

# Sexual Selection Under Parental Choice



***THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN  
THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN MATING***

M. Apostolou, *Evolution and Human Behavior* (October, 2007)

# Sexual Selection & Female Choice



- The dominant assumption in evolutionary psychology is that females exercise choice in the selection of mates
- This is consistent with sexual selection theory
- However, ethnographic evidence, reviewed below, suggests that parents dominate choice of marital partners for sons and daughters
- Trivers' theory of parental manipulation of offspring may be a more insightful model of marital choice in simple societies

## Previously from Rosenblatt and Cozby I noted the following



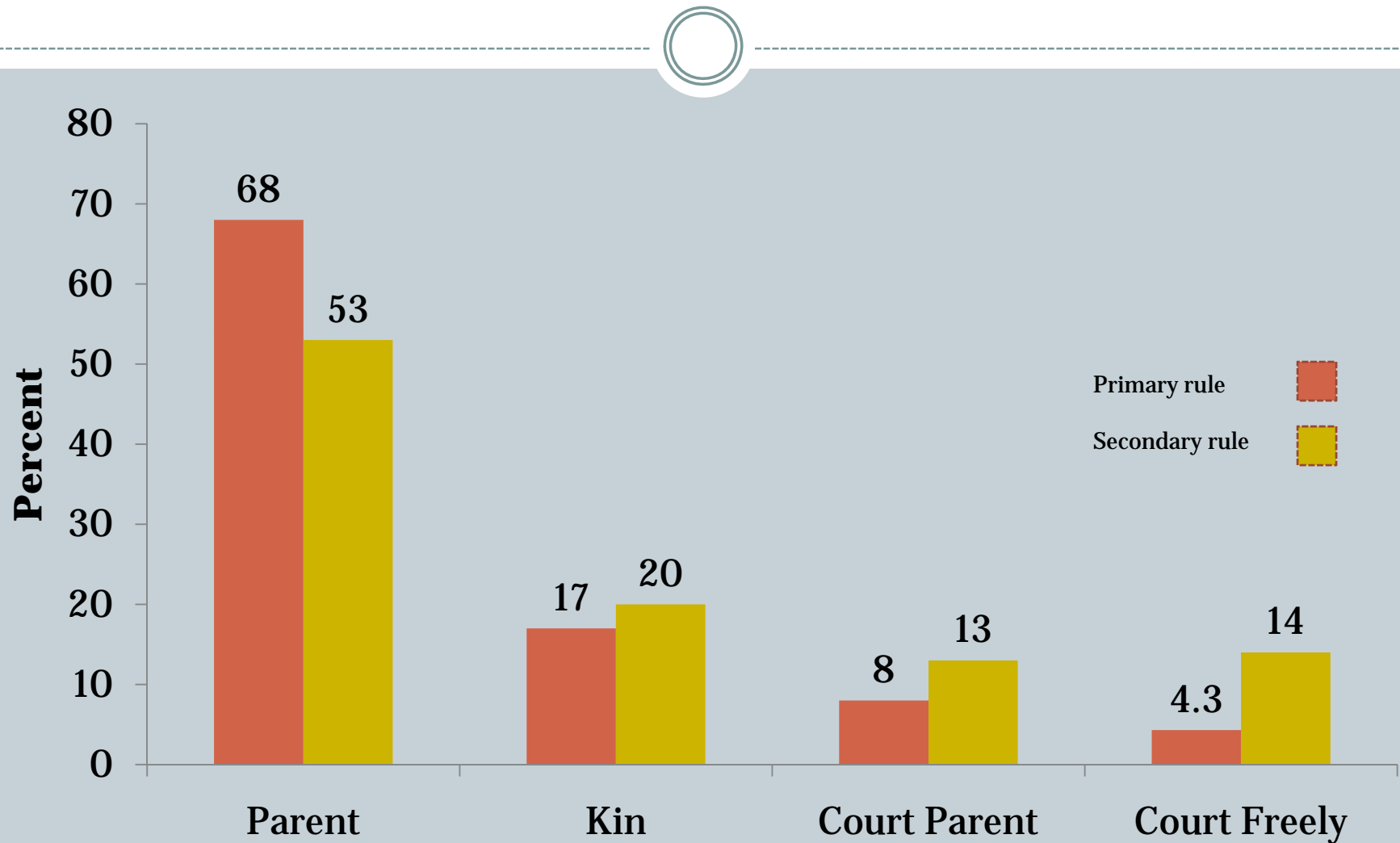
- Using the standard cross-cultural sample we found that
  - 31% of time males can court autonomously but only 8% for females.
  - Parents do not consult sons in 13% of the cases and 21% for females.
- The results for foragers are somewhat different – they show even less choice and given different measures the two studies are difficult to compare directly.

# Marital Choice among Foragers

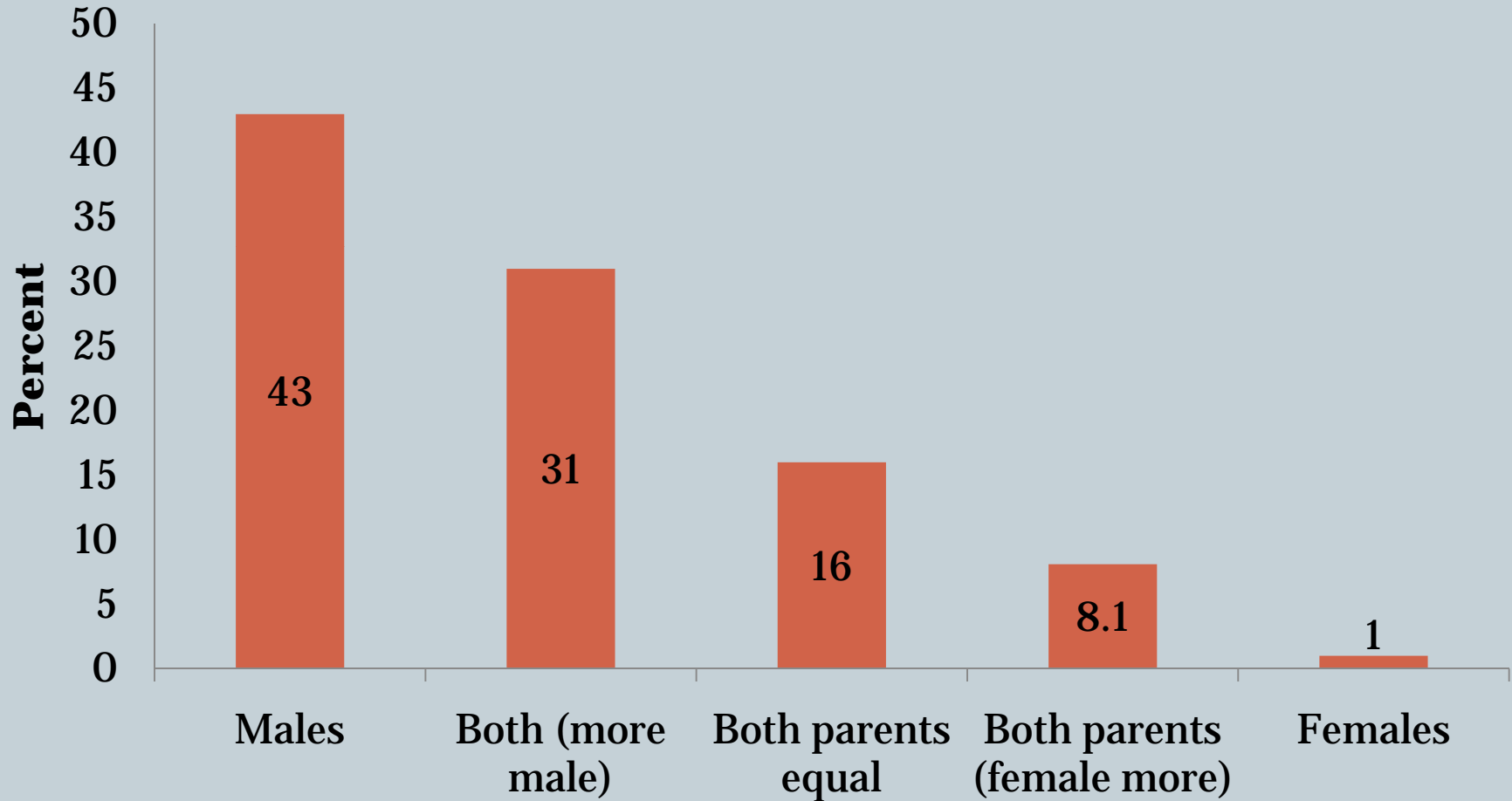


- HRAF sample of 190 hunter gatherer societies (>75% reliance on foraging)
- The issue: to what degree are women able to realize female choice (autonomous mate selection)
- Type of marital arrangements classified
  - Parents make choice
  - Kin make choice
  - Courtship subject to parental control
  - Courtship without parental approval
- Primary and secondary
  - Primary = the majority of marriages
  - Secondary = common alternative to primary

# Control of marital choice for women and men



# Which parent chooses?

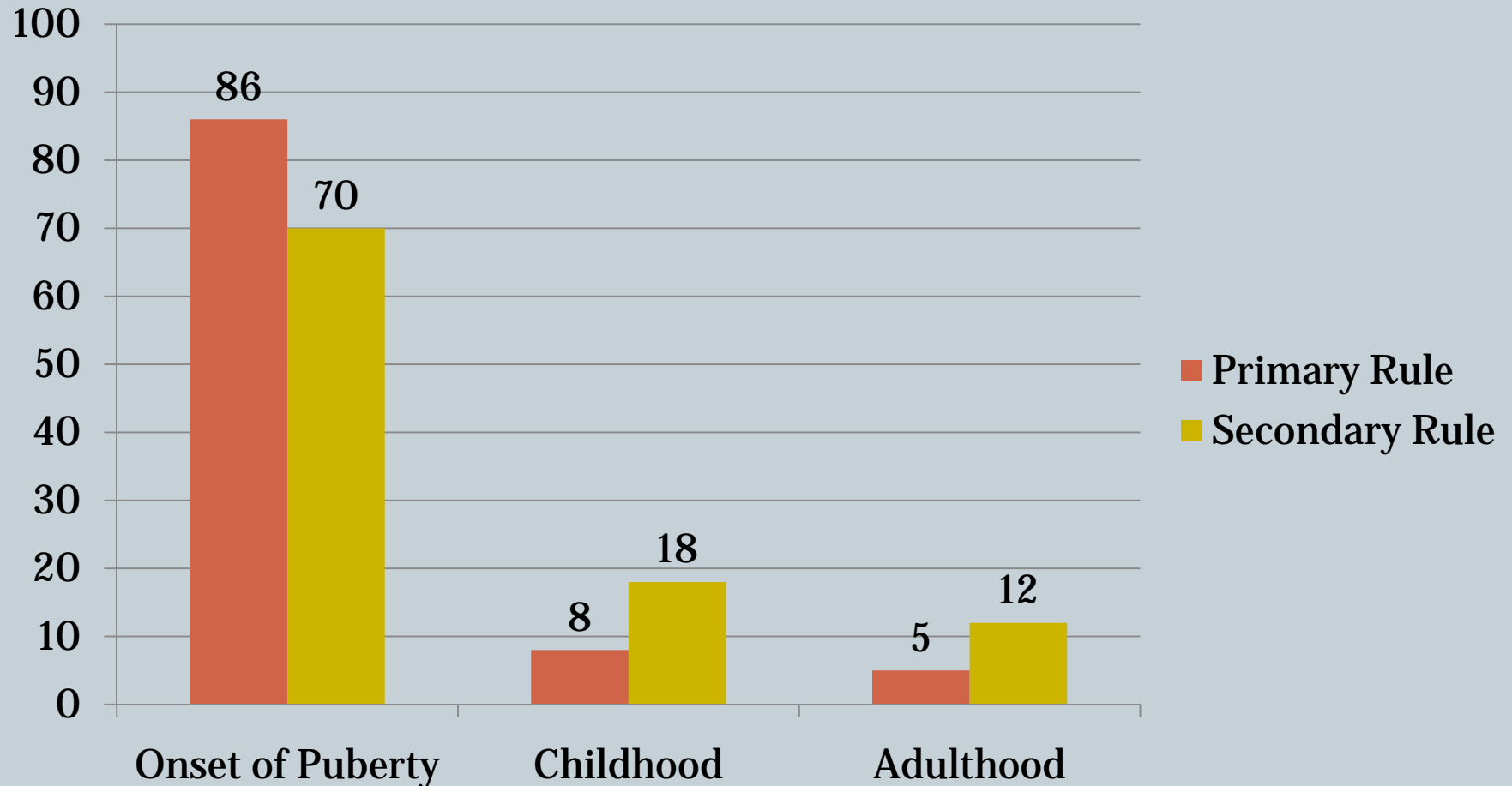


## Age at which women marry



- The foraging people Sama Bajau have the following saying regarding the need for daughters to marry as quickly as possible:
  - “Fish and daughters are alike: both must be disposed of quickly lest they spoil.”

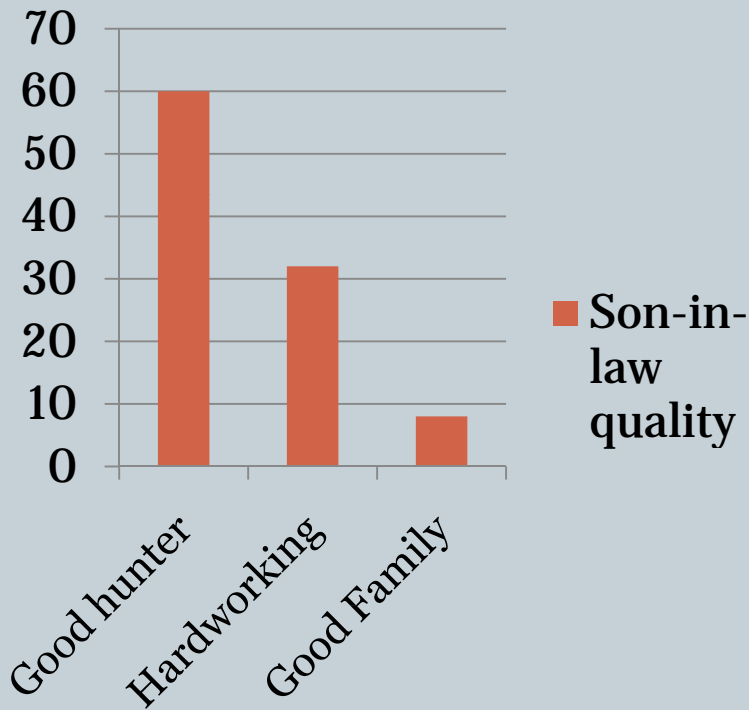
# Age at which women marry



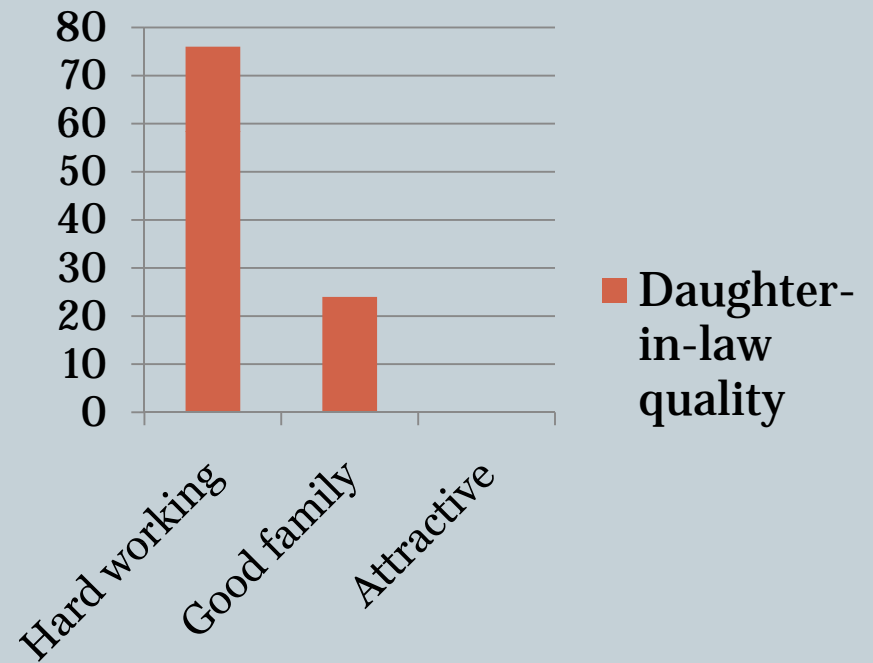
# What do parents want for an in-law



## Son-in-law quality



## Daughter-in-law quality



## Divorce – a means for female choice



- Divorce is common in 60% and rare in 40% of societies
- Incompatibility is the most common reason along with female barrenness, extra-marital sex, and laziness (both parties)
- Extramarital affairs are severely punished in 61% and moderately punished in 39%

# Conclusions



- In the vast majority of foraging peoples parents control who their children marry with fathers playing the decisive role.
- Girls are married as soon as they reach reproductive age
- Parents seem to seek productive mates for their children
- They are unconcerned with a daughter-in-law's attractiveness **contrary** to evolutionary psychological models of mate choice
- The role of female choice is virtually absent. Nevertheless, selection for mates based on hunting ability and general productivity is **consistent** with female choice.