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Laura Loyola
Loyola University

Theresa E. DiDonato
Loyola University

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How Willing Are We to Lower Our Standards? Mate Preferences as a Function of Mate Value and Faithfulness History

Laura Loyola
Loyola University

Theresa E. DiDonato
Loyola University

Please direct correspondence to:

Dr. Theresa DiDonato
4501 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21210
Phone: 410.617-5135
tedidonato@loyola.edu

Abstract

This study sought to determine how the mate value and revelation of faithfulness history could affect mate preference. It was predicted that faithfulness would be more important over mate value for a long-term relationship, and the opposite would be so for short-term relationships. Using a between-subjects experimental design, participants evaluated a hypothetical partner of high, similar, or low mate value that had a faithful or unfaithful past. Results revealed that people cared most about faithfulness for a long-term relationship when that person also had a similar or high degree of mate value. For short-term relationships people cared more about the mate value of a partner rather than faithfulness. These findings suggest that in general people are not willing to lower their standards for faithfulness when selecting a long-term mate, but more willing to do so in a short-term relationship.

Keywords: mate value, faithfulness, short-term relationship, long-term relationship

Introduction

Close relationships are one of the most fulfilling and important experiences in a person's life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Finding a romantic partner, however, is not an easy task, especially since people invest highly once they find that right mate (Rusbult, 1983). Therefore, picking the right mate can be an arduous and tentative process.

In choosing a partner, people generally engage in a process that involves assessing a potential partner's mate value. Mate value is defined as an individual's overall attractiveness, both physical and non-physical, for a potential sexual partner, spouse, and for future reproduction (Shackelford & Buss, 1997). People vary in mate value, and like the expression "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," a person's mate value can differ as a function of the perceiver. Even when one has found a partner that is perceived as having a high mate value, other information may deflect the selection that has been made. For example, previous studies have found that people reveal personal information during relationship initiation (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999). The information that may be disclosed at the start of a new relationship could include information about each party's previous relationships. This study will specifically focus on the revelation of faithfulness

history in previous relationships. Since researchers agree that trust is a fundamental basis for a close relationship (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), and trust has elements synonymous with faithfulness, it is likely that talking about previous infidelities is common among couples.

Evolutionary Perspective

Evolutionary psychologists believe that when it comes to mate selection, men and women seek different things. Men tend to seek women who exhibit youthful qualities and signs of fertility, while women tend to seek men who are capable of providing them with the resources they need in reproductive and familial cares (Kenrick, Trost, & Sundie, 2004). Accordingly, evaluation of these traits can be helpful when assessing a potential partner's mate value. A close relationship is thought most likely to occur when both partners are of similar mate value; in social psychology this is known as the level of aspiration theory, or the matching hypothesis (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Takeuchi, 2006). Differing mate values, on the other hand, do not seem favorable in romantic partnerships. A study conducted by Phillips (2010) showed that wives expect their husbands to engage in extra-marital affairs at a higher rate when their husbands are of higher mate value than themselves. This suggests that wives are aware of a

connection between their partner's mate value and their partner's potential likelihood of having an affair. If faithfulness is valued, marrying a person of high mate value could be risky.

Compromising

The present study aimed to determine if people are willing to compromise on either mate value or faithfulness when selecting a mate. Previous research has found that compromising on mate value differs in men and women when considering two options: casual dating or romantic dating (Regan, 1998). Women tend to be less willing to lower a partner's mate value for both dating scenarios, whereas men tend to be more apt to allow some leeway when it came to just a casual relationship. This finding is consistent with parental investment theory, which posits that women have a substantially greater commitment if an offspring results from a casual relationship than men (Kenrick et al., 2004). As a consequence, women are more inclined to be picky with their casual partners than men. Women's selectivity for casual affairs, however, seems to take on a different form than their selectivity for sustained romantic partnership. Specifically, the good genes hypothesis states that both men and women tend to prioritize physical attributes they could pass on to offspring more so than internal qualities that might facilitate a good partnership in the case for a short-term partner who will not be there in the long haul (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Given this evidence and Regan's (1998) finding that while a person may have standards for the mate value of a partner, this standard is subject to change given relationship circumstances, the present study examined mate decisions in both short-term and long-term contexts.

Based on a review of the literature, no study that has considered the idea of compromising mate value has looked at whether knowledge of faithfulness history may alter one's decision to engage in a relationship. Yet, before investing in a relationship, couples getting to know each other often ask about previous dating history. Recent evidence has shown that information about previous relationships is a topic discussed during relationship initiation, even in the short time frame allowed for speed dating (Stokoe, 2010). Therefore, it is important to figure out what matters more, being with a partner of high mate value that can offer many positive traits and resources or being with a partner that will offer faithfulness despite his or her mate value. Of course, one would prefer to have both high mate value and high faithfulness, but it is often the case that the two do not go hand in hand.

Implications of Infidelity

The importance of studying how faithfulness history may affect relationship formation is crucial, especially since infidelity is not uncommon in today's culture. Weiderman and Hurd (1999) found that 68% of women and 75% of men admitted to having been unfaithful at least once while in a relationship. Infidelity can not only be detrimental to a relationship, but also to one's personal well-being in the form of emotional distress. A study conducted by Phillips (2010) looked at how infidelity played out in partners with differing mate values. The study found that if the cheater had the higher mate value in the relationship, the lower mate value partner responded with feelings of anger to the cheating. Further, if the low mate value partner had been the cheater, the higher mate value partner responded with feelings of insecurity (Phillips, 2010). From an evolutionary perspective, infidelity can also affect males and females differently. If a male is unfaithful the female partner is negatively affected by the possible loss of resources for herself and the offspring, whereas if a female cheats the male partner loses the certainty that he may be the paternal father of the offspring (Trivers, 1972). These findings suggest that the common act of infidelity has serious negative effects on relationships and personal well-being. During mate selection, then, men and women seeking long-term relationships would do well to prioritize faithfulness, potentially more than mate value, when selecting a long-term partner.

Implications of Mate Value

As mentioned previously, compromising a partner's mate value does occur in some relationships (Regan, 1998). Often times though, this asymmetry of mate values procures problematic situations in close relationships (Miner, Shackelford, & Starratt, 2009). For example, Brown and Moore (2003) found that there were higher levels of romantic jealousy in couples that had asymmetrical mate values. To alleviate such problems, mate retention behaviors may come into play. Mate retention behaviors are actions that a partner uses to ensure that a partner stays in the relationship; these behaviors can either be through pleasant ways (e.g., gifts) or unpleasant ways (e.g., abuse; Miner, et al., 2009). Miner and colleagues found that the probability of mate retention behaviors occurring is more likely if a relationship exists where the mate values are unbalanced among partners. The study found that if male partners were of low mate value, they were more likely to verbally abuse their partner if she was of higher mate value. Men who were of high mate value did not exhibit as much verbal abuse towards a partner of lower mate value. Research also

shows that in relationships where there is an asymmetry of mate value, the low mate value partner tends to have a high concern of abandonment from their higher mate value partner (Phillips, 2010).

As the research suggests, being in a relationship where mate values are unmatched may lead to problems. Research has also looked at how faithfulness can affect mate retention behaviors. Evolutionary psychology suggests that men and women have developed mate retention tactics in order to deal with issues of jealousy in relationships (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). A study supporting this theory found that both men and women tend to increase their mate retention behaviors if there is a threat of infidelity in the relationship (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). With regards to this previous research, the present study will also seek to find out if knowledge of faithfulness history may alleviate or elevate these mate retention behaviors as a factor of mate value as well. Perhaps if the prior knowledge is that a partner had been faithful in previous relationships then these mate retention behaviors may be reduced, or if it is known that a partner has had a history of infidelity then these mate retention behaviors may be more common. Based on the existing literature, the following expectations are offered:

Individuals will prefer to be with a partner who will offer high faithfulness to the relationship compared to low faithfulness, as well as with a partner who will offer similar or high mate value than low mate value. However, relationship length will impact this general pattern but only for faithfulness. Specifically, in a long-term context people will prefer faithful partners but in short-term context they will not differentiate between partners as a function of faithfulness. In other words, faithfulness will matter most in the long-term context for both men and women. It is also expected that partners who offer faithfulness will be preferred for long term rather than short term regardless of all mate values, and that when a partner does not offer faithfulness they would be considered more for short term than long term relationship regardless of mate values. When it comes to mate retention tactics, it is expected that when there is a history of faithfulness from a partner, there will be less mate retention tactics exhibited. When there is a history of unfaithfulness from a partner there will be more mate retention behaviors exhibited towards this partner.

Method

Participants

A total of 274 individuals participated in this study, but because of the nature of the study's question,

the data analysis was limited to only heterosexual participants ($n = 266$), 108 males and 158 females. Participants ranged in age from 18-23 with an average age of 19.17 ($SD = 1.17$) and were all undergraduates from a small Jesuit University in the Mid-Atlantic region. Convenience sampling was used and in some cases students were allotted course credit for participation. An informed consent was issued to all participants. Random assignment was used to assign participants to each of the six groups of vignettes, (M_n per group = 44).

Materials and Measures

A demographics form was used to acquire the gender, age, and ethnicity of each of the participants. To manipulate mate value and faithfulness, six vignettes were created describing a hypothetical person. Phillips's (2010) created a measure of mate value consisting of fifteen characteristics known to be important in defining a desirable mate (e.g., "physically attractive" and "ambitious/industrious"). This scale was used to determine the stress response to infidelity as it corresponds to a couple's mate value and established inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .87$) when measuring for self-mate value. Validity was also shown when the measure provided results to support her hypotheses, which were that participants with high mate-values reacted with feelings of insecurity to infidelity, and participants with low mate-values reacted with feelings of anger to infidelity. The characteristics provided in Phillips's (2010) scale were used to create a description of mate value for the vignettes. In order to avoid having extremely high or low characteristics of mate value, descriptions of mate value were created in relation to the participant. A hypothetical partner described as having high value had the following description:

This person is more intelligent and ambitious than you, and plans to graduate from [participant's university]. He is more social and popular and a better leader than you, which has to do with that he is also more easy-going and has a more exciting personality. Physically, he is also more healthier, athletic, and better looking than you. He is also much more kind and understanding.

Wording was changed slightly to reflect the other conditions, i.e., to make the hypothetical partner similar and lower in mate value than the participant.

In order to portray a faithful or unfaithful past an additional paragraph was added after the mate value descriptions. Faithfulness is defined as the degree to which an individual feels a strong commitment to ensuring that he or she does not engage in the same or stronger emotional feelings and sexual behaviors with someone other than his or her partner (Phillips, 2010). The emotional and sexual deviance is key here, since this study was measuring both genders. A study done by Buss et al., (1992) indicated that males react to infidelity differently than females in that they experience stronger jealousy when the unfaithful act is sexual, whereas females experience stronger jealousy when the unfaithful act is emotional. To indicate a history of faithfulness or unfaithfulness that would be relevant for both genders, the following description was used:

In his previous relationships, he has had a history of being faithful/unfaithful to his partner. He has admitted to engaging/never engaging in emotional and sexual behavior with another person, while still being in a relationship.

For each vignette participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale the likelihood of choosing the hypothetical partner for a short-term or long-term relationship, 1 being "Not at all interested" and 5 being "Extremely interested." A short-term relationship was defined as a "hook-up" and a long-term relationship was defined as being "six months or more" (Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004).

Mate-retention behavior was measured by using Buss, Shackelford, and McKibbin's (2000) Mate Retention Inventory-Short Form (MRI-SF). After extensive reforming of this measure, Buss et al. (2000) found an inter item reliability of $\alpha = .89$ for both men and women. The inventory was altered in this study to make it future tense, due to the fact that the participants are simply estimating how likely they would be to engage in these behaviors with the hypothetical dating prospect. The measure consists of thirty-eight items indicating mate-retention behaviors such as, "Call[ing] to make sure my partner will be where she says she will be." For each of the statements, the participants indicated how frequently they would use these behaviors on a scale of 0 (never) to 3 (often). All the scores were then be added and averaged. The inter item reliability for this study's sample was $\alpha = .90$.

Procedure

All participants were given an informed consent and demographics form and the study was

conducted in a quiet and private area on campus. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of the six possible vignettes. The first three vignettes indicated a description of a history of high fidelity paired with the three differing levels of mate value (high, similar, low). The other three vignettes indicated a history of unfaithfulness, paired with three differing levels of mate value (high, similar, low). After reading each description, participants indicated their level of interest for a short-term or long-term relationship with the hypothetical partner. Next, participants filled out the mate retention inventory based on the vignette. At the end of the survey, participants responded to a manipulation check for each of the independent variables. After all the data were retrieved, all participants were debriefed and told the purpose of the study.

Results

A one-way ANOVA analysis testing the effectiveness of the manipulation of mate value revealed a main effect, $F(2, 261) = 42.08, p < .001$, suggesting that participants perceived the hypothetical partner's mate value differently as a function of condition. Post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD indicated that a high mate value vignette was perceived as being high in mate value, ($M = 4.72, SD = 1.55$); similar mate value was perceived as somewhat high ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.48$); and low mate value was perceived as being low ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.30$). This main effect was driven by the dramatic difference between the low mate value and the other two mate values. The manipulation for faithfulness worked as anticipated, $F(1, 269) = 371.93, p < .001$, such that the faithful vignette was perceived as more faithful ($M = 6.07, SD = 1.13$) than the unfaithful vignette ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.67$).

Short-Term and Long-Term Preference

It was predicted that people would prefer to be in relationships with a partner of high or similar mate value than low mate value, and it was expected for individuals to prefer faithful partners. It was also expected that faithfulness would be favored in long-term relationships over mate value, and that faithfulness would not matter as much in short-term relationships as it would in long-term relationships. The hypotheses were tested using a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ mixed method ANOVA with the within subject variable of relationship length (short vs. long) and between subjects predictor variables of gender (male vs. female), faithfulness (low vs. high) and mate value (lower vs. similar vs. higher).

The analyses showed a main effect for mate value, $F(2, 254) = 62.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$, which supported the basic expectation that people would prefer individuals of higher mate value over lower mate value. A main effect for faithfulness was also found, $F(1, 254) = 84.63$, $p < .001$, again supporting the general hypothesis that people would prefer potential partners offering faithfulness over no faithfulness. Initial results also suggested no main effect of relationship length on attraction, $F(1, 266) = .25$, $p > .05$; however, a closer look at this and the other interactions provides a clearer understanding of the relation between these variables. To begin, a significant interaction between relationship length and faithfulness was found, $F(1, 266) = 100.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .28$, and a significant interaction between relationship length and mate value, $F(2, 266) = 3.90$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. To further explore these interactions, a simple effect tests was conducted by using four one-way ANOVAS by gender. Even though analyses were run separately by gender as will be shown, men and women responded similarly overall, $F(1, 254) < .1$, therefore these results are presented for all participants in Figures 1 and 2, depicting the Faithful and Unfaithful conditions, respectively.

The analyses first looked at how faithfulness affected long-term attraction separately for men, $F(1, 107) = 61.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$, and women, $F(1, 158) = 81.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$. The results indicated that for a long-term relationship, men preferred a faithful partner ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.37$) rather than an unfaithful partner ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 1.15$). The same pattern was observed for women who preferred faithful partners for a long-term relationship ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.50$) over unfaithful partners ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .94$). These findings support the hypothesis that people prefer faithful partners in long-term relationships.

Turning to short-term relationships, expectations were once again supported. Examining the effect of faithfulness separately for men, $F(1, 107) = .53$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and women, $F(1, 157) = 1.08$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Consistent with the expectations, when it came to short-term relationships, men neither preferred a faithful partner ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.32$) nor an unfaithful partner ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.44$). Likewise, women did not differentiate between a potential faithful partner ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.39$) or an unfaithful partner ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.37$) for a short-term relationship.

Shifting the analysis to mate value, how the hypothetical partner's mate value influenced long-term attraction was looked at separately for men, $F(2, 107) = 8.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, and women, $F(2, 157) = 28.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$. Supporting the hypothesis,

post-hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD indicated that when it came to long-term attraction, men least preferred to be with partners of low mate value ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.21$) and most preferred to be with partners of similar ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.69$) and higher mate value ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.47$). Women also least preferred to be with partners of low mate value ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .864$) and most preferred to be with partners of similar ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.48$) and higher mate value ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.54$). While men and women appear to follow the same general pattern of preference for mates with similar or higher mate value, the larger effect size for the women highlights their tendency to be discerning for a long-term partner.

Attention was then turned to short-term attraction and the effect of mate value separately for males, $F(2, 107) = 13.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, and females, $F(2, 157) = 13.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. By and large, men and women exhibited a shared pattern of preference and this pattern provided support for the expectation that similar and high mate values would be more appealing. Post-hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD indicated that men reported low interest for low mate value partners ($M = 1.91$, $SD = .95$) as compared to partners with similar mate value ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.45$) and higher mate value ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.25$), which they preferred most. Consistent with this pattern, women least preferred partners of low mate value ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.01$) as compared to partners of similar ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.41$) and partners of higher mate value ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.38$).

According to these results, the first hypothesis was supported in that people preferred a partner of similar or high mate value rather than a low mate value partner, regardless of relationship length. More interestingly, support was found for the hypothesis that people favored the faithful partner only in the long-term not the short-term condition. Next, attention was drawn to the three-way interaction.

The initial $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ ANOVA indicated that there was a significant three-way interaction between relationship length, mate value, and faithfulness, $F(2, 266) = 14.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Close inspection showed that the interaction between mate value and short or long-term attraction depended on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the prospective partner. In both cases, this interaction was significant ($F(2, 123) = 5.70$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$ for unfaithful; $F(2, 123) = 11.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, for faithful). When the potential partner was unfaithful and also of high mate value, participants showed more short term interest ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.31$) than long-term interest ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 41) = 37.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$.

.48; however, the opposite pattern was observed for the high mate value but faithful partners. When the partner had a history of being faithful and was also of high mate value, individuals showed more long-term interest ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.15$) than short-term interest ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.35$), $F(1, 45) = 10.80$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$.

Partners of similar mate value appeared to be evaluated in the same way as those with high mate value as a function of faithfulness. Unfaithful partners of similar mate value were strongly preferred for short-term relationships ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.37$) over long-term relationships ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 43) = 36.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .46$. The opposite pattern was found for similar mate value partners with a faithfulness history. Specifically, faithful partners of similar mate value were more attractive for a long-term relationship ($M = 4.68$, $SD = .74$) than a short term relationship ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.47$), $F(1, 42) = 43.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$. In sum, consistent with predictions, a partner's mate value alone is not enough to anticipate romantic interest, faithfulness also contributes to determine attraction.

Of particular interest was the difference between participants' attraction as a function of relationship length for the low mate value partner in the unfaithful condition versus the faithful condition. Results showed that when evaluating an unfaithful potential partner of low mate value, individuals were more interested in a short-term relationship ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .71$) than a long term ($M = 1.15$, $SD = .36$), $F(1, 39) = 23.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$. However, when the low mate value partner was faithful, the length of the relationship did not matter. Participants' short term interest ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.08$) was the same as their long-term term interest ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 44) < 1$. Overall, these findings show partial support for the expectation that faithful partners will be preferred for long term relationships compared to short term relationships across all mate values: the expectation held for high and similar mate value, but not for low mate value. The expectation that people will consider unfaithful potential partners more for short-term relationships than long-term relationships was supported across all levels of mate value.

Mate-Retention Tactics

It was hypothesized that if a hypothetical partner had a history of unfaithfulness there would be an increase in mate-retention tactics towards the partner, and a decreased use of mate-retention tactics used towards a partner who had a history of faithfulness. A univariate ANOVA was used with a between subject variables of mate value (high vs.

similar vs. low) and faithfulness (low vs. high) to see if there was an interaction. Results indicated that there was no significant main effect of mate-retention tactics and mate value, $F(2, 255) = .90$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Nor was there a significant main effect of mate-retention tactics and faithfulness, $F(1, 255) = .39$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. There was also no evidence for significant interactions.

Discussion

Who one chooses for a romantic partner can affect one's entire life, especially if that relationship is a long-term one. Decisions are often based on what a potential partner brings to the table. This study focused on two qualities that any given partner can offer: mate value and faithfulness. The main purpose of this study was to determine what matters more, being with a partner of high mate value or being with a partner who offers faithfulness and how these characteristics may differ for a short-term and long-term relationship.

The present study replicated previous research showing that when it comes to short-term relationships, people prefer a partner of high or similar mate value (Fletcher et al., 2004). This finding makes sense, given the extensive research done on the matching hypothesis which states that couples tend to be of similar attractiveness (Berscheid, et al., 1971). With this understanding of short-term attraction it was predicted that faithfulness history would not matter as much as mate value. Indeed, while people discriminated in terms of mate value, they did not for faithfulness.

It was also predicted and tested that when it comes to long-term relationships, people would prioritize faithfulness more so than mate value. Results revealed that people cared about faithfulness in a partner for a long-term relationship when that person also had a similar or high degree of mate value; however, this did not apply to someone who was of low mate value. In fact, results indicated that low mate value people were not highly preferred for a long-term relationship even if they offered faithfulness. This finding goes hand in hand with the evolutionary perspective that people tend to prefer a partner that offers the best mate value (Kenrick, et al., 2004). Thus people were not willing to lower their standards and date a low mate value partner even if he or she offered faithfulness. People kept their standards for faithfulness high, even when presented with a partner of similar or high mate value (the most preferred of mate values). In other words, if there were indications of an unfaithful past, even in a partner of high mate value, this could impact the chances of a long-term relationship, and instead make the person more eligible for a short-term relationship.

When individuals are in a committed relationship, it is often common to engage in mate retention behaviors, or tactics to keep a partner in the relationship (Miner, et al., 2009). It was predicted that the potential partner's faithfulness history would increase the need for mate retention behaviors if the partner had an unfaithful past, and reduce the use of mate retention tactics if the partner had a faithful past. Results were inconclusive and did not support this hypothesis. A possible explanation for this outcome may lie in the clarity of the instructions that accompanied the MRI-SF. It was later discovered that some participants did not realize that the MRI-SF was to be answered based on the vignette they had read, and answered based on general experiences they had with partners. Another possible explanation is that given the sample used in this study, some of the mate retention tactics may have been viewed as too serious for an undergraduate student to consider doing with a hypothetical partner (e.g., "Ask my partner to marry me" and "Plead that I could not live without my partner"). The use of a hypothetical partner limited ecological validity, and so it is unsure as to whether mate retention decisions about real potential partners were captured. Also, the use of mate retention behaviors varies on different aspects. For example, a study done by Starratt, Shackelford, Goetz, & McKibbin (2007) found that mate retention behaviors tend to increase greatly when there is an increase in time spent apart since last copulation. Thus there are other drives for mate retention behaviors other than mate value and faithfulness that may come into play.

This study supported the notion that individuals are generally not willing to lower their standards, especially in faithfulness. As a result, it would be of best interest of figure out what does influence people to lower their standards and end up in mismatched pairings. One of the limitations of this study was that it only presented one possible hypothetical dating partner; research shows that the presence of other alternatives may influence the decision to continue or end a relationship (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986).

This study's findings may also have a potential influence on what a person decides to disclose about relationship histories. It seems that if trying to embark in a long-term relationship it would be wise not to disclose information about an unfaithful past, at least not until trust has already been established. If looking

for a short-term fling, disclosure about unfaithfulness does not matter. In fact, all that would matter in a short-term fling would if a person is perceived to have a similar or high mate value to the partner over a low mate value. However, research shows that there is a positive association between self-disclosures and the well-being of a relationship (Sprecher & Henrick, 2004). Research also shows that self-presentation is an important and at times calculated effort when starting a new relationship; for example, a study revealed that when it comes to online dating profiles people were intentionally reporting false information to appear more desirable (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). This study suggests that perhaps revealing an unfaithful past may not be a favorable quality to include in self-presentation, as it lowers desirability for a long-term relationship.

If an unfaithful past is going to impede sexual success later on, perhaps these unfaithful mates could benefit from third party players who can help convey a sense of lost trustworthiness, as relationship initiation is not always a solo process (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2009). Future studies may be interested to look at the future relationship success of partners with an unfaithful past. While this study has suggested that a partner with a history of unfaithfulness is undesirable, studies show that the feelings of a cheater include not only guilt and distress but also positive emotions that suggest a growth in character and a learned lesson of one's mistakes, in other words, once a cheater may not always be a cheater (Feldman & Cauffman, 1998).

This study has provided an exciting look at how revelations, specifically those of infidelity, that occur during relationship initiation may affect the willingness to pursue a romantic relationship. This study's findings suggests that revealing a history of infidelity can certainly hurt the chances of being desired for a romantic relationship, regardless of one's mate value. Surprisingly, the effect of personal disclosures during relationship initiation is a topic that has been relatively understudied. The hope is that this study has offered insight on a topic that not only has the potential to encourage new research but to also alter the future of relationship success.

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Figure 1. Likelihood of Long-term or Short-term relationship with a Faithful-dating prospect of differing mate-values

Figure 2. Likelihood of Long-term or Short-term relationship with an Unfaithful-dating prospect of differing mate-values