

Defection and Mate Retention Tactics of Men and Women

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Abstract

Both men and women in long – term relationships engage in various mate retention behaviors. These behaviors have spurred from humans evolutionary history as a result of men and women needing to solve certain adaptive problems during the EEA. Mate retention tactics serve the purpose of maintaining a relationship and preventing a partner from defecting. This study will attempt to explore the extent and manner in which individuals in a relationship employ various mate retention tactics. In particular, this study will explore how mate retention tactics are employed by individuals whose romantic partner is in danger of defecting (e.g. cheating, leaving the relationship, etc.) or by individuals who themselves are in danger of defecting from the relationship.

Introduction

Managing reproductive resources was a great challenge for both sexes in the EEA. One of the reproductive resources that imposes a fitness cost on an individual is the finding and retaining of available mates. One potential risk factor (reproductive cost) for men is paternity uncertainty due to the offspring being conceived in the female. If in fact the female is cuckolding the male, the male would be unknowingly investing in offspring that are not genetically related to him. If the female were to completely defect from the relationship, the male would then completely lose all of the resources he previously invested in a mate that could have otherwise been used to invest in other, possibly more, reproductively successful relationships. For women, the greatest risk factor (reproductive cost) of a mate defecting is losing the resources that their partner could have invested in the offspring. These problems that our ancestors faced during the EEA resulted in various adaptive mate retention behaviors that serve the purpose of keeping mate pairs together in order to secure their mutual reproductive success. Previous research has explored sex differences in jealousy which might have a relevant effect on the emotional impact of infidelity (Edlund & Sagarin, 2009). Other prior research has made inquiries about the effect of mate retention tactics (cost – inflicting vs. benefit provisioning) on the mate value of partners (Mckibben et al., 2007; Miner, Shackelford & Starratt, 2009; Miner et al., 2009). This research will investigate the mate retention tactics of men and women with partners in danger of defecting, as well as the mate retention tactics of men and women themselves, who are in danger of defecting from their relationship.

Methods

In this study, participants will first be asked to imagine a current long – term relationship with a romantic partner. Second, they will take the TSDI (Trait – Specific Dependence Inventory), a self-report inventory that assesses the personality traits of romantic partners in relation to one’s own level of dependence (Ellis et al., 2002). TSDI items best represent 6 factors in regards to mate characteristics: Agreeable / Committed, resource accruing potential, physical prowess, emotional stability, surgency (dominance & sociability), and physical attractiveness. After being asked to imagine themselves in a long – term relationship with a romantic partner and will then fill out the MRI - SF (Mate Retention Inventory – Short Form). It should be noted as well that in this study mate retention tactics will be categorized as either Benefit Provisioning (Positive Inducements or Public Signals of Possession) or Cost - Inflicting (Direct Guarding, Intersexual Negative Inducements, and Intrasexual Negative Inducements). After the participants have completed these tasks, they will then be prompted to imagine their long – term mate acting suspiciously and being in danger of defecting from the relationship (suspicion of cheating [emotional and sexual]). They will be asked to rate the likelihood that this imagined mate will completely defect from the relationship. At this point they will be given the MRI – SF in order to measure their mate retention tactics when they are suspicious of their partners infidelity. Finally, the participant will be asked to imagine that they are the ones who are suspected of being in danger of defecting from the relationship (Cheating). They will be asked to rate the likelihood that this imagined mate will completely defect from the relationship and then they will assess their own mate retention tactics with the MRI – SF. Participants responses will be gathered through Amazon Mechanical Turk and will be appropriately compensated.

Projected Results / Discussion

In this study, it is predicted that we will find that men and women of lower relative mate value will exhibit more benefit – provisioning mate retention tactics (Positive Inducements or Public Signals of Possession) and less cost – inflicting mate retention tactics (Direct Guarding, Intersexual Negative Inducements, and Intrasexual Negative Inducements) when their partner is the one who is in danger of defecting from the relationship. Secondly, we predict that men and women of higher relative mate value will similarly display more benefit – provisioning tactics and less cost – inflicting tactics when their mate is in danger of defecting from the relationship. However, the change to and from low – risk behaviors (Benefit – Provisioning) to high – risk behaviors (Cost – Inflicting) might depend on the likelihood of the individual’s partner to defect from the relationship.



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