



Original Article

Self-control and honesty depend on exposure to pictures of the opposite sex in men but not women☆

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that viewing stimuli that induce mating or sex motivation can push men towards greater impulsivity, a manifestation of lower self-control. Recent advances in research on the connection between self-control and moral behavior indicate that low self-control is associated with increased dishonesty. From an evolutionary perspective, when mating motivation is activated, men may behave in dishonest ways by projecting characteristics in line with women's mate preferences to enhance their sexual attractiveness. We tested the possibility that exposure to pictures of sexually appealing women would engender lower self-control, leading men to behave dishonestly. The results showed that a state of lower self-control was observed in males who viewed women rated high on sexual attractiveness but not in males who viewed women rated low on sexual attractiveness or in females who viewed men (Experiment 1). Compared with control participants, male participants exposed to pictures of sexy women were less likely to return excess money received for participating (Experiment 2) and more likely to cheat in a matrix task (Experiments 3 and 4). State self-control mediated the link between exposure to sexual stimuli and dishonest behavior in men (Experiments 2 and 4). For men whose mating motivation is heightened by exposure to sexual stimuli, dishonesty appears to be a tactic for projecting characteristics preferred by women (e.g., large economic resources).

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A thing worth having is a thing worth cheating for
(W. C. Fields (1880–1946))

1. Introduction

Extant research regarding mating motivation has shown that exposure to sexual cues can stimulate men's mating motivation, which leads to greater impulsivity (e.g., Baker & Maner, 2008; Chiou, Wu, & Cheng, 2015; Van den Bergh, Dewitte, & Warlop, 2008; Wilson & Daly, 2004). Self-control refers to control over one's thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behavior (Ainslie, 1975; Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Impulsivity has been considered and demonstrated as a key facet of low self-control (e.g., Chiou et al., 2015; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Fujita & Han, 2009; also see Fujita, 2011, for a related review). Previous studies have indicated that low self-control is a determinant of increased

dishonesty (Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009). In the current research, we showed that exposing men to pictures of sexually appealing women was associated with lower self-control and increased dishonesty.

1.1. Association between mating-induced impulsivity and dishonesty in men

According to the notion of parental investment (Miller, 2000; Trivers, 1972), men have some chance of reproductive success from short-term expenditures of mating effort (e.g., a single act of sexual intercourse), whereas successful reproduction typically requires more long-term parental investment by women (e.g., the burden of a nine-month gestation). Therefore, men are more likely to pursue short-term sexual strategies than women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Prior research has shown that cues that activate mating motivation can facilitate particular perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors associated with reproductive success (e.g., Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006; Maner et al., 2005; Roney, 2003). For example, Chiou et al. (2015) demonstrated that exposure to physically appealing women induced a "mating mindset" among male participants, as indexed by greater Stroop

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interference (i.e., longer reaction times) in naming the color of mating-related versus neutral terms in a modified Stroop task. Moreover, exposure to sexual cues can lead to greater impulsivity in intertemporal choice, i.e., a preference for immediacy (Baker & Maner, 2008; Chiou et al., 2015; Van den Bergh et al., 2008; Wilson & Daly, 2004). Thus, exposure to cues related to mating may serve to stimulate an escalation of present mating effort and promote the tendency toward immediate gratification among men. A mating mindset or sex motive activated by the availability of courtship-worthy targets (e.g., viewing pictures of women rated high on sexual attractiveness) should motivate men to behave impulsively.

In principle, impulsivity has been shown to reflect a tendency toward temporal discounting (i.e., a preference for smaller, immediate rewards over larger, distant ones; Frederick, Loewenstein, & O'Donoghue, 2002; Kirby & Maraković, 1995) and poor self-control (Arneklev, Grasmick, & Bursik, 1999; Denson, Pederson, Friese, Hahm, & Roberts, 2011; Jimura, Chushak, & Braver, 2013; Madden, Petry, Badger, & Bickel, 1997). Wilson and Daly (2004) showed that men were more likely to discount the future (i.e., greater impulsivity) after viewing pictures of attractive women. Van den Bergh et al. (2008) found that viewing female models dressed in swimsuits or lingerie led to greater discounting in male students (Study 1a). The authors also observed greater discounting when male participants physically examined bras compared to t-shirts (Study 1b). Moreover, keeping mating-related motivation or sexual impulses in check demands self-control (Baumeister et al., 1994; Baumeister et al., 2007; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Chiou et al. (2015) showed that viewing pictures of physically attractive women was associated with low self-control in men. Thus, we contend that exposing men to stimuli that induce a mating or sex motive (e.g., pictures of sexually appealing women) may be associated with a state of lower self-control.

Honesty entails a typical self-control dilemma in which one must conform to moral rules while exerting control over amoral, selfish impulses (Baumeister et al., 1994; Carver & Scheier, 1981). Self-control has been referred to as “moral muscle,” corresponding to the ability to override selfish, antisocial impulses in favor of socially desirable norms (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). Thus, low self-control should be associated with increased dishonesty (Cochran, Wood, Stellers, Wilkerson, & Chamlin, 1998; Mead et al., 2009). For example, Mead et al. (2009) showed that participants with low self-control exaggerated their performance for monetary gain on a self-scored test (i.e., dishonesty; Experiment 1) and showed greater susceptibility to cheating (Experiment 2) than their counterparts. Additionally, neuroimaging evidence has shown that both impulsivity (Hare, Hakimi, & Rangel, 2014; Harris, Hare, & Rangel, 2013) and dishonesty (Greene & Haidt, 2012; Greene & Paxton, 2009) involve control-related regions of the prefrontal cortex. Given that poor self-control is associated with decreased honesty, we hypothesized that men's greater impulsivity (i.e., a manifestation of lower self-control) induced by exposure to pictures of women rated as being sexy would prompt dishonest behavior.

1.2. Men's dishonesty as a tactic for displaying characteristics preferred by women

In addition to the above-mentioned association between mating-induced impulsivity and dishonesty in men, the perspective of mate preference or mate attraction may also predict the connection between men's mating motivation and dishonesty. Over human evolutionary history, men and women have confronted different adaptive problems during sexual selection (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Trivers, 1972). The notion of mate preference and empirical evidence indicate that men value cues to a woman's fertility such as youth, physical attractiveness, and waist-to-hip ratio (e.g., Buss, 1989; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990; Singh, 1993), whereas women value physical attractiveness (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Frederick & Haselton, 2007; Little, Jones, DeBruine, & Caldwell, 2011; also see Rodeheffer,

Leyva, & Hill, 2016, for a related review) and economic resources (Buss, 1989, 1995; Dunn & Searle, 2010; Feingold, 1992; Landolt, Lalumière, & Quinsey, 1995). According to the perspective of sexual strategies in mate choice, the mate preferences of one sex can affect the sexual strategy in the other (Buss, 1988, 1998; Chan, 2015). For example, mating motives activated by exposing participants to attractive opposite-sex photographs or sexual scenarios have been shown to prompt a variety of behaviors in human males but not in females. These experimentally induced behaviors include playing risky blackjack hands (Baker & Maner, 2008), acting in a nonconforming manner (Griskevicius et al., 2006), spending conspicuously (Griskevicius et al., 2007), donating more generously (Iredale, Van Vugt, & Dunbar, 2008), exhibiting heroic altruism (Griskevicius et al., 2007), and endorsing warring attitudes (Chang, Lu, Li, & Li, 2011), all of which are preferred by women (Chan, 2015; Kelly & Dunbar, 2001). These findings suggest that mating-related cues may heighten men's (but not women's) mating motivation, which motivates them to make choices or behave in a way that is desirable to women in sexual selection (i.e., for the purpose of mate attraction).

From an evolutionary perspective, people can often obtain resources at less cost in ancestral and current environments by acting dishonestly (Buss, 1999; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). Activating men's mating motivation by situational cues (e.g., pictures of sexually appealing women) should motivate an increased desirability as a mating partner to women (Bäckman & Dixon, 1992; Chan, 2015; Salthouse, 1995). Given that dishonesty can serve as a low-cost and convenient shortcut to acquire resources, power, status, and reputation (Buss, 1994, 1999), men with a heightened mating motive may engage in dishonest behaviors to display preferred characteristics to women in order to promote mate attraction. For instance, to establish an advantage in female mate preference using a dishonest strategy, a man can exaggerate muscular strength which signals masculinity and dominance (Frederick & Haselton, 2007), claim physical fitness which signals health (Little et al., 2011), pretend to be a millionaire which signals abundant economic resources (Buss, 1989, 1998; Dunn & Searle, 2010; Pawlowski & Koziel, 2002), fake a graduate degree or cheat to get better grades which signal intelligence (Buss, 1998; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Miller & Todd, 1998), or fake altruistic displays which signal status (Bird & Smith, 2005; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010). These signaled characteristics are all preferences of women in a mate.

However, recent advances in research on the connection between mating motivation in men and prosociality indicate that altruistic male behavior, in the form of “risky heroism”, can be triggered by sexual motives (Farthing, 2005; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Kelly & Dunbar, 2001; Sylwester & Pawlowski, 2011). Similarly, men are more likely to display altruism in the presence of an attractive member of the opposite sex, but the same is not true for women (Farrelly, Lazarus, & Roberts, 2007; Iredale et al., 2008). These findings do not contradict our predictions regarding the link between men's mating motivation and dishonest behavior from the viewpoint that dishonesty can serve as a tactic for projecting characteristics preferred by women in the context of sexual selection. This is because physical attractiveness cannot be increased quickly (Chan, 2015; Taylor, Wedell, & Hosken, 2007). Prosocial or altruistic acts incur some costs (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Henrich, 2009). Therefore, when mating motivation is activated, men might be motivated to increase their attractiveness in other ways. One alternative way for men to increase their desirability as a mating partner is to accumulate resources, acquire status, or acquire desirable characteristics using a dishonesty strategy (Buss, 1999; Mazar et al., 2008). Thus, exposure to stimuli that activate men's mating motivation (e.g., pictures of sexually appealing women) might be associated with their increased dishonesty.

1.3. Overview of the present research

In sum, prior work has demonstrated that stimuli inducing mating or sex motivation can engender greater impulsivity (i.e., lower self-

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