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Mail-Order Brides

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Synonyms

[International brides](#); [Internet brides](#); [Picture brides](#)

Definition

Mail-order brides are women who are explicitly seeking marriage and advertise themselves with agencies that publicize their availability.

Introduction

The term “mail-order bride” originated on the American frontier in the nineteenth century. At that time, the number of men on the frontier far outnumbered the number of available women, and lonely farmers and ranchers would seek wives from “Back East” by placing ads in newspapers and magazines. Interested women would write back and send photographs, and the couple did not usually meet in person until the woman showed up for her wedding.

The Modern Mail-Order Bride Industry

Twenty-first-century mail-order brides advertise themselves through international marriage agencies. These agencies have names such as *AnastasiaDate.com*, *Loveme.com*, *RussianBrides.com*, and *GlobalLadies.com*. What distinguishes mail-order brides from other mate-seeking women is that they are trying to expand their pool of eligible mates across national borders, and they do so in a way that preserves a freedom of choice that would be greatly diminished if they were to employ more traditional matchmakers. Most mail-order brides now come from Southeast Asia (especially Thailand and the Philippines), Latin America (often Colombia and Brazil), and Russia and the Ukraine. The prospective husbands they seek come primarily from the United States or Western Europe, although there is a market for foreign brides in South Korea and Japan as well (Johnson 2007; Ordoñez 1997). As Wilson (1998) has observed, the photographs of these women that are placed on an agency’s website are in some sense “*passport photos for foreign eyes and a ticket out of Southeast Asia*” (p. 117) or wherever else from which they might hail.

Another factor that may influence a woman to seek a husband as a mail-order bride is family pressure, especially when she has already reached an age by which she is supposed to have been married. Kojima (2001) identified this pressure to escape the social stigma attached to single women

in Korea as a primary motive for Korean women's emigration to Japan in search of a husband.

Recent Research on Mail-Order Bride Mating Strategies

Although the motives of women seeking Western husbands are often driven by economic concerns, this is not always the case (Johnson 2007; Minervini and McAndrew 2006); mail-order brides are drawn from throughout the social spectra of their respective societies. In two studies, Minervini and McAndrew (2006) examined the mate preferences of mail-order brides from Colombia, Russia, and the Philippines. They conducted in-depth interviews with several "brides," husbands of mail-order brides, and the proprietor of a mail-order bride agency in Colombia. These interviews revealed that a wide range of factors play a role in the mail-order bride mating strategy. When asked why American customers seek Latina women, the proprietor of the match-making service said that American men prefer Latina women as wives because they are believed to take better care of their husbands and are more tender, warm, and dedicated to their home than are American women. The matchmaker also reported that his American customers sought women who were younger than themselves and those who had stereotypically Latin features such as tan skin and long, dark hair. Latina women, he believed, are interested in American men because they are thought to be more faithful, less jealous, and less chauvinistic than Latino men. The interviews captured the irony of situations in which women who were attempting to escape from traditional constraints were being matched with men who were attempting to find a wife whom they believed would embrace these very constraints.

For example, an American man who married a mail-order bride had this to say about family life:

The husband and wife are equal partners in the family structure, though not the same. Men and women are different in physical and mental abilities. I feel that the wife has her place in the family structure, such as giving more care to children, the house, and things of that nature. The husband

should take care of income and things of that nature.

Similarly, another former husband (age 65) of a mail-order bride stated that he felt that American women:

were too interested in what I was worth [economically]. With women's liberation in the USA, I had them calling me, coming to my house. Before, the man called the woman when he wanted to date her; the woman was not the initiator. Now is so different from what I grew up with, so I thought that the best thing to do was to meet someone that can't just come to my house.

A woman now living in the United States explained her reasons for becoming a mail-order bride:

I met men in Colombia, I was married, I had my experience. I decided to look for something different, try men from another culture that might be better than ours. American men are more serious; [they] worry and respect their wife.

Thus, the mail-order bride business as it now operates may be in the perverse position of attempting to match independent, nontraditional women with very traditional Western men, a situation which frequently leads to dissatisfaction for both parties.

Minervini and McAndrew (2006) surveyed a group of Colombian women who were attempting to become mail-order brides, and they compared them with a group of Colombian women who were not pursuing a husband in this way. In addition to asking about their preferences for a husband, they also asked them what they thought men were looking for in a wife. The responses of the two groups to open-ended questions about mating were much more similar than different, and the items relevant to what they wanted in a prospective husband were the ones that showed the least difference. Both groups emphasized the importance of sexual fidelity and commitment as traits to look for in a mate as well as traits to advertise about one's self. These results line up nicely with the responses to a third question in which the women shared what they thought men sought in a wife, as they believed that these were the two most important qualities that men were after. In a second study, Minervini and McAndrew also

found a high degree of agreement among mail-order brides from Russia, Colombia, and the Philippines. Across the board, they found a preoccupation with the very same characteristics (e.g., ambition, commitment to a relationship and children, sexual fidelity, a mate that is somewhat older) that have been documented by evolutionary psychologists in a great many studies.

Mail-Order Brides and Domestic Violence

It must also be acknowledged that there is a very dark side to the mail-order bride experience. Women who travel to a far-off country to marry a stranger are putting themselves at great risk, and grim statistics confirm the danger. Many incidents of violence (including murder) against mail-order brides have been well documented, especially in the United States and South Korea (Crandall et al. 2005; Osipovich 2005). It is not unreasonable to assume that awkward or sinister men are overrepresented in the pool of males who choose to pursue mates from so far away, and women should proceed with great caution if they choose to explore mating opportunities in this fashion.

Conclusion

Women willing to become mail-order brides do not appear to have a different agenda than other mate-seeking women; they simply have discovered a novel way to expand their pool of prospective husbands. However, the mail-order bride mating strategy may be putting women at risk for sexual and physical violence, and it may not be the ideal way of connecting with men who value independence in a mate.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Increased Mating Success/Access](#)
- ▶ [Intimate Partner Violence](#)
- ▶ [Marriage](#)
- ▶ [Mate Preferences](#)
- ▶ [Mate Selection Strategy](#)
- ▶ [Mate Value](#)
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- ▶ [Mating Systems](#)
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- ▶ [Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment](#)
- ▶ [Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence](#)
- ▶ [Women Marry Up](#)
- ▶ [Women's Long-Term Strategies](#)
- ▶ [Women's Mate Preferences](#)

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