American Psychological Association (APA) style calls for (1) brief documentation in parentheses near each in-text citation and (2) complete documentation in a list of references at the end of your text. The models in this chapter draw on the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition (2009). Additional information is available at www.apastyle.org.

A DIRECTORY TO APA STYLE

**APA In-Text Documentation**  
1. Author named in a signal phrase  480  
2. Author named in parentheses  481  
3. Authors with the same last name  482  
4. After a block quotation  482  
5. Two authors  483  
6. Three or more authors  483  
7. Organization or government as author  483  
8. Author unknown  484  
9. Two or more works cited together  484  
10. Source quoted in another source  484  
11. Work without page numbers  485  
12. An entire work  485  
13. An entire website  485  
14. Personal communication  486
Notes 486

APA Reference List 487

BOOKS 487

Documentation Map: Book 489
1. One author 488
2. Two or more works by the same author 488
3. Two or more authors 490
4. Organization or government as author 490
5. Author and editor 490
6. Edited collection 491
7. Work in an edited collection 491
8. Unknown author 491
9. Edition other than the first 491
10. Translation 492
11. Multivolume work 492
12. Article in a reference book 492

PERIODICALS 493

Documentation Map: Article in a Journal with DOI 496
Documentation Map: Article in a Magazine 497
13. Article in a journal paginated by volume 494
14. Article in a journal paginated by issue 494
15. Article in a magazine 494
16. Article in a newspaper 495
17. Article by an unknown author 495
18. Review 495
19. Letter to the editor 498
ELECTRONIC SOURCES 499

Documentation Map: Work from a Website 501
Documentation Map: Article in a Database with DOI 502
20. Work from a nonperiodical website 500
21. Article in an online periodical or database 500
22. Article only available through a database 503
23. Article in an online reference work 503
24. Electronic book 504
25. Electronic discussion source 504
26. Blog entry 505
27. Online video 505
28. Podcast 505

OTHER KINDS OF SOURCES 505

29. Film, video, or DVD 505
30. Music recording 506
31. Proceedings of a conference 506
32. Television program 506
33. Software or computer program 507
34. Dissertation abstract 507
35. Dissertation 507
36. Technical or research report 508

How to Cite Sources That APA Does Not Cover 508

Sample Research Paper, APA Style 508
APA IN-TEXT DOCUMENTATION

Brief documentation in your text makes clear to your reader precisely what you took from a source and, in the case of a quotation, precisely where (usually, on which page) in the source you found the text you are quoting.

Paraphrases and summaries are more common than quotations in APA-style projects. The chapter on quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing covers all three kinds of citations. It also includes a list of words you can use in signal phrases to introduce quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. As you cite each source, you will need to decide whether to name the author in a signal phrase—“as McCullough (2001) wrote”—or in parentheses—“(McCullough, 2001).”

The first examples in this chapter show basic in-text documentation for a work by one author. Variations on those examples follow. All of the examples are color-coded to help you see how writers using APA style work authors and page numbers—and sometimes titles—into their texts.

1. AUTHOR NAMED IN A SIGNAL PHRASE

If you are quoting, you must give the page number(s). You are not required to give the page number(s) with a paraphrase or a summary, but APA encourages you to do so, especially if you are citing a long or complex work; most of the models in this chapter do include page numbers. Check with your instructors to find out their preferences.

AUTHOR QUOTED

Put the date in parentheses right after the author’s name; put the page in parentheses as close to the quotation as possible.

McCullough (2001) described John Adams as having “the hands of a man accustomed to pruning his own trees, cutting his own hay, and splitting his own firewood” (p. 18).
John Adams had “the hands of a man accustomed to pruning his own trees, cutting his own hay, and splitting his own firewood,” according to McCullough (2001, p. 18).

Notice that in the first example, the parenthetical reference with the page number comes after the closing quotation marks but before the period at the end of the sentence.

**AUTHOR PARAPHRASED**

Put the date in parentheses right after the author’s name; follow the date with the page.

McCullough (2001, p. 18) described John Adams’s hands as those of someone used to manual labor.

John Adams’s hands were those of a laborer, according to McCullough (2001, p. 18).

**2. AUTHOR NAMED IN PARENTHESES**

If you do not mention an author in a signal phrase, put his or her name, a comma, and the year of publication in parentheses as close as possible to the quotation, paraphrase, or summary.

**AUTHOR QUOTED**

Give the author, date, and page in one parentheses, or split the information between two parentheses.

Adams is said to have had “the hands of a man accustomed to pruning his own trees, cutting his own hay, and splitting his own firewood” (McCullough, 2001, p. 18).

One biographer (McCullough, 2001) has said John Adams had “the hands of a man accustomed to pruning his own trees, cutting his own hay, and splitting his own firewood” (p. 18).
AUTHOR PARAPHRASED OR SUMMARIZED

Give the author, date, and page in one parentheses toward the beginning or the end of the paraphrase.

One biographer (McCullough, 2001, p. 18) described John Adams as someone who was not a stranger to manual labor.

John Adams’s hands were those of a laborer (McCullough, 2001, p. 18).

3. AUTHORS WITH THE SAME LAST NAME

If your reference list includes more than one person with the same last name, include initials in all documentation to distinguish the authors from one another.

Eclecticism is common in contemporary criticism (J. M. Smith, 1992, p. vii).

J. M. Smith (1992, p. vii) has explained that eclecticism is common in contemporary criticism.

4. AFTER A BLOCK QUOTATION

If a quotation runs forty or more words, set it off from the rest of your text and indent it one-half inch (or five spaces) from the left margin without quotation marks. Place the page number(s) in parentheses after the end punctuation.

Kaplan (2000) captured ancient and contemporary Antioch for us:

At the height of its glory in the Roman-Byzantine age, when it had an amphitheater, public baths, aqueducts, and sewage pipes, half a million people lived in Antioch. Today the population is only 125,000. With sour relations between Turkey and Syria, and unstable politics throughout the Middle East, Antioch is now a backwater—seedy and tumbledown, with relatively few tourists. (p. 123)

Antioch’s decline serves as a reminder that the fortunes of cities can change drastically over time.
5. TWO AUTHORS

Always mention both authors. Use and in a signal phrase, but use an ampersand (&) in parentheses.

Carlson and Ventura (1990, p.v) wanted to introduce Julio Cortázar, Marjorie Agosín, and other Latin American writers to an audience of English-speaking adolescents.

According to the Peter Principle, “In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence” (Peter & Hull, 1969, p. 26).

6. THREE OR MORE AUTHORS

In the first reference to a work by three to five persons, name all contributors. In subsequent references, name the first author followed by et al. Whenever you refer to a work by six or more contributors, name only the first author, followed by et al. Use and in a signal phrase, but use an ampersand (&) in parentheses.

Faigley, George, Palchik, and Selfe (2004, p.xii) have argued that where there used to be a concept called literacy, today’s multitude of new kinds of texts has given us literacies.

It’s easier to talk about a good movie than a good book (Sebranek, Meyer, & Kemper, 1990, p. 143).

Peilen et al. (1990, p. 75) supported their claims about corporate corruption with startling anecdotal evidence.

7. ORGANIZATION OR GOVERNMENT AS AUTHOR

If an organization has a long name that is recognizable by its abbreviation, give the full name and the abbreviation the first time you cite the source. In subsequent citations, use only the abbreviation. If the organization does not have a familiar abbreviation, use the full name each time you refer to it. (See the next page for examples.)
8. AUTHOR UNKNOWN

With reference books and newspaper editorials, among other things, you may not know the author of a work. Use the complete title if it is short; if it is long, use the first few words of the title under which the work appears in the reference list.


A powerful editorial asserted that healthy liver donor Mike Hurewitz died because of “frightening” faulty postoperative care (“Every Patient’s Nightmare,” 2007).

9. TWO OR MORE WORKS CITED TOGETHER

If you need to cite multiple works in the same parentheses, list them in the same order that they appear in your reference list, separated by semicolons.

Many researchers have argued that what counts as “literacy” is not necessarily learned at school (*Heath, 1983; Moss, 2003*).

10. SOURCE QUOTED IN ANOTHER SOURCE

When you need to cite a source that was quoted in another source, let the reader know that you used a secondary source by adding the words as cited in.
During the meeting with the psychologist, the patient stated repeatedly that he “didn’t want to be too paranoid” (as cited in Oberfield & Yasik, 2004, p. 294).

11. WORK WITHOUT PAGE NUMBERS

Instead of page numbers, some electronic works have paragraph numbers, which you should include (preceded by the abbreviation para.) if you are referring to a specific part of such a source. In sources with neither page nor paragraph numbers, refer readers to a particular part of the source if possible, perhaps indicating a heading and the paragraph under the heading.

Russell’s dismissals from Trinity College at Cambridge and from City College in New York City have been seen as examples of the controversy that marked the philosopher’s life (Irvine, 2006, para. 2).

12. AN ENTIRE WORK

You do not need to give a page number if you are directing readers’ attention to an entire work. Identify the author in a signal phrase or in parentheses, and cite the year of publication in parentheses.

Kaplan (2000) considered Turkey and Central Asia explosive.

13. AN ENTIRE WEBSITE

When you are citing an entire website (and not a specific document within the website), give the URL in the text. You do not need to include the website in your reference list. To cite part of a website, see no. 20 on page 500.

Beyond providing diagnostic information, the website for the Alzheimer’s Association includes a variety of resources for family and community support of patients suffering from Alzheimer’s (http://www.alz.org).
14. PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Cite email, telephone conversations, interviews, personal letters, messages from nonarchived discussion groups or message boards, and other personal texts as personal communication, along with the person’s initial(s), last name, and the date. You do not need to include such personal communications in your reference list.

The author and editors seriously considered alternative ways of demonstrating documentation styles (F. Weinberg, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

L. Strauss (personal communication, December 6, 2006) told about visiting Yogi Berra when they both lived in Montclair, New Jersey.

NOTES

APA recognizes that there are instances when writers of research papers may need to use content notes to give an explanation or information that doesn’t fit into the paper proper. To signal a content note, place a superscript numeral in your text at the appropriate point. Your readers will know to look for a note beginning with the same superscript numeral on a separate page with the heading Notes, after your paper but before the reference list. If you have multiple notes, number them consecutively throughout your paper. Indent the first line of each note five spaces, and set all subsequent lines flush left.

Here is an example showing text and an accompanying content note from a book called In Search of Solutions: A New Direction in Psychotherapy (2003).

TEXT WITH SUPERSCRIPT

An important part of working with teams and one-way mirrors is taking the consultation break, as at Milan, BFTC, and MRI.¹
 CONTENT NOTE

1It is crucial to note here that, while working within a team is fun, stimulating, and revitalizing, it is not necessary for successful outcomes. Solution-oriented therapy works equally well when working solo.

APA REFERENCE LIST

A reference list provides full bibliographic information for every source cited in your text with the exception of entire websites and personal communications. This list should be alphabetized by authors' (or editors') last names. Works that do not have an identifiable author or editor are alphabetized by title. See pages 518–19 for a sample reference list.

Books

BASIC FORMAT FOR A BOOK

For most books, you'll need to provide information about the author; the date of publication; the title and any subtitle; and the place of publication and publisher. You'll find this information on the book's title page and copyright page.


New York, NY: Viking.

A FEW DETAILS TO NOTE

- **DATES:** If more than one year is given, use the most recent one.

- **TITLES:** Capitalize only the first word and proper nouns and proper adjectives in titles and subtitles.
• **PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** Give city followed by state (abbreviated) or country, if outside the United States (for example, Boston, MA; London, England; Toronto, Ontario, Canada). If more than one city is given, use the first. Do not include the state or country if the publisher is a university whose name includes it.

• **PUBLISHER:** Use a shortened form of the publisher’s name (Little, Brown for Little, Brown and Company), but retain Association, Books, and Press (American Psychological Association, Princeton University Press).

1. **ONE AUTHOR**

   **Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of publication). Title. Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.**


2. **TWO OR MORE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

   If the works were published in different years, list them chronologically.


   If the works were published in the same year, list them alphabetically by title, adding “a,” “b,” and so on to the years.


3. TWO OR MORE AUTHORS

For two to seven authors, use this format.

First Author’s Last Name, Initials, Next Author’s Last Name, Initials, & Final Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of publication). Title. Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


For a work by eight or more authors, name just the first six authors, followed by three ellipses, and end with the final author (see page 494 for an example from a journal article).

4. ORGANIZATION OR GOVERNMENT AS AUTHOR

Sometimes a corporation or government organization is both author and publisher. If so, use the word Author as the publisher.

Organization Name or Government Agency. (Year of publication). Title. Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


5. AUTHOR AND EDITOR

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of edited edition). Title. (Editor’s Initials Last Name, Ed.). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher. (Original work[s] published year[s])

6. EDITED COLLECTION

First Editor’s Last Name, Initials, Next Editor’s Last Name, Initials, & Final Editor’s Last Name, Initials. (Eds.) (Year of edited edition). *Title*. Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


7. WORK IN AN EDITED COLLECTION

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of article or chapter. In Initials Last Name (Ed.), *Title* (pp. pages). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


8. UNKNOWN AUTHOR

*Title*. (Year of publication). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


If the title page of a work lists the author as Anonymous, treat the reference-list entry as if the author’s name were Anonymous, and alphabetize it accordingly.

9. EDITION OTHER THAN THE FIRST

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). *Title* (name or number ed.). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.

10. TRANSLATION

**Author’s Last Name, Initials.** (Year of publication). *Title* (Translator’s Initials Last Name, Trans.). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher. (Original work published Year)


11. MULTIVOLUME WORK

**Author’s Last Name, Initials.** (Year). *Title* (Vols. numbers). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


**ONE VOLUME OF A MULTIVOLUME WORK**

**Author’s Last Name, Initials.** (Year). *Title of whole work: Vol. number.*

*Title of volume*. Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


12. ARTICLE IN A REFERENCE BOOK

UNSIGNED

**Title of entry.** (Year). In *Title of reference book* (Name or number ed., Vol. number, pp. pages). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


**Periodicals**

**BASIC FORMAT FOR AN ARTICLE**

For most articles, you’ll need to provide information about the author; the date; the article title and any subtitle; the periodical title; and any volume or issue number and inclusive page numbers. (APA also recommends including a DOI if one is available; for more on DOIs, see pages 499–500. For an example of a journal article that shows a DOI, see no. 21 on page 500.) Here is an example of a basic entry for an article in a journal.


**A FEW DETAILS TO NOTE**

- **AUTHORS:** List authors as you would for a book (see no. 1 on page 488 and no. 3 on page 490).
- **DATES:** For journals, give year only. For magazines and newspapers, give year followed by a comma and then month or month and day. Do not abbreviate months.
- **TITLES:** Capitalize only the first word and proper nouns and proper adjectives in titles and subtitles of articles. Capitalize the first and last words and all principal words of periodical titles. Do not capitalize a, an, the, or any prepositions or coordinating conjunctions unless they begin the title of the periodical.
13. ARTICLE IN A JOURNAL PAGINATED BY VOLUME

**Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume, pages.**


14. ARTICLE IN A JOURNAL PAGINATED BY ISSUE

**Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume(issue), pages.**

Weaver, C., McNally, C., & Moerman, S. (2001). To grammar or not to grammar: That is not the question! *Voices from the Middle, 8*(3), 17–33.

15. ARTICLE IN A MAGAZINE

If a magazine is published weekly, include the day and the month. If there are a volume number and an issue number, include them after the magazine title.

**Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Day). Title of article. Title of Magazine, volume(issue), page(s).**

If a magazine is published monthly, include the month(s) only.


16. ARTICLE IN A NEWSPAPER

If page numbers are consecutive, separate them with a dash. If not, separate them with a comma.

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Day). Title of article. Title of Newspaper, p(p). page(s).


17. ARTICLE BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR

IN A MAGAZINE

Title of article. (Year, Month Day). Title of Periodical, volume(issue), page(s).


IN A NEWSPAPER


18. REVIEW

IN A JOURNAL

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Date of publication). Title of review [Review of Title of Work, by Initials Last Name]. Title of Periodical, volume(issue), page(s).

IN A MAGAZINE


IN A NEWSPAPER


If the review does not have a title, include just the bracketed information about the work being reviewed.


19. LETTER TO THE EDITOR

IN A JOURNAL

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Date of publication). Title of letter [Letter to the editor]. Title of Periodical, volume(issue), page(s).


IN A MAGAZINE


IN A NEWSPAPER

Electronic Sources

BASIC FORMAT FOR AN ELECTRONIC SOURCE

Not every electronic source gives you all the data that APA would like to see in a reference entry. Ideally, you will be able to list author’s or editor’s name; date of first electronic publication or most recent revision; title of document; information about print publication if any; and retrieval information: DOI (Digital Object Identifier, a string of letters and numbers that identifies an online document) or URL (address of document or site). In some cases, additional information about electronic publication may be required (title of site, retrieval date, name of sponsoring institution). You will find most of those pieces of information in the following example.


A FEW DETAILS TO NOTE

- **AUTHORS**: List authors as you would for a print book or periodical.
- **TITLES**: For websites and electronic documents, articles, or books, capitalize titles and subtitles as you would for a book; capitalize periodical titles as you would for a print periodical.
- **DATES**: After the author, give the year of the document’s original publication on the Web or of its most recent revision. If neither of those years is clear, use _n.d._ to mean “no date.” For undated content or content that may change—like an “about us” statement or blog post—include the month (not abbreviated), day, and year that you retrieved the document. For content that’s unlikely to change—like a published journal article or book excerpt—you don’t need to include the retrieval date.
- **DOI OR URL**: A DOI provides a permanent link to an online document, so when it’s available, include the DOI instead of the URL in the reference. A DOI is often found on the first page of an article, but
sometimes you'll need to click on a button labeled “Article” or “Cross-Ref” to find it. If you do not identify the sponsoring institution (“the Library of Congress website” in the example above), you do not need a colon before the URL or DOI. Don’t include any punctuation at the end of the URL or DOI. If online material is presented in frames and no DOI is available, provide the URL of the home page or menu page. When a URL won’t fit on one line, break the URL before most punctuation, but do not break http://.

20. WORK FROM A NONPERIODICAL WEBSITE

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Date of publication). Title of work. Title of site. DOI or Retrieved Month Day, Year (if necessary), from URL.


To cite an entire website, include the URL in parentheses in an in-text citation. Do not list the website in your list of references.

21. ARTICLE IN AN ONLINE PERIODICAL OR DATABASE

When available, include the volume number and issue number as you would for a print source. If no DOI has been assigned, provide the URL of the home page or menu page of the journal or magazine, even for articles that you access through a database.

AN ARTICLE IN AN ONLINE JOURNAL

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume(issue), pages. DOI or Retrieved from URL.

AN ARTICLE IN AN ONLINE MAGAZINE

Author's Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Day). Title of article. Title of Magazine, volume(issue). DOI or Retrieved Month Day, Year (if necessary), from URL


AN ARTICLE IN AN ONLINE NEWSPAPER

If the article can be found by searching the site, give the URL of the home page or menu page.

Author's Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Day). Title of article. Title of Newspaper. Retrieved from URL


22. ARTICLE ONLY AVAILABLE THROUGH A DATABASE

Some sources, such as an out-of-print journal or rare book, can only be accessed through a database. When no DOI is provided, give either the name of the database or its URL.

Author's Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume(issue), pages. DOI or Retrieved from Name of database or URL


23. ARTICLE IN AN ONLINE REFERENCE WORK

For online reference works like dictionaries or encyclopedias, give the URL of the home page or menu page if no DOI is provided. (See next page for template and example.)
24. ELECTRONIC BOOK

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of book. DOI or Retrieved from URL


For an electronic book based on a print version, include a description of the digital format in brackets after the book title.


25. ELECTRONIC DISCUSSION SOURCE

If the name of the list to which the message was posted is not part of the URL, include it after Retrieved from. The URL you provide should be for the archived version of the message or post.

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Day). Subject line of message [Descriptive label]. Retrieved from URL


Do not include email or other nonarchived discussions in your list of references. Simply cite the sender’s name in your text. See no. 14 on page 486 for guidelines on identifying such sources in your text.
26. **BLOG ENTRY**

   **Author's Last Name, Initials.** (Year, Month Day). Title of post [Web log post]. Retrieved from URL


27. **ONLINE VIDEO**

   **Last Name, Initials (Writer), & Last Name, Initials (Producer).** (Year, Month Day posted). Title [Descriptive label]. Retrieved from URL


28. **PODCAST**

   **Writer’s Last Name, Initials.** (Writer), & Producer’s Last Name, Initials. (Producer). (Year, Month Day). Title of podcast. *Title of website or program* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from URL


**Other Kinds of Sources**

29. **FILM, VIDEO, OR DVD**

   **Last Name, Initials (Producer), & Last Name, Initials (Director).** (Year). Title [Motion picture]. Country: Studio.

30. MUSIC RECORDING

Composer’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of copyright). Title of song. On Title of album [Medium]. City, State or Country: Label.


If the music is performed by someone other than the composer, put that information in brackets following the title. When the recording date is different from the copyright date, put it in parentheses after the label.


31. PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of paper. In Proceedings Title (pp. pages). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


32. TELEVISION PROGRAM

Last Name, Initials (Writer), & Last Name, Initials (Director). (Year). Title of episode [Descriptive label]. In Initials Last Name (Producer), Series title. City, State or Country: Network.

33. SOFTWARE OR COMPUTER PROGRAM

Title and version number [Computer software]. (Year). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


34. DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of dissertation. Title of Source, volume(issue), page(s).


35. DISSERTATION

ACCESSSED ONLINE

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of dissertation (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Name of database. (accession number)


For a dissertation that you retrieve from the Web, include the name of institution after Doctoral dissertation. For example: (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina). End your citation with Retrieved from and the URL.

UNPUBLISHED


36. TECHNICAL OR RESEARCH REPORT

Author’s Last Name, Initials. (Year). Title of report (Report number). Publication City, State or Country: Publisher.


How to Cite Sources That APA Does Not Cover

To cite a source for which APA does not provide guidelines, look at models similar to the source you are citing. Give any information readers will need in order to find it themselves—author; date of publication; title; publisher; information about electronic retrieval (DOI or URL); and any other pertinent information. You might want to try your citation yourself, to be sure it will lead others to your source.

SAMPLE RESEARCH PAPER, APA STYLE

Carolyn Stonehill wrote the following paper for a first-year writing course. It is formatted according to the guidelines of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition (2009). While APA guidelines are used widely in linguistics and the social sciences, exact requirements may vary from discipline to discipline and course to course. If you’re unsure about what your instructor wants, ask for clarification.
It's in Our Genes:
The Biological Basis of Human Mating Behavior

Carolyn Stonehill
English 102, Section 22
Professor Bertsch
February 24, 2009
While cultural values and messages certainly play a part in the process of mate selection, the genetic and psychological predispositions developed by our ancestors play the biggest role in determining to whom we are attracted. Women are attracted to strong, capable men with access to resources to help rear children. Men find women attractive based on visual signs of youth, health, and, by implication, fertility. While perceptions of attractiveness are influenced by cultural norms and reinforced by advertisements and popular media, the persistence of mating behaviors that have no relationship to societal realities suggests that they are part of our biological heritage.
IT'S IN OUR GENES

It's in Our Genes: The Biological Basis of Human Mating Behavior

Consider the following scenario: It's a sunny afternoon on campus, and Jenny is walking to her next class. Out of the corner of her eye, she catches sight of her lab partner, Joey, parking his car. She stops to admire how tall, muscular, and stylishly dressed he is, and she does not take her eyes off him as he walks away from his shiny new BMW. As he flashes her a pearly white smile, Jenny melts, then quickly adjusts her skirt and smooths her hair.

This scenario, while generalized, is familiar: Our attraction to people—or lack of it—often depends on their physical traits. But why this attraction? Why does Jenny respond the way she does to her handsome lab partner? Why does she deem him handsome at all? Certainly Joey embodies the stereotypes of physical attractiveness prevalent in contemporary American society. Advertisements, television shows, and magazine articles all provide Jenny with signals telling her what constitutes the ideal American man. Yet she is also attracted to Joey’s new sports car even though she has a new car herself. Does Jenny find this man striking because of the influence of her culture, or does her attraction lie in a more fundamental part of her constitution? Evolutionary psychologists, who apply principles of evolutionary biology to research on the human mind, would say that Jenny’s responses in this situation are due largely to mating strategies developed by her prehistoric ancestors. Driven by the need to reproduce and
propagate the species, these ancestors of ours formed patterns of
mate selection so effective in providing for their needs and those of
their offspring that they are mimicked even in today’s society.
While cultural values and messages clearly play a part in the
process of mate selection, the genetic and psychological
predispositions developed by our ancestors play the biggest role in
determining to whom we are attracted.

Women’s Need to Find a Capable Mate

Pioneering evolutionary psychologist Trivers (as cited in Allman,
1993) observed that having and rearing children requires women to
invest far more resources than men because of the length of
pregnancy, the dangers of childbirth, and the duration of infants’
dependence on their mothers (p. 56). According to Fisher (as cited in
Frank, 2001), one of the leading advocates of this theory, finding a
capable mate was a huge preoccupation of all prehistoric reproductive
women, and for good reason: “A female couldn’t carry a baby in one
arm and sticks and stones in the other arm and still feed and protect
herself on the very dangerous open grasslands, so she began to need a
mate to help her rear her young” (p. 85). So because of this it became
advantageous for the woman to find a strong, capable man with
access to resources, and it became suitable for the man to find a
healthy, reproductively sound woman to bear and care for his
offspring. According to evolutionary psychologists, these are the
bases upon which modern mate selection is founded, and there are
many examples of this phenomenon to be found in our own society.
One can see now why Jenny might be attracted by Joey’s display of resources—his BMW. In our society, men with good job prospects, a respected social position, friends in high places, or any combination thereof have generally been viewed as more desirable mates than those without these things because they signal to women that the men have resources (Buss & Schmitt, 1993, p. 226). Compared with males, females invest more energy in bearing and raising children, so it is most advantageous for females to choose mates with easy access to resources, the better to provide for their children.

Men’s Need to Find a Healthy Mate

For men, reproductive success depends mainly on the reproductive fitness of their female counterpart: No amount of available resources can save a baby miscarried in the first month of gestation. Because of this need for a healthy mate, men have evolved a particular attraction “radar” that focuses on signs of a woman’s health and youth, markers that are primarily visual (Weiten, 2001, p. 399). Present-day attractiveness ratings are based significantly on this primitive standard: “Some researchers have suggested that cross-cultural standards of beauty reflect an evolved preference for physical traits that are generally associated with youth, such as smooth skin, good muscle tone, and shiny hair” (Boyd & Silk, 2000, p. 625). This observation would explain why women of our time are preoccupied with plastic surgery, makeup, and—in Jenny’s case—a quick hair check as a potential date.
approaches. As Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, and Wu (1995) noted, “A focus on outer beauty may have stemmed from a need for desirable inner qualities,” such as health, strength, and fertility, and “culture may build on evolutionary dynamics by specifying grooming attributes that signal successful adaptation” (pp. 262–263).

The Influence of the Media on Mate Selection

There is, however, a good deal of opposition to evolutionary theory. Some critics say that the messages fed to us by the media are a larger influence on the criteria of present-day mate selection than any sort of ancestral behavior. Advertisements and popular media have long shown Americans what constitutes a physically ideal mate: In general, youthful, well-toned, symmetrical features are considered more attractive than aging, flabby, or lopsided ones. Evolutionary psychologists argue that research has not determined what is cause and what is effect. Cosmides and Tooby (1997) offered the following analogy to show the danger of assigning culture too powerful a causal role:

For example, people think that if they can show that there is information in the culture that mirrors how people behave, then that is the cause of their behavior. So if they see that men on TV have trouble crying, they assume that their example is causing boys to be afraid to cry. But which is cause and which effect? Does the fact that men don’t cry much on TV teach boys to not cry, or does it merely reflect the way boys normally develop? In the absence of research on the particular topic,
There is no way of knowing. ("Nature and Nurture: An Adaptationist Perspective," para. 16)

We can hypothesize, then, that rather than media messages determining our mating habits, our mating habits determine the media messages. Advertisers rely on classical conditioning to interest consumers in their products. For instance, by showing an image of a beautiful woman while advertising a beauty product, advertisers hope that consumers will associate attractiveness with the use of that particular product (Weiten, 2001). In order for this method to be effective, however, the images depicted in conjunction with the beauty product must be ones the general public already finds attractive, and an image of a youthful, clear-skinned woman would, according to evolutionary psychologists, be attractive for reasons of reproductive fitness. In short, what some call media influence is not an influence at all but merely a mirror in which we see evidence of our ancestral predispositions.

If Not Media, Then What?

Tattersall (2001), a paleoanthropologist at the American Museum of Natural History, offered another counterargument to the evolutionary theory of mate selection. First, he argued that the behavior of organisms is influenced not only by genetics, but also by economics and ecology working together (p. 663). Second, he argued that no comparisons can be made between modern human behavior and that of our evolutionary predecessors because the appearance of Homo sapiens presented a sudden, qualitative change...
DOING RESEARCH

IT’S IN OUR GENES

from the Neanderthals — not a gradual evolution of behavioral traits:

As a cognitive and behavioral entity, our species is truly unprecedented. Our consciousness is an emergent quality, not the result of eons of fine-tuning of a single instrument. And, if so, it is to this recently acquired quality of uniqueness, not to the hypothetical “ancestral environments,” that we must look in the effort to understand our often unfathomable behaviors. (p. 665)

The key to Tattersall’s argument is this “emergent quality” of symbolic thought; according to his theories, the ability to think symbolically is what separates modern humans from their ancestors and shows the impossibility of sexual selection behaviors having been passed down over millions of years. Our sexual preferences, Tattersall said, are a result of our own recent and species-specific development and have nothing whatsoever to do with our ancestors.

Opponents of the evolutionary theory, though, fail to explain how “unfathomable” mating behaviors can exist in our present society for no apparent or logical reason. Though medicine has advanced to the point where fertility can be medically enhanced, Singh (1993) observed that curvy women are still viewed as especially attractive because they are perceived to possess greater fertility — a perception that is borne out by several studies of female fertility, hormone levels, and waist-to-hip ratio (p. 304). Though
more and more women are attending college and achieving high-paying positions, women are still “more likely than men to consider economic prospects a high priority in a mate” (Sapolsky, 2001–2002, p. 18). While cultural norms and economic conditions influence our taste in mates, as Singh (1993) showed in observing that “the degree of affluence of a society or of an ethnic group within a society may, to a large extent, determine the prevalence and admiration of fatness [of women]” (pp. 304–305), we still react to potential mates in ways determined in Paleolithic times. The key to understanding our mating behavior does not lie only in an emergent modern quality, nor does it lie solely in the messages relayed to us by society; rather, it involves as well the complex mating strategies developed by our ancestors.
References


IT'S IN OUR GENES

