Short Communication

Attractive men's desirability as a long-term partner varies with ascribed excitement values

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ABSTRACT

Values guide behaviors and cognitively represent needs. Expressed values may provide relevant cues that affect mate selection. In particular, individuals endorsing excitement values (e.g., emotion, pleasure, sexuality) are more likely to commit infidelity. Therefore, a person's desirability as a long-term partner may be negatively affected by that person's endorsement of excitement values. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a 2 (sex) $\times$ 2 (ascribed values) $\times$ 2 (facial attractiveness) factorial design experiment. Participants were 80 individuals, aged between 17 and 48 years ($M = 24.1$, $SD = 5.61$), mostly heterosexual (93.8%). Participants rated how desirable the person depicted in the factorial scenarios is as a long-term partner, on a 6-point Likert scale (undesirable–very desirable). Attractive men's desirability as a long-term partner decreased when associated with excitement values, providing some support for evolutionarily informed hypotheses. We discuss results in light of evolutionary hypotheses of mate selection, highlighting limitations and identifying directions for future research.

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1. Introduction

Previous research has identified psychological traits that affect a person's desirability as a long-term partner (for a review, see Buss, 2015). Despite the voluminous literature linking psychological variables to desirability as a long-term partner, one set of psychological variables that has been relatively neglected in the mate preference literature is "values". A value is a unique psychological construct that guides behaviors and cognitively represents needs (Gouveia, 2003, 2013; Gouveia, Milfont, & Guerra, 2014).

From an evolutionary psychological perspective, certain characteristics are perceived as desirable because they were linked ancestrally with benefits for the selecting individual (Little, 2015). Because a partner's infidelity is costly to both men and women, they are likely to perceive as more desirable attributes that indicate a greater likelihood of fidelity (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). A man whose partner is sexually unfaithful risks cuckoldry (i.e., unwitting investment in a child to whom he is genetically unrelated; Buss & Shackelford, 1997), and a woman whose partner is emotionally unfaithful risks losing partner-provisioned resources (Buss, 2015). Therefore, psychological traits that serve as cues of greater likelihood of infidelity are predicted to affect negatively one's desirability as a long-term partner (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Schmitt et al., 2012 found that infidelity is associated with low agreeableness and low conscientiousness, and these traits are perceived as unattractive for both men and women (Meier, Robinson, Carter, & Hinsz, 2010).

Because infidelity carries great costs for the selecting partner (Buss, 2015), prospective partners endorsing values that suggest a greater likelihood of infidelity are predicted to be less desirable as long-term partners. What kind of values may affect a person's desirability as a long-term partner? One possible answer is "excitement values". According to Gouveia (2013), excitement values (e.g., emotion, pleasure, sexuality) represent the need for gratification and variety, and contribute to the endorsement of change and innovation in the structure of social organizations. Excitement values correspond to an interest in having stimulating experiences, whether emotional, intellectual, or sexual. Someone who endorses excitement values will tend to make decisions that allow them to experience greater excitement, relative to someone who does not endorse such values (Gouveia, 2013).

Individuals endorsing excitement values are more likely to engage in risk-taking activities, including alcohol abuse (Medeiros, Pimentel, Monteiro, Gouveia, & Medeiros, 2015) and infidelity (Guerra, Gouveia, Sousa, Lima, & Freires, 2012). Men who engage in high-risk activities may be attractive to women in a short-term sexual context (due to women's "quest for good genes that enhance offspring quality"; Sylwester & Pawlowski, 2011). In a long-term context, however, men engaging in risk-taking activities may be less attractive to the extent

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that risk-taking signals greater likelihood of infidelity, injury, and death (Buss, 2015). Similarly, women engaging in risk-taking activities may be less attractive as long-term partners to men because risk-taking signals greater likelihood of infidelity (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Moreover, excitement values such as "pleasure" and "sexuality" may signal sexual promiscuity, and people who have had more sexual partners are more likely to be unfaithful in a long-term relationship than those who have had fewer sexual partners (Thompson, 1983). Additionally, the endorsement of excitement values may reflect poor mothering skills, in terms of risk to both mother's and child's health (e.g., alcohol abuse; Medeiros et al., 2015), which is unattractive to men (Buss, 2015). Therefore, excitement values expressed by a prospective long-term partner may be an unattractive feature for both sexes. Thus, we hypothesize that a person's desirability as long-term partner will be negatively affected by that person's endorsement of excitement values.

The goal of the current study was to investigate whether a person's desirability as a long-term partner is affected by that person's endorsement of excitement values. We conducted a 2 (sex: male, female) × 2 (ascribed values: excitement, no values) × 2 (facial attractiveness: highly attractive, unattractive) factorial design study. We controlled for facial attractiveness because physical features may affect a person's desirability as long-term partner (Geldart, 2010).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 80 heterosexual Brazilians, 17 to 48 years old ($M = 23.8$, $SD = 5.5$). Most were in a romantic relationship (56.4%). We invited prospective participants through messages on Brazilian Facebook groups. Participants were equally divided by the factorial combinations.

2.2. Instruments

Participants completed an on-line survey that included demographic questions (e.g., age, sex) and one scenario. Each scenario consisted of a highly attractive or an unattractive facial image, and a brief value description or no value description. The selection of facial images and the development of value descriptions are detailed in the Procedure. There were eight scenarios in total [2 (sex: male, female) × 2 (facial attractiveness: highly attractive, unattractive) × 2 (ascribed values: excitement, no values)]. Each participant was randomly presented one scenario that depicted an opposite-sex facial image. For example, one scenario for *female* participants was a *highly attractive male* facial image, followed by *excitement values* description. Another scenario for *male* participants presented an *unattractive female* facial image, followed by *no values*. Participants rated how desirable the person depicted in the image is as a long-term partner, on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *Undesirable* and 6 = *Very desirable*. All survey material was presented in Brazilian Portuguese.

2.3. Procedure

2.3.1. Facial images

To control for facial attractiveness, we first collected facial images via an on-line survey distributed on Brazilian Facebook groups. During this task, 264 participants selected both the least and most attractive opposite-sex Facebook profile images. Facebook users consented to have their images used by others at the moment they set them to "Public", as stated by the Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. We then selected 160 images considering several criteria (see Appendix A). To arrange the attractiveness of faces along a continuous scale, 188 individuals indicated the extent to which each face was attractive on a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 = *Unattractive* and 6 = *Very attractive*. We then selected the five most and five least attractive images from each

sex, resulting in 20 faces. Because each participant had access to only one image of one factorial scenario in the study (see Instruments), the attractiveness level for each scenario was then the mean score of all respective five facial images. For more details, see Appendix A.

2.3.2. Excitement values description

We adapted the Basic Value Survey (Gouveia, 2003; see supplementary material) items into a brief narrative. The narrative had a female version and a male version, which were identical except for the individuals' names (i.e. "Rodrigo" for men and "Renata" for women). The male version was "Rodrigo likes to live for the moment and to satisfy all his desires. He enjoys challenges and unknown situations, and is always looking for risky adventures. He needs to have frequent sexual intercourses to feel sexually satisfied."

2.3.3. Data analysis

We conducted two two-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA; "sex" and "ascribed values" as independent variables; and "desirability as a long-term partner" as dependent variable), one for the unattractive facial images, and one for the highly attractive facial images. We left "facial attractiveness" out of the ANOVA because its inclusion would inflate the main effects. We next conducted independent sample *t*-tests for specific interactions (i.e., simple slope tests).

3. Results

The results of the two-way ANOVA for unattractive images revealed a non-significant overall model [$F(3, 36) = 0.28$, $p > 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.02$], indicating that none of the independent variables ("sex" and "ascribed values"), or their interaction, affected the desirability as a long-term partner of unattractive individuals. The results of the two-way ANOVA for highly attractive images indicated a significant overall model [$F(3, 36) = 4.54$, $p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.27$]. For this model, the desirability as a long-term partner changed accordingly to sex [$F(1, 36) = 5.99$, $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.14$], and ascribed values [$F(1, 36) = 5.98$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.14$], but not their interaction [$F(1, 36) = 1.64$; $p = 0.21$; $\eta^2 = 0.04$].

To further investigate the interactions between variables for the highly attractive images (see Fig. 1), we conducted four independent-sample *t*-tests, one for each slope (i.e., simple slope tests). We divided α (i.e., *p*-value threshold) by four to correct for Type I error (Bonferroni correction). The first *t*-test revealed that male faces ascribed with excitement values ($M = 2.3$; $SD = 1.06$) were less desirable as a long-term partner ($t = 2.82$; $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 1.3$) than male faces without ascribed excitement values ($M = 3.9$; $SD = 1.45$). The second *t*-test revealed no differences in desirability between female faces ascribed with excitement values and without ascribed values. The third *t*-test showed that, when ascribed with excitement values, male faces ($M = 2.0$; $SD = 1.38$) were rated as less desirable ($t = 1.59$; $p < 0.1$, $\eta^2 = 0.53$, marginally significant; Gelman, 2013) than female faces ($M = 2.9$; $SD = 1.95$). The fourth *t*-test revealed no differences in desirability between male and female faces without ascribed excitement values.

4. Discussion

The current study investigated whether a person's desirability as a long-term partner is affected by that person's endorsement of excitement values. The results are partially in line with expectations. The overall model for highly attractive individuals revealed that their desirability as a long-term partner varied as a function of sex, ascribed values, and their interaction. In line with evolutionary hypotheses of mate selection, the results indicated that male faces ascribed with excitement values were less desirable than male faces without ascribed excitement values, supporting our hypothesis that prospective partner's endorsement of excitement values would affect negatively their desirability as a long-term partner. Because women prioritize psychological attributes