



The Mate Retention Inventory-Short Form (MRI-SF)

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Abstract

People devote considerable effort to retaining their mates. Mate retention tactics range from vigilance to violence, and are linked to variables such as marital satisfaction and relationship aggression. The Mate Retention Inventory (MRI; 104 items comprising 19 tactics) has proven to be reliable and valid. Given the importance of assessing mate retention in various contexts, there is a need for a briefer version of the MRI. In Study 1 ($N = 1032$), we develop a short form of the MRI (the MRI-SF), which assesses performance of 19 mate retention tactics using two items per tactic. The tactic scales show internal consistency, high correlations with the MRI long-form tactic scales, and links with assessments of controlling behavior, relationship violence, and an assessment of injury. Study 2 ($N = 625$) replicates the MRI-SF reliability and high correlations with the MRI long-form tactic scales, and shows links to a sexual coercion measure. We conclude that the MRI-SF is sufficiently reliable and valid that it can be used in basic and applied research in place of the MRI long-form for most purposes.

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1. Introduction

Evolutionary biologists apportion the effort an organism expends into somatic effort and reproductive effort, with the latter further divided between mating effort and parental effort (e.g., Low, 2000). Mating effort may be partitioned into at least two distinct domains—effort devoted to attracting a mate (Buss, 1988a; Buss & Schmitt, 1996) and effort devoted to retaining a mate (Buss, 1988b; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). For many species, long-term mate retention is not an adaptive problem, because mateships are brief. Mate guarding in these species is usually restricted to brief intervals (Thornhill & Alcock, 1983). Humans, however, represent an extreme end of the temporal continuum in the sense that they form mateships that can last years or decades. Because long-term mating is such a central strategy within the human menu of mating strategies, the adaptive problem of mate retention is especially pronounced. In evolutionary currencies, mates gained often must be retained to repay reproductively the effort allocated to mate selection and attraction.

The first instrument to assess human mate retention tactics (the Mate Retention Inventory, or MRI) appeared in 1988 (Buss, 1988a, 1988b). It assessed the performance of 19 tactics ranging from vigilance to violence, subsuming 104 specific behaviors. Empirical research using the MRI has yielded a number of important findings. Hypothesized sex differences in mate retention tactics, such as the greater use by men of resource provisioning and the greater use by women of appearance enhancement, have been documented among non-married couples (Buss, 1988a, 1988b) as well as newlywed couples (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Men more than women in both samples were more likely to use intrasexual threats and physical violence. Individuals who anticipated that they were likely to remain with their mate in the future, a key signal of commitment, devoted more effort to mate retention, especially the tactics of vigilance, monopolization of the mate's time, and public signals of commitment such as putting their arms around their mate when intrasexual competitors were around.

Mate retention intensity differs predictably based on sex-linked aspects of mate value. Specifically, men married to women who are young and physically attractive—key cues to fertility—devote more effort to mate retention than men married to women who are older and less attractive (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Women married to men with good jobs, higher incomes, and who devote more effort to getting ahead in the status hierarchy devote more effort to mate retention than women married to men lower on these qualities. Particular mate retention tactics, such as vigilance, monopolization of mate's time, emotional manipulation, and derogation of competitors have been shown to be correlated with partner-directed violence (Shackelford, Goetz, Buss, Euler, & Hoier, 2005), suggesting that displays of these tactics might be early harbingers of violence that could be used for practical intervention, therapeutic, or educational purposes. The MRI has also been used in studies of homosexual couples (VanderLaan & Vasey, *in press*) and Croatian couples (Kardum, Hudek-Knezevic, & Gracanin, 2007). In addition to these sources of evidence for the predictive validity of the MRI, the instrument shows reasonable internal consistency reliability as well as congruence between self-report and spouse-report (Shackelford, Goetz, & Buss, 2005).

For many research purposes completing the 104-item MRI is prohibitively time consuming. Thus, we sought to develop a reliable and valid short form, the MRI-SF. This article presents two empirical studies that were used to develop this instrument.

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