



Detached and antagonistic: Pathological personality features and mate retention behaviors



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ABSTRACT

Basic personality features have been found to be associated with a variety of romantic relationship outcomes including the strategies that individuals employ to retain their romantic partners. In the current studies, we were interested in determining whether pathological personality features were associated with mate retention behaviors. We examined the associations between the pathological personality features captured by the PID-5 and mate retention behaviors across two samples (i.e., an undergraduate sample and a community sample). Pathological personality features reflecting negative affect, detachment, and antagonism were associated with mate retention behaviors such that individuals who possessed these features were less likely to provide benefits to their partner and more likely to inflict costs on them. Discussion focuses on the implications of these findings and how they can influence the tactics that individuals employ to maintain their romantic relationships.

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1. Introduction

Romantic relationships can be a source of pride, happiness, comfort, and security when they are going well. As a result, humans devote a considerable amount of time and energy to forming and maintaining these relationships. One aspect of romantic relationship maintenance that has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years has been *mate retention behaviors* which are the tactics that individuals employ to maintain their relationships by reducing the probability of defection or infidelity by their current romantic partners (Buss, 1988; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Mate retention behaviors are described by Buss (1988) as a taxonomy of behaviors that range “from vigilance to violence” (p. 291) and are commonly classified using two higher-order dimensions: benefit-provisioning behaviors and cost-inflicting behaviors (Shackelford, Goetz, & Buss, 2005). Benefit-provisioning behaviors involve the use of fairly innocuous acts that function to highlight the positive aspects of the relationship for the partner. These behaviors include showing love and affection toward the partner, buying them expensive gifts, and enhancing one's own appearance. Essentially, benefit-provisioning behaviors provide incentives for the partner to continue investing in the relationship.

In contrast to benefit-provisioning approaches, cost-inflicting behaviors serve to generate costs to the partner if they should decide to leave the relationship or behave unfaithfully. That is, these behaviors increase the probability that one's partner will continue investing in the relationship by making defection appear to be a risky strategy. This prevention is often accomplished by using deceit, manipulation, threats of violence, or actual violence. For example, an individual may attempt to prevent his or her partner from defecting from the relationship by lying about a romantic rival in order to paint that individual in a negative light or making the partner think that he or she may be harmed (e.g., physically, financially, socially) if he or she tries to dissolve the relationship. These behaviors may escalate in their intensity as individuals become more concerned about the possibility of their partner defecting from the relationship or being unfaithful (e.g., Buss, 1988).

Researchers have begun to investigate the implications that these mate retention behaviors have for romantic relationships including marital outcomes (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Buss, 2010; Shackelford et al., 2005), partner-directed violence (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Goetz, 2009), and sexual behavior within the relationship (e.g., Pham & Shackelford, 2013; Pham et al., in press; Sela, Shackelford, Pham, & Euler, 2015). Researchers have also begun to examine the links between personality features and the use of mate retention behaviors. For example, de Miguel and Buss (2011) found that individuals with

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higher levels of neuroticism reported using more mate retention behaviors, whereas individuals with higher levels of agreeableness used fewer mate retention behaviors. More recently, [Holden, Zeigler-Hill, Pham, and Shackelford \(2014\)](#) found that individuals with high levels of honesty-humility (i.e., the dimension of personality that captures the extent to which individuals are concerned with equality, fairness, and honesty in their interpersonal relationships) reported using fewer mate retention behaviors that involved manipulation or deception.

Although research has established connections between basic personality traits and the use of mate retention behaviors, relatively little is known about the connections between darker aspects of personality and mate retention behaviors. The most frequently studied constellation of dark personality features is the Dark Triad which consists of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism ([Paulhus & Williams, 2002](#)). Individuals with high levels of the Dark Triad personality traits tend to be antagonistic, self-concerned, callous, and manipulative. Previous research has shown that individuals with high levels of the Dark Triad traits are more likely to adopt particularly aversive mate retention strategies such as punishing their partners or acting violently toward romantic rivals ([Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010](#)). For example, [Brewer and Abell \(2015\)](#) found that individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism were more likely than others to engage in cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors. In addition, [Tragesser and Benfield \(2012\)](#) found that borderline personality features – which include efforts to avoid abandonment as well as interpersonal relationships marked with extreme levels of idealization and devaluation – were associated with cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors. It is clear that individuals with high levels of these potentially pathological personality features employ mate retention behaviors that may be harmful to their partners or even fatal in some extreme cases.

The goal for the present studies was to extend what is known about the connections between personality features and mate retention behaviors by examining a broad array of pathological personality traits that were described in Section 3 (“Emerging Measures and Models” in need of further study) of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5; [American Psychiatric Association, 2013](#)). This model of pathological personality is concerned with maladaptive variants of the Big Five personality dimensions of extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness ([Thomas et al., 2013](#)) and this model has led to the development of the Personality Inventory for the DSM-5 (PID-5; [Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2012](#)). The PID-5 is used to capture the following personality dimensions: detachment (which is characterized by introversion, social isolation, and anhedonia), negative affect (which concerns the tendency to experience an array of negative emotions), antagonism (which refers to aggressive tendencies accompanied by assertions of dominance and grandiosity), disinhibition (which includes impulsivity and sensation seeking), and psychoticism (which involves a disconnection from reality and a tendency toward illogical thought patterns). In addition to these higher-order dimensions of pathological personality, the PID-5 consists of 25 lower-order facets including callousness, deceitfulness, depressivity, hostility, submissiveness, and withdrawal. Research concerning the PID-5 is clearly still in its earliest stages but it has already demonstrated considerable potential (e.g., [Hopwood et al., 2013](#); [Noser et al., 2015](#); [Strickland, Drislane, Lucy, Krueger, & Patrick, 2013](#)).

A number of studies have suggested that individuals scoring high on the PID-5 dimensions may have interpersonal relationships marked by violence and aggression (e.g., [Strickland et al., 2013](#)). For example, individuals with high levels of antagonism may lash out against friends and relatives when their personal

desires do not align with the goals and desires of these other individuals ([Harkness, Reynolds, & Lilienfeld, 2014](#)). This is important because pathological personality features are often accompanied by interpersonal difficulties. Although this area has yet to be fully explored, it seems reasonable to examine the possibility that the pathological personality features captured by the PID-5 may influence the approaches that individuals take in maintaining their romantic relationships. For example, some of these pathological personality features – such as antagonism – may be associated with higher levels of cost-inflicting behaviors. Therefore, we sought to extend previous research concerning both pathological personality features and mate retention behaviors by assessing the relationship between PID-5 personality dimensions and the use of certain mate retention behaviors.

1.1. Overview and predictions

The purpose of the present studies was to examine the connections that pathological personality features had with the two higher-order forms of mate retention behaviors (i.e., benefit-provisioning and cost-inflicting). We expected that negative affect would be positively associated with both benefit-provisioning and cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors. This prediction is consistent with the results of previous studies showing that neuroticism (or emotionality) is linked with these mate retention behaviors ([de Miguel & Buss, 2011](#); [Holden et al., 2014](#)). The rationale for this prediction is that negative affect involves variability in the psychological systems concerned with short-term danger detection ([Harkness et al., 2014](#)). As a result, individuals with high levels of negative affect may be highly concerned about the possibility that their partners will defect or be unfaithful which may motivate them to employ both benefit-provisioning and cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors in an attempt to mitigate these perceived dangers.

We predicted that antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism would each have a positive association with cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors which is consistent with previous research showing that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness are negatively associated with cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors ([de Miguel & Buss, 2011](#); [Holden et al., 2014](#)). Individuals with high levels of antagonism tend to be manipulative, deceitful, and grandiose ([Krueger et al., 2012](#)) which may lead them to employ mate retention behaviors that involve inflicting costs on their relationship partners. This prediction is consistent with the results of recent studies that have examined the links between mate retention behaviors and personality features that possess antagonistic elements such as low levels of honesty-humility ([Holden et al., 2014](#)) and the Dark Triad (e.g., [Brewer & Abell, 2015](#); [Jonason et al., 2010](#); [Tragesser & Benfield, 2012](#)). Our rationale for expecting that disinhibition may be associated with cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors stems from previous studies showing that features of disinhibition such as impulsivity have been found to be linked to aggression (e.g., [Edwards, Scott, Yarvis, Paizis, & Panizzon, 2003](#); [Plutchik & Van Praag, 1995](#)).

Our final prediction was that detachment would be negatively associated with both forms of mate retention behavior because individuals with high levels of detachment are likely to be withdrawn and to avoid intimacy. Therefore, we reasoned that it was unlikely that individuals with high levels of detachment would invest heavily in their romantic relationships and devote resources toward engaging in either type of mate retention behavior.

We chose to assess the associations between pathological personality features and mate retention behaviors across two studies. We explored these associations using the short form of the PID-5 in an undergraduate sample for Study 1 and the long form of the PID-5 in a community sample for Study 2. Together, these studies

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