaction.

Frequency of Participant Ratings for Highest Likert Scale Category, "Extremely Satisfied"			
Attribute Statement	Frequency	Percentage	Attribute Ranking (of 12)
Question: "How satisfied are you with these aspects of your relationship?" (N=122)			
Our code of shared values	112	91.8	1
Our home (e.g., how it is kept, its decoration and utility, etc.)	91	74.6	2
The amount of influence I have over the decisions we make as a couple	91	74.6	3
The relationship I have with my partner's family	91	74.6	4
How we manage our finances	85	69.7	5

Figure 1. Flow chart summarizing and illustrating participant attribute and attribute statement ratings for partner, parents and relationships.

