



Unrestricted sexuality promotes distinctive short- and long-term mate preferences in women



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ABSTRACT

The *dual-sexual strategy* hypothesis claims that women select different men for short- and long-term relationships. In short-term relationships, women are attracted to good genes (e.g., masculinity, attractiveness); in long-term relationships, material traits (e.g., good income, patient) are favoured. A potential predictor of women's mating strategy is *sociosexuality*, a measure of an individual's willingness to engage in casual, uncommitted sex. We asked whether women high in sociosexuality (i.e., unrestricted sexuality) would demonstrate greater distinctiveness between short- and long-term mate preferences. In an online study, participants ($N = 459$) from India and the USA were apportioned a 'mate budget' to construct their ideal short- and long-term partners. Mate Dollars could be spent on either genetic or material traits. As expected, genetic traits were favoured for short-term relationships; material traits were favoured for long-term relationships. However, women with a more restricted sexuality preferred short-term mates who closely resembled their long-term preferences. Women from the USA (with typically less restricted sexuality) showed more distinctive preferences than women from India (with typically more restricted sexuality). Overall, a woman's sociosexuality influences the distinctiveness of her short- and long-term mate preferences.

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1. Introduction

When choosing a romantic partner, humans may encounter potential suiters who can differ, among other traits, in physical attractiveness, personality, social status and health. Rather than mating at random, women's mate preferences reflect a sophisticated suite of strategies, which function to obtain high quality males (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). However, women's perception of what constitutes a "high quality mate" can differ across individuals (Havlicek & Roberts, 2009; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011) and relationship context (e.g., one-night stand, marriage, 'friends with benefits', cuckoldry; Buss et al., 1990).

1.1. Dual-sexual strategy

Across populations, genetic variation can mean that individuals differ in heritable fitness (i.e., the *genetic benefits* that are inherited by offspring from parents). Among men, indicators of good genes include masculinity, symmetry, social dominance and sense of humour

(Gangestad, Garver, Simpson, & Cousins, 2007). In addition to good genes, women are also attracted to men with access to material resources. Men who offer *material benefits*, such as wealth, high status, emotional stability and maturity, are better equipped to provide resources necessary for the production of reproductively successful offspring, making them more attractive in the mating market (Lu, Zhu, & Chang, 2015).

Although women typically favour males who offer both genetic and material benefits, most find that they cannot "have it all" (Buss & Shackelford, 2008). For example, men with good genes can access multiple high quality mates without investing greatly in time or the provisioning of material goods (Faurie, Pontier, & Raymond, 2004), meaning they are more likely to favour short-term mating. Further, women's ability to attract a high-quality, long-term partner is constrained by the availability of mates (Stone, Shackelford, & Buss, 2007) and her own mate value (Buss & Shackelford, 2008).

In response to these trade-offs, women adopt a *dual-sexual strategy*, such that they prioritise different male characteristics when choosing either a short- or long-term mate. Men who can offer material benefits are best equipped to provide parental investment, making these attributes particularly valuable for long-term relationships (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). However, women can additionally access genetic benefits from males with good genes, via short-term mating (e.g., one-night stand, cuckoldry; Pillsworth & Haselton, 2006). In this way, women who adopt the dual-sexual strategy can gain long-term benefits from men

Abbreviations: SOI-R, Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008); WMPQ, Women's Mate Preference Questionnaire (Lu, Zhu, & Chang, 2015).

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who offer material benefits, while good genes can be accessed sporadically via short-term mating. Nonetheless, in some contexts female promiscuity can be costly, resulting in “slut-shaming”, malicious gossip, “honour killings” or a lower brideprice (Ghanim, 2015; Hartung, 2012; Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016).

1.2. Sexual strategies and sociosexuality

Whereas most women can enact a dual-sexual strategy (Li, Valentine, & Patel, 2011), the extent to which women prioritise short- (vs. long-) term mating is moderated by individual differences in traits possessed by the chooser, such as intelligence, personality traits and sociosexuality (Schmitt & Shackelford, 2008; Simpson & Gangestad, 1992; Stanik & Ellsworth, 2010). Sociosexuality is a personality construct that measures one's willingness to engage in casual, non-committed sex. *Sexually unrestricted* individuals have sex earlier in relationships, are more open to uncommitted relationships (e.g., ‘friends with benefits’) and are more likely to have multiple partners at one time (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), or cuckold their partner (Gangestad, Simpson, Cousins, Garver-Apgar, & Christensen, 2004). Unrestricted women are particularly attracted to good genes traits, such as physical attractiveness and masculinity, as a means to gain heritable benefits for offspring via short-term mating (Gangestad et al., 2004; Waynforth, Delwadia, & Camm, 2005). Alternatively, sexually restricted women typically prioritise material traits via long-term mating with investing males (O'Connor et al., 2014).

Taken together, these studies indicate that women's mating strategies are influenced by their sociosexuality. However, to our knowledge, the question of whether women's sociosexuality can predict the distinctiveness of their preferences for short vs. long-term mates has not been addressed. We suggest three key reasons why sociosexuality could moderate the distinctiveness of women's short- and long-term mate preferences.

First, sexual experience could amplify relationship preferences. Sexually unrestricted individuals are, by definition, more experienced in choosing a short-term mate than more restricted women. This experience could translate into a greater success at choosing short-term mates who offer heritable benefits for offspring. Some research has indicated that those high in sociosexuality are more successful at identifying facial cues of good genes, such as symmetry (Quist et al., 2012) and masculinity (Provost, Kormos, Kosakoski, & Quinsey, 2006; Sacco, Jones, DeBruine, & Hugenberg, 2012). However, some researchers have failed to replicate this finding (Glassenberg, Feinberg, Jones, Little, & DeBruine, 2010; Sacco, Hugenberg, & Sefcek, 2009).

The second argument speaks to the cognitive mechanisms that maintain sexual strategies. As we have seen, rather than possessing one universal mating tactic, women differ with respect to their optimal sexual strategy. From this perspective, those who demonstrate unrestricted sexuality can benefit from a dual approach, by choosing investing males for long-term mating, and ad hoc short-term mating with good genes males. Restricted women, however, benefit from engaging in a targeted, long-term strategy, inducing men to invest prior to sexual access (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002). This raises the question of how such strategies are maintained. We propose that sexually restricted women are predisposed to choosing an investing male, even in contexts where prioritising good genes could be viewed as beneficial (e.g., for short-term mating). In doing so, restricted women can increase their likelihood of attracting (and being attracted to) a mate who possesses material attributes. Alternatively, unrestricted women can benefit from both material and genetic traits by differentiating between their short- and long-term sexual strategy.

Third, sociosexuality could moderate an individual's objectives within the domain of short-term mating. In this view, for unrestricted women, short-term mating is a tool to obtain genetic benefits for offspring. Alternatively, restricted women may use short-term mating to evaluate and attract long-term mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Therefore,

selecting short-term mates who could be suitable husbands would be an adaptive strategy for restricted women.

1.3. The present research

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether unrestricted women are more prone to adopting a dual-sexual strategy. We propose that sexually unrestricted women make a greater distinction between their ideal short- and long-term mate. From this, three hypotheses emerge. First, we predicted an interaction between sociosexuality and relationship context (short-, long-term), such that women high in sociosexuality possess more distinctive mate preferences than do women with low sociosexuality. That is, as women become more conservative in their sexual behaviour, their short- and long-term preferences should converge (Hypothesis 1).

To test the cross-cultural validity of our claims, we focussed our recruitment on two contrasting cultures: India and the USA ($N = 459$). Relative to the USA, Indians report having had fewer sexual partners (3.0 vs. 10.7) and one-night stands (13% of Indians vs. 50% of Americans). Indians are also more likely to encourage young people to abstain from premarital sex (49% vs. 14%) (Durex Sexuality Study, 2005). Consequently, we predicted that women from India would be sexually restricted, relative to women from the USA (Hypothesis 2), resulting in more similar short- and long-term preferences among Indian women, relative to USA women (Hypothesis 3).

Following the measurement of individual differences in sociosexuality, women were apportioned a budget in Mate Dollars to construct their ideal short- and long-term partners. Mate Dollars could be spent on a menu of six genetic (= good genes) and six material traits. We examined whether the proportion of dollars spent on genetic and material traits for short- and long-term mates is predicted by sociosexuality.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 459 women (India = 230; USA = 229) recruited in an Amazon Mechanical Turk study. All participants were aged 18–44, heterosexual and reported that they were fluent in English. The age distribution was 18–24 (9%), 25–34 (56%), or 35–44 (33%). Fifty-nine percent were married, 19% were in committed relationships, 16% were single, and the rest were engaged or widowed. Participants were financially reimbursed for their time (USA: 2.25 USD; India: 1.50 USD).

2.2. Design

In a three-factor, mixed factorial design, Nationality (USA, India) was the between-subjects factor, and Context (Short-, Long-Term) the within-subject factor. Our third independent variable was the participant's Sociosexuality score. The dependent variable was the proportion of Mate Dollars spent on Genetic (vs. Material) traits.

2.3. Procedure

To measure sociosexuality, participants completed the 9-item revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008), a Likert-type scale that measures sociosexual *behaviour* (e.g., “With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months?”), *attitudes* (e.g., “Sex without love is OK”) and *desire* (e.g., “In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met?”). Consistent with previous studies, the three subscales were aggregated prior to analysis (Brown & Sacco, 2017; Kandrik, Jones, & DeBruine, 2015; Lewis, Al-Shawaf, Conroy-Beam, Asao, & Buss, 2012). Higher scores are associated with less restricted sexuality.

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