



## Male mate retention mediates the relationship between female sexual infidelity and female-directed violence

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Received 25 November 2007; received in revised form 12 December 2007; accepted 18 December 2007

Available online 11 February 2008

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### Abstract

Previous research has documented relationships between (1) female sexual infidelity and men's non-violent mate retention behaviors, and (2) men's non-violent mate retention behaviors and partner-directed violence. In the two studies, we examined two additional relationships: (1) the relationship between accusations of female sexual infidelity and men's partner-directed violence and (2) whether men's direct guarding mate retention behaviors mediates the relationship between accusations of female sexual infidelity and men's partner-directed violence. The results indicate that (1) accusations of female sexual infidelity predict men's partner-directed violence, (2) men's reports of direct guarding mediates the relationship between accusations of partner sexual infidelity and partner-directed violence (Study 1,  $N = 165$ ) and (3) women's reports of men's direct guarding partially mediates the same relationship (Study 2,  $N = 306$ ). The discussion addresses sex differences identified in the mediation analyses, notes limitations of the research, and highlights directions for future research.

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*Keywords:* Sexual infidelity; Direct guarding; Violence; Intimate relationships

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## 1. Introduction

Over human evolutionary history, men have faced the adaptive problem of female sexual infidelity and subsequent cuckoldry – or the unwitting investment in genetically unrelated offspring. The reproductive costs of cuckoldry, including loss of time, energy, resources, and alternative mating opportunities, are potentially so great that men are hypothesized to have evolved psychological mechanisms that function to motivate anti-cuckoldry tactics. Mate retention behaviors are one such class of anti-cuckoldry tactics. These behaviors vary in the costs inflicted upon partners, ranging from subtle manipulation to outright physical violence (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Partner-directed violence is a more severe class of anti-cuckoldry tactics that functions to keep a partner invested in the current relationship and to prevent her from sexual infidelity and possible cuckoldry.

### 1.1. *Suspicious of female sexual infidelity and female-directed violence*

Existing theoretical and empirical literature suggests a positive relationship between suspicions of female infidelity, a measure of cuckoldry risk, and violence against women in intimate relationships (e.g., Buss, 2000; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982). For example, recent studies have reported positive correlations between suspicions of female infidelity and men's partner-directed sexual coercion, a specific class of partner-directed violence (Goetz & Shackelford, 2006; Starratt, Goetz, Shackelford, & McKibbin, in press). Additional research has documented a positive relationship between men's sexual coercion of their partner and men's partner-directed violence (Shackelford & Goetz, 2004). Although this literature indicates that suspicions of female infidelity predict men's sexual coercion and that men's sexual coercion in turn predicts men's partner-directed violence, we are unaware of any research that has assessed the direct relationship between accusations of female infidelity and men's partner-directed violence. We investigated this relationship in tests of the first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Men's accusations of female infidelity predict men's partner-directed violence.

### 1.2. *Mediating role of direct guarding*

Previous research also documents positive associations between perceived risk of female sexual infidelity and men's mate retention behaviors (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Starratt, Shackelford, Goetz, & McKibbin, 2007) and between accusations of sexual infidelity and men's mate retention behaviors (McKibbin, Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, Starratt, & Stewart-Williams, 2007). Buss and Shackelford (1997) hypothesized that the use of some non-violent mate retention behaviors may portend violence in relationships. Consistent with this hypothesis, Shackelford, Goetz, Buss, Euler, and Hoier (2005) reported that men's use of particular non-violent mate retention tactics (e.g., emotional manipulation) was related positively to female-directed violence.

Hypothesis 1 posits a positive relationship between accusations of female sexual infidelity and partner-directed violence. Given that both female sexual infidelity and partner-directed violence are related to non-violent mate retention behaviors, it may be that the latter significantly influences the hypothesized relationship. The current study investigates whether performance of certain non-violent mate retention behaviors mediates the relationship between men's accusations of female sexual infidelity and men's partner-directed violence.

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