Sex and the city
F seeks handsome M with GSOH and big wallet

Girls who live in a big city have more expensive tastes in men than their provincial cousins, at least when it comes to advertising for a partner. The discovery suggests that women's idea of a perfect partner changes when there are plenty of big spenders around. But others say that large cities may simply attract more women who are after a rich man.

Kevin McGraw at Cornell University collected lonely hearts ads from newspapers in 23 American cities, ranging from Los Angeles with a population of 3.5 million people, to Montgomery in Alabama, home to one-tenth that number. He sorted the ads according to what the women asked for in prospective partners. For example, some women made emotional qualities a priority, seeking "companionship" or a "long-term relationship", while others demanded material wealth, looking for a "professional", "financially stable" or "rich" boyfriend.

McGraw then looked for correlations between where women lived and what they wanted. Those from big cities tended to rate wealth higher and emotional stability lower than those from small cities. This shows that women adjust their preferences based on what is available and what their needs are, says McGraw. "A middle class woman in New York might have higher resource demands simply because of a higher cost of living."

But Steve Gangestad, an expert in human mate selection at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque questions that. He says that high-maintenance women might simply migrate to cities, where they are more likely to find a big earner.

Irma Kurtz, an agony aunt at Cosmopolitan magazine in London, says that large American cities also have large pockets of poverty. The ads may be a way for women to filter out prospective partners that they perceive to be less successful, she says.  

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More at: Ethology (vol 108, p 303)