



Cash in hand, want better looking mate: Significant resource cues raise men's mating standards

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ABSTRACT

Resources are a cardinal component of male mate value in the sexual exchange between men and women. Inspired by theories and research suggesting a link between mating and resource constructs as well as studies linking money and valuations of others, the current study tests the hypothesis that cues to resource availability may lead to higher mating standards for men, but not women. Participants were exposed to either stacks of paper, a small sum of money (104 Singapore dollars ~USD\$84), or a large sum of money (2600 Singapore dollars ~USD\$2100). Consistent with the hypothesis, after male – but not female – participants handled a large sum of money, they raised their minimum requirements for a date. We discuss how the results are consistent with an evolutionary perspective on mating and how future research can further investigate environmentally contingent self-assessments and strategies.

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“...the boy with the cold hard cash is always Mister Right.”

— Madonna, *Material Girl*

1. Introduction

As reflected by the above song lyrics, a colloquial yet perennial observation across various cultures is that wealthy men are highly desirable as romantic partners. Researchers adopting an evolutionary perspective have made significant contributions towards understanding this and related phenomenon by shedding light on the mating preferences of men and women. Drawing on Trivers (1972) seminal theory of parental investment, researchers have hypothesized that the interaction between ancestral females' parental investment of their own 'intrinsic' physiological resources, through gestation and lactation, and males' relatively 'extrinsic' investments of material resources, such as food, shelter and protection, led to evolved differences in mate preferences between the sexes (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; Symons, 1979). Studies have supported this prediction, demonstrating that women, more so than men, value cues related to resources, while men tend to place higher value on cues to health

and fertility (e.g., Buss, 1989; Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005).

Importantly, these sex-differentiated mate preferences may interact adaptively with environmental cues to guide the mate selection process. For instance, studies have recently examined how mating motives affect preferences for resources. When men, but not women, were primed with mating motives, they spent more on luxury items (products that are not considered essential and are associated with affluence; Griskevicius et al., 2007). When men were in the presence of women (but not the other way around), they were more likely to appraise money and being wealthy as very important (Roney, 2003). Similarly, after viewing pictures of attractive versus unattractive women, men – but not women – economically discounted the future (i.e., more greatly valued resources in the present; Wilson & Daly, 2004) and took more risks (Baker & Maner, 2008). Men have also been found to be more generous and to donate more money to charity if they are knowingly observed by an attractive female (Iredale, Van Vugt, & Dunbar, 2008). These studies highlight how mating cues may elicit responses linked to sex-differentiated mate preferences.

Studies from another line of research suggest that there are other important psychological links involving resources. Specifically, recent social psychological research has demonstrated that cues to resource availability may affect the way people view or value others. For instance, when primed with money, people became less prosocial and helpful, and less willing to seek help from

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others when facing difficulty (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006). People primed with money also reported less distress after being subjected to social exclusion, whereby those primed with loss of money reported greater distress (Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009). Given that cues to money – a key form of resources in modern societies – may affect how people view others and that resources play a central role in mate preferences and mating psychology, we postulated that cues to resource availability may affect how potential mates are valued.

1.1. The current study

The present research examines the importance of resources in relation to the evolved sexual exchanges between men and women. For both sexes, resources can be an end in itself (i.e., men and women can benefit from consuming resources strictly for themselves). However, because women place a premium on men's extrinsic worth (social status) and resources, there may be sexual selection pressure for men to demonstrate greater investment and generosity in order to court prospective mates. Therefore, for men more than women, resources may also be a means to increased mating opportunity. As such, we might expect men to be adaptively sensitive to the availability of significant resources in their immediate environment and to adjust their mating strategies accordingly.

This study hypothesizes that sensory stimuli from exposure to money may function as decision input cues resulting in raised standards for a potential mate in men but not in women. We sought to make an important extension to both the work of mating researchers, who have established causal links between the presence of desirable potential mates and valuations placed on wealth (e.g., Roney, 2003; Wilson & Daly, 2004), and work by other social psychologists, who have indicated a causal link between money and valuations of others (e.g., Vohs et al., 2006).

This study also presented an opportunity to test whether men or women are more selective towards a potential date, as the more selective sex will tend to have higher standards (Kenrick et al., 1990). Finally, the study allowed us to test for sex differences in mate preferences found in previous research (men placing greater value on physical attractiveness, women placing greater value on social status; e.g., Buss, 1989).

2. Method

2.1. Design

This study employed a between-subjects design consisting of two independent variables (participant sex – male or female; resource exposure – *Control*, *Small Resources*, or *Large Resources*) and one dependent variable (mating standards).

2.2. Participants

Students from Singapore Management University voluntarily enrolled to attain either course credits or a payment of S\$5. A total of 96 women and 81 men participated. Subsequently, 15 females and 9 males were omitted for misinterpreting the instructions of the counting and calculation task. Thus, 81 women and 72 men made up the final sample, and the mean male age was 22.5 years, while the mean female age was 20.7 years. The ethnic proportion was 79.2% Chinese, 9.1% Indian, 3.9% Malay, 2.6% Caucasian and 5.2% others.

2.3. Materials and procedure

Participants were primed with one of three resource exposure conditions: *Control*: 52 blank strips of paper (dimensions propor-

tionate to money notes), *Small Resources*: 52 S\$2 notes, or *Large Resources*: 52 S\$50 notes. Participants were presented with a set of questions they had to answer based on the resource condition. The first question asked the participant how many sheets of paper there are either in the stack of paper, S\$2 notes, or S\$50 notes. To further strengthen the priming exposure, the next four questions instructed the participant to carry out a series of simple calculations and measurements based on the money notes or paper (rulers were provided for the measuring task). These instructions were given on the pretext of assessing their cognitive counting performance and also served as a filler task to mask the intentions of the experiment.

Participants were run separately in private booths. After the manipulation, participants proceeded to fill out a mating standards survey measuring their minimum requirements on physical attractiveness, creativity, personability, and social level, for a date (Kenrick et al., 1990). When a participant completed the study, s/he was debriefed and thanked.

3. Results

To determine the effects of resource exposure on mating standards, a general linear model repeated measures analysis was used to analyze the data. A participant's overall 'mating standard' score was ascertained by finding the mean score of requirements for a date.

As predicted, there was a two-way interaction of *sex* $\times$ *resources* on participants' requirements for a date, $F(2,147) = 3.17$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .041$. The mating standards of men were significantly affected by the resource condition, $F(2,147) = 4.58$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .059$. Men had the highest standards for a date in the *Large Resources* condition ($M = 71.1$, $SD = 1.75$) compared to the *Small Resources* condition ($M = 65.1$, $SD = 1.69$), $p < .05$, and *Control* condition ($M = 64.2$, $SD = 1.83$), $p < .05$. Conversely, women's mating standards did not vary significantly across the three resource conditions $F(2,147) = .769$, $p = .47$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$. The mean scores of women's requirements for a date in the *Large Resources* condition ($M = 71.1$, $SD = 1.62$) did not differ significantly from the *Small Resources* condition ($M = 73.1$, $SD = 1.65$), $p > 1.00$, or the *Control* condition ($M = 70.3$, $SD = 1.69$), $p > 1.00$ (see Fig. 1).

To gain further insight into the effects of resources on men's requirements for a date, we used each of the four minimum requirements for a date as a dependent variable in another set of general linear model analyses. For men, the effect of resource exposure was only significant on physical attractiveness, $F(2,69) = 6.52$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .159$. The *Large Resources* condition significantly raised men's physical attractiveness minimum requirement above that demanded by other male participants in both the *Control* condition ($MD = 8.2$, $SD = 2.95$), $F(1,147) = 11.63$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .073$, and the *Small Resources* condition ($MD = 9.6$, $SD = 2.36$), $F(1,147) = 11.63$,

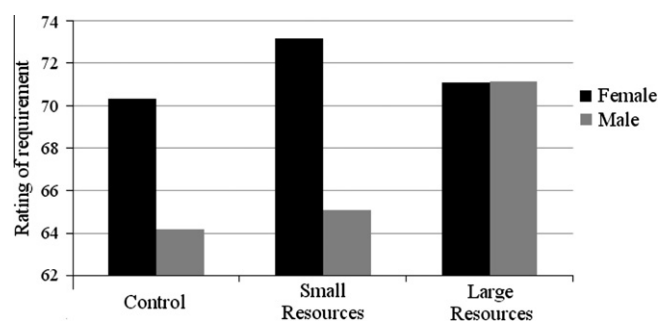


Fig. 1. Mean scores for dating requirements across conditions.

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