Title: Qualities of a good spouse: a qualitative study based on free-listing technique

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Abstract: The objective of the paper is to know about what people desire from their respective spouses or in other words what are the desired qualities that a souse should have. The study used free-listing technique to collect data and applied a very simple method to analyse those. The study found as many as 114 qualities or items mentioned by 17 respondents. Importance or salience of each item or quality in respondent's mind has also been computed. There are considerable differences in preferences according to marital status and gender. The method used here can also be used in other opinion research studies.

Key words: Qualities of a Good Spouse, Free-listing, Honest, Understanding.

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Citation: Amlan Majumder, (2000), **"Qualities of a good spouse: a qualitative study based on free-listing technique"**, Seminar paper for the Course on 'Social Research Methods' of the Second Semester 1999-2000, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi: New Delhi.

1. Introduction

The most crucial job for a student of humanities and social science is to understand people. In order to solve someone's problem a researcher must know her or him well. Though there are various points to look at to do that, the present study makes an attempt to know the young scholars of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD) by evaluating their wants from their spouses or would be spouses -- what they desire from them or what are the good qualities that a spouse should have. [1]

I hope my readers would not mind if I write something about the background of the study in this introductory section. I have been trained in qualitative anthropological research techniques in my Master of Population Studies programme at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai during the second semester of the academic year of 1998-1999. Later I joined the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IITD as a PG student in Economics. While doing course work on Social Research Methods, which has been covered by the psychology unit of the Department, I took the opportunity to apply one qualitative method learnt earlier to write my term paper for the above-mentioned course. The message of my paper was that I was going to apply qualitative anthropological techniques in issues related to cognitive psychology. The present paper is the modified version of my term paper (as mentioned above), which has been written during April – May 2000. [2]

2. Objective

The objectives of the study are to (i) know the desired qualities of a good spouse form both male and female respondents pursuing graduate studies at the IITD, and (ii) to compute importance or salience of each item or group of items in respondent's mind. [3]

3. Method

Though I began this study with some previous experience, I did not have with me any relevant literature in black and white. Rather I had with me one study (un published at that time) on male sexual health problems in a Mumbai slum population based on free-listing technique with similar objectives (Verma, Rangaiyan, Singh, Sharma & Pelto, 2001). The study relied on the software 'Anthropac' for data analysis. It computed average rank and salience of each item among sample informants. Salience has been calculated by combining the frequency of an item with its average rank in individual lists. Methodological question, which may arise at this point is that whether the process of computing average rank has been a valid action. Each individual list expresses one preference ordering where items are in ordinal scale. Characters in ordinal scale have identity and order only. They are not additive. One can use positive integers as 1, 2, 3 etc. to rank them in ascending or descending order but in no way they can be added, subtracted or divided. In that sense it is not possible to compute average rank of items mentioned by various respondents. For example, [First (1) + Third (3)] / 2 = Second (2) is a meaningless operation. If it is not possible to compute average rank, any method of computing salience based on average rank is likely to lose credibility. In the present paper, I have tried to develop a very simple technique to compute salience which is free from the above-mentioned shortcoming and can be operationalised even without using any software package or any spreadsheet programme. [4]

3.1. Sampling

A purposive sampling technique has been applied to cover 30 respondents. However, 17 feedbacks have been received as follows:

    7 unmarried females
    3 married females
    3 married males, and

4 unmarried males.

It was also not possible to cover equal number of unmarried and married respondents, as the proportion of the latter was very less in population. All respondents are IITians consisting of students of final year M. Tech. and Ph. D. programmes from various disciplines in the first semester of 2000 – 2001 academic year. [5]

3.2. Method of data collection

Free-listing technique has been adopted for collecting necessary information. Respondents have been requested to feel free to write the desired qualities of a good spouse (as many as they wish) in descending order according to importance. Though the technique is well known in the field of qualitative research, according to Verma et al. (2001) the technique is particularly useful to get culturally relevant items (vocabulary) and to delineate the boundaries of a semantic or cultural domain. The technique can also be used to make inferences about the informants' cognitive structure from the order of recall and the frequency of recall. [6]

3.3. Method of analysing data

3.3.1. Classification of data and necessary adjustments

Though there may be a large number of items, considering appropriate or similar meaning, those can be classified into few broad categories. For example, if one list with 7 qualities begins with *good looking* and ends with *fair complexion* with other different qualities in the middle, the 2 qualities will be clubbed together and considered as first category. After this adjustment number of different categories in that list will be 6. [7]

3.3.2. Computation of importance or salience

3.3.2.1. Assumptions

Computation of importance or salience is based on the following assumptions:
(i) each individual list is exhaustive, (ii) importance of different items to the respondent declines linearly as rank increases, (iii) though relevance of one particular issue (qualities of a good spouse in the present case) may vary among individuals, different levels of relevance among the sample informants will get same weight, and (iv) the attribute, importance can be converted into positive integers which are in ratio scale. [8]

The first assumption is to make sure that an individual list is an exact reflection of the state of the mind of the respondent with respect to the concerned matter. There should not be any hole or gap in the observed list if it would have been compared with the one, which reflects the ideal state of the mind. The second assumption is nothing but a simplification of this fact. It is obvious that importance of items declines gradually, as the respondents have been requested to do so. However, it is not exactly known whether importance declines exponentially or linearly or follow ebb and flow pattern. For the sake of simplicity, however, we may assume a linear path of decline. The third assumption is to convey that the issue of qualities of a good spouse is equally important among all respondents. Importance of different items may vary in an individual mind, but the overall importance of the issue is equally important among individuals. For example, one respondent may list 16 items, some other may list 7 items and from this fact it is not plausible to assume that the former is more concerned about the issue (under discussion) than the latter. Technically, in the computational procedure, both the persons will get same weight. In other words, in each individual, the mind-space occupied by the issue will be considered equal to 1 (one). The fourth assumption has been made to avoid technical problem, which arises from the usual practice of computing average rank in studies based on free-listing technique (as mentioned earlier). However, as

importance is an attribute, we can assign values to it such that values are in ratio scale. It will make addition (subtraction and division also) a valid action. [9]

3.3.2.2. Method of computing salience

Method of computing salience can be explained by a suitable example. We can assume that there are 2 individual lists: A and B. There are 3 items in list A and 5 items in list B. The quality - *good looking* has first rank in list A and fifth rank in list B. As importance of items in an individual list declines linearly, we can assign each item a number (as a proxy measure of importance) such as 3, 2, 1 respectively in the list A and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively in the list B. Based on the assumptions of section 3.3.2.1, *good looking* has a salience: $3 / (3 + 2 + 1) = 0.500$ for individual A. The subsequent 2 qualities in list A have salience values: $2 / (3 + 2 + 1) = 0.333$ and $1 / (3 + 2 + 1) = 0.167$ such that for an individual $\sum$ (salience) = 0.500 + 0.333 + 0.167 = 1.000. Similarly, the quality - *good looking* in list B has a salience: $1 / (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) = 0.067$ and the preceding qualities have salience values: $2 / (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) = 0.133$, $3 / (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) = 0.200$, $4 / (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) = 0.267$, and $5 / (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1) = 0.333$ respectively such that for an individual $\sum$ (salience) = 0.333 + 0.267 + 0.200 + 0.133 + 0.067 = 1.000. However, the average salience of the item - *good looking* is (0.500 + 0.067) / 2 = 0.284. The figure 0.284 conveys that, on an average, 28.4 per cent space of a respondent's mind is occupied by the feeling that a spouse should be *good looking*. This exercise has been carried out for 10 unmarried and married females, 4 unmarried, and 3 married males respectively. [10]

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Types of response

Seventeen respondents have mentioned 114 qualities or items. They have been shown in Table 1. Ten unmarried and married female respondents have mentioned 75 items. As number of items listed by married females was very less as compared to those of the unmarried ones, they have been clubbed together. However, out of these 75 items taking similar or appropriate meaning 25 categories have been formed. List of items mentioned by unmarried and married female respondents are displayed in Table 2. Similarly, 16 categories for unmarried and 17 categories for married male respondents have been formed from sets of 36 and 18 items. Lists of items mentioned by unmarried and married male respondents are shown in Table 3 and Table 4. [11]

4.1.1. List of items (qualities) from all respondents

Table 1. List of items (qualities) from all respondents

Sl. No.	Qualities	Sl. No.	Qualities
1	A person of depth.	58	Not short tempered or get easily carried away.
2	Ability to explore ideas.	59	Not smoker.
3	Ability to express ideas.	60	Not stingy.
4	Affectionate.	61	Open minded.
5	Believes in equal worth of all human beings.	62	Open minded.
6	Best friend.	63	Open to new thoughts.
7	Broad thinking.	64	Optimistic.
8	Can have drinks at times but should not be a drunkard.	65	Pleasant disposition.

9	Care for parents and children.	66	Pleasant nature.
10	Caring.	67	Positive attitude to life.
11	Companion and friend.	68	Principled human being.
12	Compassionate to feelings.	69	Punctual.
13	Compassionate.	70	Pure heart.
14	Conservative in spending money.	71	Reciprocity in relationship.
15	Cooperative.	72	Respect all people.
16	Dedication.	73	Respect for each other.
17	Dependable.	74	Respect for my views.
18	Dignified, Balanced.	75	Respects privacy.
19	Educated.	76	Responsible.
20	Emotional.	77	Role of mother wife and friend.
21	Encouraging.	78	Self-respect.
22	Even tempered.	79	Sensitive.
23	Faithful.	80	Sentimental.
24	Family man.	81	Sexual pleasure.
25	Financial stability.	82	Sharing difficulties and joys equally.
26	Fond of children and animals.	83	Sharing vision thoughts and ambition.
27	Generous.	84	Sharing.
28	Give and take policy.	85	Should be of medium weight.
29	Good advisor.	86	Should have clean habits.
30	Good at heart.	87	Should not be an MCP (male chauvinistic pig).
31	Good chef.	88	Should not be tall.
32	Good father.	89	Should not be ugly.
33	Good home maker.	90	Shouldering husband's works / activities.
34	Good human values.	91	Simple.
35	Good job.	92	Sincerely.
36	Good looking.	93	Sociable.
37	Good motivator.	94	Sportive.
38	Good nature.	95	Stand by me through thick and thin.
39	Good personality.	96	Straight forward.
40	Good presence of mind.	97	Strong sense of family.
41	Good sense of humour.	98	Supportive.
42	Hard working.	99	Talent.
43	Healthy-physical	100	Telepathic.
44	Honest.	101	Totally upright.
45	Independently decision making ability.	102	Transparency in relationship.
46	Indulgent.	103	Trustworthiness.
47	Intelligent.	104	Trustworthiness.
48	Likes to travel to see the world.	105	Truthfulness.
49	Lots of common sense.	106	Unconditional positive regard.
50	Loving.	107	Understanding, Communicative.
51	Mature.	108	Understanding.
52	Mentally compatible.	109	Values the non-self over the self.
53	Mentally strong to face any challenge.	110	Virgin.
54	Mutual Respect.	111	Well earning.
55	Mutual trust and love.	112	Willing to send me for job.
56	Nice to my family.	113	Wonderful human being.

57	Non-interfering.	114	Young in heart.

4.1.2. List of items (qualities) from unmarried and females

Table 2. List of items (qualities) from unmarried and married females

Sl. No.	Categories	Items (Qualities)
1	Believes in equal worth of all human beings	Believes in equal worth of all human beings.
2	Educated	Educated.
3	Emotional	Emotional, Sentimental, Sensitive, Caring, Mentally compatible.
4	Faithful	Faithful, Sincerely.
5	Family man	Family man, Good father, Nice to my family, Strong sense of family, Fond of children and animals, Companion and friend.
6	Good job	Good job, Well earning, Financial stability.
7	Good looking	Good looking, Should not be ugly, Should not be tall, Should be of medium weight.
8	Good nature	Good nature, Should have clean habits, Good personality, Dignified, Balanced, not short tempered or get easily carried away, Pleasant disposition, Even tempered, Compassionate, Good at heart, Should not be an MCP (male chauvinistic pig), Wonderful human being, Principled human being.
9	Good sense of humour	Good sense of humour, Good presence of mind, Lots of common sense.
10	Honest	Honest, Truthfulness, Totally upright.
11	Indulgent	Indulgent, Willing to send me for job, Non-interfering, Open minded.
12	Intelligent	Intelligent, Mature, Talent, A person of depth.
13	Loving	Loving, Affectionate.
14	Mutual Respect	Mutual Respect, Respect all people, respect for my views, Self-respect.
15	Not smoker	Not smoker, Can have drinks at times but should not be a drunkard.
16	Not stingy	Not stingy.
17	Optimistic	Optimistic, Positive attitude to life.
18	Respects privacy	Respects privacy.
19	Sharing	Sharing, Generous.
20	Simple	Simple.
21	Sportive	Sportive.
22	Supportive	Supportive, Good advisor, Stand by me through thick and thin, Encouraging.
23	Telepathic	Telepathic.
24	Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness, Responsible, Dependable.
25	Understanding	Understanding, Communicative.

4.1.3. List of items (qualities) from unmarried males

Table 3. . List of items (qualities) from unmarried males

Sl No.	Categories	Items (Qualities)
1	Care for parents and children	Care for parents and children, Role of mother wife and friend.
2	Conservative in spending money	Conservative in spending money.
3	Educated	Educated.
4	Good home maker	Good homemaker, Hardworking, Great chef.
5	Good motivator	Good motivator.
6	Healthy-physical	Healthy-physical
7	Honest	Honest, Pure heart, Broad thinking, Open minded, Straight forward, Open to new thoughts.
8	Intelligent	Intelligent, Independently decision making ability, Ability to explore ideas.
9	Likes to travel to see the world	Likes to travel to see the world.
10	Mentally strong to face any challenge	Mentally strong to face any challenge.
11	Mutual trust and love	Mutual trust and love, Reciprocity in relationship, Unconditional positive regard, Transparency in relationship, Respect for each other, Compassionate to feelings, Dedication, Give and take policy.
12	Punctual	Punctual.
13	Sexual pleasure	Sexual pleasure.
14	Sharing difficulties and joys equally	Sharing difficulties and joys equally, shouldering husbands works/activities, Sharing vision thoughts and ambition.
15	Supportive	Supportive, Cooperative.
16	Virgin	Virgin.

4.1.4. List of items (qualities) from married males

Table 4. List of items (qualities) from married males

Sl. No.	Categories	Items (Qualities)
1	Ability to express ideas	Ability to express ideas.
2	Best friend	Best friend.
3	Educated	Educated.
4	Good chef	Good chef.
5	Good human values	Good human values.
6	Honesty	Honesty, Truthfulness.
7	Intelligent	Intelligent.
8	Loving and caring	Loving and caring.
9	Optimistic	Optimistic.
10	Pleasant nature	Pleasant nature.
11	Sharing	Sharing.
12	Sociable	Sociable.
13	Supportive	Supportive.
14	Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness.

15	Understanding	Understanding.
16	Values the non-self over the self	Values the non-self over the self.
17	Young in heart	Young in heart.

4.2. Preference of unmarried and married females

Table 5 shows preferences of unmarried and married female respondents. For example, the first item, g*ood sense of humour* has a frequency of 6. It means that 60 per cent of the respondents desire that their respective husbands should be acquainted with this particular quality. It has a salience value of 0.209. It implies that, on an average, nearly 21 per cent space of a respondent's mind is occupied by the feeling that a spouse should have *good sense of humour*. The quality, *honest* has been mentioned by 80 per cent of the female respondents but has a salience of 0.150. Though many of the respondents feel that a good spouse should be *honest*, it is les important than *good sense of humour*, *trustworthiness*, and *emotional* but more important than *understanding*, *intelligent*, *educated*, and others. [12]

Table 5. Preference of unmarried and married females

Sl. No.	Qualities	Frequency	% Respondents	Salience
1	Good Sense of Humour	6	60	0.209
2	Trustworthiness	6	60	0.180
3	Emotional	4	40	0.158
4	Honest	8	80	0.150
5	Understanding	4	40	0.136
6	Intelligent	5	50	0.130
7	Educated	5	50	0.126
8	Good nature	7	70	0.124
9	Faithful	2	20	0.112
10	Sharing	4	40	0.110
11	Loving	5	50	0.107
12	Supportive	3	30	0.095
13	Good Job	3	30	0.093
14	Simple	2	20	0.082
15	Respectfulness	5	50	0.079
16	Family man	6	60	0.077
17	Not stingy	1	10	0.075
18	Indulgent	2	20	0.070
19	Sportive	1	10	0.045
20	Believes in equal worth of all human beings	1	10	0.045
21	Good Looking	1	10	0.042
22	Telepathic	1	10	0.038
23	Not Smoker	1	10	0.025
24	Optimistic	1	10	0.017
25	Respects privacy	1	10	0.015

4.3. Preference of unmarried males

Table 6 shows preferences of unmarried male respondents. Respondents in this category unanimously confirmed that *mutual trust and love* is the most important factor. *Understanding*, *sharing,* and *good homemaker* are the other important factors according to

importance. Their unmarried (with married also) counterparts, however, give stress on *trustworthiness* (probably in one direction); *love* (loving) is also an important factor, which takes almost the central position in their mind (11th position in Table 5). [13]

Table 6. Preference of unmarried males

S. No.	Qualities	Frequency	% Respondent	Salience
1	Mutual Trust and Love	4	100	0.203
2	Understanding	3	75	0.169
3	Sharing	3	75	0.151
4	Good home maker	3	75	0.113
5	Good Motivator	1	25	0.109
6	Supportive	2	50	0.108
7	Honest	3	75	0.104
8	Educated	2	50	0.101
9	Care for Parents Children	2	50	0.089
10	Punctual	1	25	0.073
11	Conservative in spending Money	1	25	0.058
12	Intelligent	3	75	0.057
13	Likes to travel to see the World	1	25	0.056
14	Healthy (Physical)	2	50	0.047
15	Healthy (mental)	1	25	0.042
16	Virgin	1	25	0.017
17	Sexual Pleasure	1	25	0.008

4.4. Preference of married males

Table 7 shows preferences of married male respondents. Respondents in this category are not running behind the illusion of *love* like their unmarried friends. They feel that *understanding* and *pleasant nature* are more important. However, like others they also feel that *honesty*, *education* etc. are crucial factors. Cultural differences between married and unmarried groups and also between genders can be understood by looking at the items like *great chef* or *good home maker* in Table 3 and *good chef* in Table 4, *good job* (which includes *well earning*, *financial stability* also), and *family man* in Table 2. Female respondents want their spouses to be in good or well earning jobs and also to be a *good family man*. One married male (unmarried also) respondent, on the other hand wants his spouse to be a *good chef* or like. [14]

Table 7. Preference of married males

Sl. No.	Qualities	Frequency	% Respondent	Salience
1	Understanding	2	66.66	0.268
2	Pleasant nature	1	33.33	0.238
3	Sociable	1	33.33	0.190
4	Best Friend	1	33.33	0.182
5	Young in Heart	1	33.33	0.164
6	Good Chef	1	33.33	0.145
7	Ability to express ideas	1	33.33	0.143
8	Loving and Caring	1	33.33	0.127
9	Honest	3	100	0.116
10	Educated	2	66.66	0.116

11	Intelligent	1	33.33	0.107
12	Optimistic	2	66.66	0.099
13	Trustworthiness	1	33.33	0.091
14	Supportive	2	66.66	0.072
15	Good Human Values	1	33.33	0.071
16	Values the non- self over the self	1	33.33	0.048
17	Sharing	1	33.33	0.036

5. Conclusion

The study accumulated 114 points from the 17 young hearts. Those points and results of systematic analyses give a very good and clear idea about their desires from respective spouses or would be spouses. It also proves that free-listing technique can delineate cultural differences among groups. The method used here can also be used in other opinion research studies. [15]

Acknowledgments

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