

The Couples Match

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Graduate school in psychology can be an intense and rewarding experience on many levels. The pressures encountered and partnerships formed in graduate school often lead to deeply meaningful relationships. As a result, many people leave graduate school with more than they bargained

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for—new friendships, a new romantic relationship, or even a new spouse or life-partner. When the final year of graduate training rolls around,

all of us face the daunting and puzzling process of applying to internship. Romantic partners who apply to internship simultaneously are faced with an additional set of challenges.

Thankfully, the Association of Psychology Post-Doctoral and Internship Centers and National Matching Services, Inc. (APPIC and NMS, respectively) have anticipated these challenges. These organizations offer a wealth of information and a very good system for applying, ranking, and matching to internship sites as a couple. Last year, my girlfriend,

Talia, and I went through this process and were successfully matched as a couple in the New York metropolitan area. In this article I shall share my experiences and advice regarding the “couples match.”

Deciding whether and how to use the couples match is a multi-step process. The first thing you and your partner should do is initiate an open dialog about the general regions each of you is considering. If you are serious about matching as a couple you will need to compromise even at this initial step (but do remain honest about your personal interest in each area). Talia and I each found ourselves considering regions (and therefore, sites) that we would not have given a second glance if the other had not expressed interest in them. Although you may find yourself applying to sites or regions where you have little intrinsic interest, you may also find, as I did, that some of these sites end up among your top choices.

To increase our chances of matching together, Talia and I decided to apply in larger metropolitan areas due to their higher concentration of internship sites. As such, we were each able to distill our selections down to 12 sites in 4 regions. If you apply in each other’s regions as we did, you will probably end up applying to many of the same sites as your significant other. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, if you are applying to the same track of a given site you will have to figure out how you feel about competing with one another—a topic well



beyond the scope of this article.

Once you have mailed your applications and have (hopefully) started receiving interview invitations, you should consider your partner's interview schedule. If you are able to visit various regions and sites together you will be able to "preview" what your life would be like there together. You will also be able to share your initial impressions about each site with your partner. This will help you process your reactions to each site and may prevent you from harboring "secret" preferences for individual sites.

When at the internship interviews (especially when interviewing at the same site on the same day), you must agree on whether to disclose or disguise your relationship. This will depend on each of your own feelings, as well as how "friendly" you feel that site is to hearing about your personal life (I found that my comfort level varied greatly depend-

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ing on the site). Whether you decide to reveal or hide your relationship to your partner, you should avoid discussing whether you are considering matching as a couple, since this is a taboo piece of "match-related information."

So, you made it this far—phew. Unfortunately, though, the most complicated part of matching as a couple is the ranking process. As you have probably heard, most individual applicants find it difficult to rank 12, 8, or even 4 sites. However, since in the couples matching process you are essentially ranking pairs of sites, the total number of items on your rank list will be at least the product of your and your partner's sites. This means that if one member of a couple is ranking 10 sites and the other is ranking 9, the couple will have 90 possible combinations where each person is matched.

But what if one of you, for any of a variety of unfortunate reasons, is not matched with an intern-

ship site? This is an important issue that is often misunderstood and is tied in with the myth that the couples match process hurts your odds. If you want your chances to be exactly the same as they would be if you were matching independently, you must allow for combinations in which one member of the couple goes unmatched. This issue is effectively explained on the APPIC and NMS websites and as such I will only summarize it here. Briefly, if you do not rank match-pairs where one of you does not match, and one of you does go unmatched, then the other person in the couple will be unmatched as well, regardless of how well he or she would have done as an individual candidate. This is because the computer will not be able to use any of your combinations, since they all require that the unmatched partner being ranked somewhere. To avert this disaster, our hypothetical couple must rank the 90 combinations where both of them are matched and an additional 19 combinations where one partner is unmatched and the other proceeds through their individual rankings from most to least desirable. Total number of combinations: 109.

Each of you will develop your own strategy for deciding how to rank this dizzying number of combinations. Talia and I alternated between combinations that "favored" one or the other of us. We proceeded through the first 17 combinations that had us in the same metropolitan area, moving on to those where we were in the same region, then those that had us in far-flung regions, before finally ranking combinations where one of us went unmatched. I am happy to say that it worked very well.

That brings me to my last bit of advice regarding the couples match process: take heart. Talia and I took only a few days to complete our rankings and I can honestly say the process was not entirely unpleasant. If you prepare well, discuss matters openly, and compromise frequently, the couples match process can increase your chances of spending your internship year near the person who is most important to you. □