



# Mate competition in Pakistan: Mate value, mate retention, and competitor derogation



Nabiha Chaudhary<sup>a,\*</sup>, Laith Al-Shawaf<sup>cb</sup>, David M. Buss<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Lahore School of Professional Studies, University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

<sup>c</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, TX, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Mate retention and competitor derogation are two key components of human mate competition. In a conservative, religious sample from Pakistan ( $N = 255$ ), the current study investigated evolutionarily informed hypotheses regarding a) sex differences in competitor derogation and mate retention, b) the relationship between mate value and mate retention tactics, and c) the role religiosity plays in predicting the type of mate retention behaviors. The results indicated that across both sexes, higher mate value predicted greater use of mate retention tactics and also predicted overall competitor derogation. Men more than women used tactics of resource display, violence, intra-sexual threats, sexual inducements, derogation of mate, possessive ornamentation, and monopolization. The results also showed that greater religiosity predicted increased use of cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors among men and decreased use among women. To our knowledge, the current study is the first to investigate mating psychology in Pakistan from an evolutionary perspective.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Mate value and mate retention tactics

Not all potential mates are equally valued. Although there exist some individual difference in valuation criteria, some potential are consensually seen as more desirable than others (Sugiyama, 2005). Overall desirability as a mate includes a wide variety of attributes (Buss, 1989; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). These include facial attractiveness (Rhodes, 2006), physical attributes (Furnham, Swami, & Shah, 2006), financial prospects (Buss et al., 2001), health (Grammer, Fink, Møller, & Thornhill, 2003), intelligence (Stone, Shackelford, & Buss, 2008), and emotional stability (Buss et al., 1990), to name a few. For the purposes of the current investigation, the aggregate of all of these components of desirability can be thought of as an individual's mate value (Sugiyama, 2005).

Research suggests that individuals are aware of both their and others' mate value (Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009; Salkicevic, Stanic, & Grabovac, 2014). Furthermore, mating behavior is influenced by both: one's own mate value and one's partner's mate value (Salkicevic et al., 2014). Mate value discrepancies in a relationship have been shown to affect important outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Conroy-Beam, Goetz, & Buss, 2016; Salkicevic et al., 2014),

mating effort (Kirsner, Figueredo, & Jacobs, 2009), forgiveness and jealousy (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007) and likelihood of infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 1997).

Mate value also appears to affect mate retention behavior (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a; Kirsner et al., 2009; Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009). Individuals with higher mate value are able to provide more benefits to their partners, such as financial resources, physical protection, and higher quality genes. In comparison, individuals with lower mate value are less able to provide such benefits, and are therefore hypothesized to be more likely to resort to cost-inflicting mate retention tactics. Cost-inflicting tactics work by lowering a partner's self-esteem, (Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009), or (for example) by monopolizing a partner's time and restricting contact with other potential mates. Indeed, research suggests that the lower mate value individual in a relationship is more likely to initiate cost-inflicting behaviors (such as derogation of mate, vigilance, and jealousy induction), whereas the higher mate value partner is more likely to employ benefit provisioning behaviors (such as resource display and appearance enhancement; Miner, Shackelford, & Starratt, 2009; Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009; Salkicevic et al., 2014). The present study seeks to investigate this phenomenon in a Muslim Pakistani context for the first time.

**Hypothesis 1.** *Mate value will predict the specific types of mate retention strategies men and women employ.*

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [nabihach36@gmail.com](mailto:nabihach36@gmail.com) (N. Chaudhary).

Specific predictions derived from this hypothesis are:

1a) Men of higher mate value will engage in more benefit-provisioning mate retention behaviors than men of lower mate value.

1b) Men of lower mate value will engage in more cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors than men of higher mate value.

1c) Women of higher mate value will engage in more benefit-provisioning mate retention behaviors than women of lower mate value.

1d) Women of lower mate value will engage in more cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors than women of higher mate value.

### 1.2. Sex-differentiated mate retention tactics

One of the greatest risks in a mateship is to have a partner who commits an infidelity or defects from the relationship (Edlund, Heider, Scherer, Farc, & Sagarin, 2006; Fisher, Voracek, Rekkas, & Cox, 2008). To guard against such outcomes, humans have evolved specific mechanisms to defend against partner infidelity and defection. These tactics are often referred to as mate retention strategies (Salkicevic et al., 2014).

Since men and women look for different characteristics in a potential mate, mate-retention tactics are also sex-differentiated (de Miguel & Buss, 2011; Kardum, Hudek-Knežević, & Gračanin, 2006; Lopes, Shackelford, Santos, Farias, & Segundo, 2016; Pham, Barbaro, Mogilski, & Shackelford, 2015). In line with women's mate preferences, men more often use the tactics of resource display (Buss, 1988b) and mate derogation (Barbaro, Pham, & Shackelford, 2015). By contrast, in line with men's desires, women more commonly employ mate retention strategies such as appearance enhancement (Buss, 1988b; Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). In sum, the mate preferences of one sex theoretically dictate and empirically predict the mate retention strategies of the opposite sex. The following hypothesis and predictions are based on this logic.

**Hypothesis 2.** *Men and women will differ in the tactics they use for mate retention*

- Men will use 'resource display' more than women as a mate retention strategy
  - Women will use 'appearance enhancement' more than men as a mate retention strategy
- Additionally, based on previous studies, it has been established that men perform sexual inducements to retain a mate more often as compared to women (Buss, 1988b; de Miguel & Buss, 2011). We want to test the generality this oft-discovered, yet counter-intuitive empirical finding, in this study as well and therefore, hypothesized that:
- Men will use "sexual inducements" more than women as a mate retention strategy

Research shows that men are more likely to use intrasexual threats than are women (Buss, 1988b; Buss & Shackelford, 1997a; Kardum et al., 2006). More broadly, men are more physically aggressive than women (Archer, 2004), and are much more likely to engage in intrasexual violence and homicide (Campbell, 1995). Based on these considerations, we also made the following predictions:

- Men will use 'intrasexual threats' more than women as a mate retention strategy
- Men will use 'violence against rivals' more than women as a mate retention strategy

### 1.3. Competitor derogation

Competitor derogation is a common tactic in intrasexual competition (Buss & Dedden, 1990). These are actions initiated with the intent of making a same-sex rival appear less appealing (Buss & Dedden, 1990;

Buss & Shackelford, 1997b) and range from insulting the competitor's intelligence to physically confronting him or her. Although both men and women compete intra-sexually, there are sex differences in the ways they derogate their competitors. Men and women tend to derogate their competitors on dimensions valued by the opposite sex; for example, men place a premium on women's physical attractiveness (Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994) and therefore, women derogate their rivals on the dimension of physical attractiveness (Buss, 1988b; Fisher & Cox, 2009).

Similarly, men tend to derogate their rivals on the dimensions of economic resources and professional achievement, as well as on athletic prowess and physical formidability, because women value these attributes in a potential mate (Buss & Dedden, 1990). Research shows that women find intelligence in men attractive and prefer mating with intelligent men (Buss & Shackelford, 2008). Moreover, because social status is strongly linked to economic resource potential, research also indicates that women prefer men who are high in social status (Li, Balley, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). Therefore, men derogate their rivals on precisely these dimensions.

There are also domains of competitor derogation commonly used by both sexes, such as spreading rumors and attacking the social characteristics of one's competitors (Buss & Dedden, 1990). Given the logic that the mate preferences of one sex determine the domains of competition of the other sex (Buss, 1988a), we generated the following hypothesis and predictions:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Men and women will differ in the ways they derogate their mate competitors*

3a) Men will engage in more derogation of their rivals along the dimensions valued by women: finances, strength, achievement, family and lack of ambition or goal.

3b) Women will engage in more derogation of their rivals along the dimensions valued by men: physical attractiveness and sexual fidelity (vs. promiscuity).

### 1.4. Religiosity

With a few exceptions, most studies on human mating have taken place in non-Muslim populations (Atari, 2017; Atari, Barbaro, Sela, Shackelford, & Chegeni, 2017; Atari, Barbaro, Shackelford, & Chegeni, 2017; Atari & Jamali, 2016). Pakistan is an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority country (Haub & Kaneda, 2014) with Islam as its official state religion (Rahman, 1973). Religiosity in Pakistan is widespread (Crabtree, 2010) and influences many mating-related behaviors: honor killings (Ruane, 2000), arranged marriages (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002), polygamy (Hadi, 2003), and violence towards women (Niaz, 2003). Islamic law influences sexual practices as well – for example, both premarital sex and adultery are punishable under the penal law (Imran, 2013). In Pakistan, religion also influences interaction between the sexes, for instance, with the prevalence of the *pardah*, i.e. headscarf for women, pressures to dress modestly, and the importance of avoiding interaction with genetically unrelated males (Dickemann, 1981; Mirza, 1999).

It seems reasonable to expect that such a high degree of religiosity might impact mating behavior in Pakistan where women are victims of domestic violence at the hands of men (Fikree & Bhatti, 1999). This includes beating and subjecting women to subordinate status, economic dependence, and restrictions on going out alone (Rabbani, Qureshi, & Rizvi, 2008). In Pakistan, women are typically expected to stay in the house and leave the house in accordance with the approval of a male guardian (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004).

In terms of religiosity and mate retention, an Iranian study indicated an association between religiosity and benefit-provisioning mate retention behaviors in women (Atari, Barbaro, Shackelford, & Chegeni, 2017). Among men, the results were more complex: religiosity negatively predicted physical possession signals and positively predicted

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