

Male Perception of Physical Attractiveness
and Tendency for Mate Guarding

Stephanie Crank

Angelo State University

Abstract

Individuals seek out a mate who they perceive to be physically attractive, though illusory biases can affect perception. Physical attractiveness is evolutionarily based on overall health and body size. Social cognition and emotion also affect how individuals perceive their partners appearance, and how they behave around their partner. Strong negative emotions, such as jealousy, result in mate guarding behaviors. Research indicates that when women perceive themselves as more attractive than their partner, they are more likely to resist mate guarding. To determine if men were more likely to engage in mate guarding behaviors when they perceived their partner as more attractive, an online survey will be conducted.

Male Perception of Physical Attractiveness and Tendency for Mate Guarding

Romantic relationships have a reputation for partners viewing each other with an illusory positive bias; however, partner perceptions are paradoxically accurate (Solomon & Vazire, 2014). It is not uncommon for individuals to choose a partner that increases their self-esteem. On one hand, choosing a romantic partner based on increased self-esteem creates a sense of validation. Nevertheless, humans strive to find a partner with whom they can represent themselves to match their identity (Solomon & Vazire, 2014). Consequently, the paradox arises. The positive bias and accurate perception phenomenon exist in many forms. The love-is-blind ideology represents this contradiction well.

Research suggests having a love-is-blind ideology increase relationship satisfaction and romantic love (Swami, Waters, & Furnham, 2010). This ideology is largely demonstrated by how attractive partners view one another. While relationships are enhanced from similar interests, physical attractiveness (PA) serves as an initiation function for all relationships (Fugere, Cousins, & Maclaren, 2015). A plethora of research has been conducted examining physical attractiveness; however, limitations often arise under the proverb that *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*. This limitation relies on the attempt to define the construct of physical attractiveness.

Evolutionary psychologists suggest physical attractiveness relies on the health of a potential mate and the ability of the potential mate to be successful regarding reproduction (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Since humans are social beings, remaining with a long-term mate is often desired. Women look for a male partner who can provide for the offspring, whereas men are interested in a female who is healthy and possess indicators of fertility (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Indicators of a male partner who can provide include the capacity to protect, the ability to obtain

resources, and compatibility. Indicators of health and fertility in females are low waist-to-hip ratios (*e.g.*, an hourglass figure) and a healthy body weight.

Although evolution provides an instinctual cognitive basis for understanding the sexual attraction, it does not cover all areas related to physical attraction. Positive and social psychologists examine societal definitions of beauty and the relation to self-esteem. Personality traits also influence perceptions of beauty and self-esteem. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism have poorer self-views, whereas individuals with high extroversion have high self-esteem and body image (Swami, Hadji-Michael, & Furnham, 2008).

While there is some overlap between the subsets of psychological study, defining physical attraction is still difficult, but it is only half the battle. Creating a test that accurately measures attraction is even more challenging. In order to create a valid and reliable scale, Swami and colleagues (2008) utilized self-report measures of different bodily features. In their measure, Estimating Physical Attractiveness (EPA), participants are asked to rate how attractive they feel each bodily feature is on their own body and on their partner's body (Swami, Waters, & Furnham, 2010).

Comparing physical attractiveness may influence the extent to which individuals engage in mate guarding behaviors. Mate guarding is the behaviorisms intended to keep partner faithful in a relationship (Fugere, Cousins, & Maclaren, 2015). These behaviors include engaging in aggression, attempting to show ownership, and watching for dangers. Fugere, Cousins, & Maclaren (2015) directed a study to determine how physical attraction affects mate guarding. They collected over 1000 women to participate in their study and found that women who perceived themselves as more physically attractive than their partner were more likely to resist his mate-guarding tactics.

Fugere and her colleagues work supplemented the research well, but their research was limited because they only focused on females. The present study will examine the correlation between male's perception of his romantic partner's physical attractiveness and his tendency to engage in mate guarding behaviors. Understanding male mate guarding tendencies in relation to perceived physical attractiveness adds to current research on the topic. It is hypothesized that men who perceived themselves to be less attractive than their female partner will be more likely to engage in mate guarding behaviors at a higher rate. Similarly, it is hypothesized that men who perceived themselves as equally or less attractive as their partner will be less likely to engage in mate guarding tactics.

Methodology

Participants

Approximately fifty male undergraduate students from a mid-sized university in a rural community in the southern region of the USA will be recruited. Participants will volunteer to participate for partial class credit.

Materials

A questionnaire requesting descriptive data about each participant's age, ethnicity, collegiate year, major, and sexual orientation will be administered to participants. The descriptive data questionnaire will be preceded by the MRTS and the EPA in varying order.

Mate Retention Tactics Scale (MRTS) The 48-item MRTS will be used to assess men's tendency to mate guard his partner. Items consist of tactics such as mate concealment (*e.g.*, I would not let my partner talk to other men) and time monopolization (*e.g.*, I insisted I wanted to spend all my free time with her; Fugere, Cousins, & Maclaren, 2015). The scale is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often) where higher scores suggest more

mate guarding behaviors. The Cronbach's alphas are reliable at .96 (Fugere, Cousins, & Macleren, 2015).

Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (EPA) The 20-item EPA will be utilized to assess men's perception of his and his partner's estimated physical attractiveness. Participants will be presented with a normal distribution of "attractiveness scores" ($M = 100$, $SD = 15$) where the mean is considered average (Swami, Waters, & Furnham, 2010). Participants rate theirs and their partner's physical attractiveness, such as overall facial attractiveness and overall body weight, based on the curve presented.

Procedure

After participants are recruited through the psychology experimental on-line database (SONA), the university's PsychData (computer software) will prompt students to begin the series of questionnaires after they read and agreed to the consent form. Following the informed consent, PsychData will randomly give half of the participants the Mate Retention Tactics Scale (MRTS; Fugère, Cousins, & MacLaren, 2015) prior to the Estimating Physical Attractiveness Scale (EPA; Swami, Waters, & Furnham, 2010) followed by a demographics questionnaire. Whereas, the other half will be given the EPA prior to the MRTS followed by the same demographics questionnaire.

Proposed Statistical Analyses and Results

Participants EPA scores will be totaled for their perception of themselves and of their partner. These scores will then be subtracted to determine the extent to which participants found themselves more or less attractive than their partner. To investigate the relationship between this difference and participants overall mate guarding tendencies, a Pearson's correlation coefficient will be calculated. The EPA scores are predicted to be positively correlated with the MRTS scores suggesting that the greater the difference between an individual's EPA and his partner's

EPA, the higher his MRTS scores will be. To investigate the relationship between age and mate guarding behaviors, a Pearson's correlation will be calculated. It is predicted that age will be negatively correlated with MRTS, suggesting as an individual's age increases, their MRTS scores will decrease.

References

- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review, 100*, 204-232.
- Fugere, M. A., Cousins, A. J., & Maclaren, S. A. (2015). (Mis)matching in physical attractiveness and women's resistance to mate guarding. *Personality and Individual Differences, 87*, 190-195. doi: 10.1016/j.paid2015.07.048
- Solomon, B. C., & Vazire, S. (2014). You are so beautiful...to me: Seeing beyond biases and achieving accuracy in romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 107*(3), 516-528. doi:10.1037/a0036899
- Swami, V., Hadji-Michael, M., Furnham, A. (2008). Personality and individual difference correlates of positive body image. *Body Image, 5*, 322-325.
- Swami, V., Waters, L., & Furnham, A. (2010). Perceptions and meta-perceptions of self and partner physical attractiveness. *Personality and Individual Differences, 49*, 811-814. doi:10.1016/j.paid2010.06.011