

TACTICS OF MATE RETENTION IN SAUDI ARABIA: SEX DIFFERENCES, RELATIONSHIP STATUS, AND PERSONALITY

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Abstract

This study explored mate retention tactics employed in Saudi Arabia. A sample of 375 respondents (220 female; mean age = 35.62 years) completed the Mate Retention Inventory and Revised NEO-Personality Inventory, which were modified to the Arab culture. Multiple regression analyses examined relationships between each mate retention tactic and the Big Five model of personality, relationship commitment status, age, and gender. Women were significantly more likely to employ nine types of mate retention tactics: direct guarding, concealment of mate, time monopolization, commitment manipulation, possessive ornamentation, violence against rivals, public signals of possession, and verbal signals of possession. Men were significantly more likely to employ three types of tactics: vigilance, submission and debasement, and punish mate's infidelity threat. Sexual inducement was negatively associated with commitment status. Conscientiousness was positively associated with sexual inducement, possessive ornamentation, love and care, appearance enhancement, and resource display. Agreeableness was positively associated with two cost-infliction tactics: jealousy induction and submission and debasement. Extraversion was positively correlated with time monopolization, love and care, and intrasexual threats. Age was negatively associated with direct guarding, vigilance, time monopolization, commitment manipulation, appearance enhancement, and love and care. The gender differences in mate retention tactics supported the two evolution-based hypotheses.

Keywords: Mate Retention: Sex Differences, Relationship Status, Personality

1. INTRODUCTION

Mate retention has been a prominent and recurring challenge for humans throughout evolutionary history, centered on forging and remaining in committed relationships (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). This phenomenon has elicited increased interest among researchers aimed at establishing constructs that map out mate retention behavior and their correlations, with spouse-directed insults and physical violence being among those that have been researched extensively (Kaighobadi et al., 2008; Shackelford et al., 2005; Lopes et al., 2016). According to Starratt et al. (2007), the level of risk in relation to partner's infidelity will greatly determine the frequency of mate retention strategies employed by men. The investigation conducted by Kaighobadi et al. (2010) demonstrated the stability of mate retention behavior over a prolonged period, indicating that the behavior can be acquired and retained. Among men, the ability to retain mates is dependent on defined characteristics (Goetz et al., 2005). There is, therefore, a close association between mate retention success and static factors such as personality (Holden et al., 2014; Atari et al., 2017; Pham & Shackelford, 2014).

Buss and Shackelford (1997) concluded that mate retention tactics can cover a broad range of actions, which can be vigilant or violent in nature. The tactics aimed at mate retention can be positive (e.g., offering gifts to partner) or negative (e.g., violence directed to the potential romantic rival or relationship partner), intersexual (i.e., toward the romantic partner) and intrasexual (toward rivals) (Buss et al., 2008). Mate retention behavior is normally assessed using the Mate Retention Inventory (MRI; Buss, 1988).

The MRI includes 19 specific tactics used to retain mates such as *possessive ornamentation*, *concealment of mates*, and *violence toward rivals* (Shackelford et al., 2005). These 19 tactics fall into five broad categories of mate retention tactics, which are further divided into two domains: intersexual manipulations (i.e., behaviors directed at competitors) and intrasexual manipulations (i.e., behaviors directed at one's partner). Intersexual manipulations include *direct guarding*, *intersexual negative inducements*, and *positive inducements*. Keeping one's spouse under direct watch is one of the main forms of direct guarding, such as a man insisting that his partner's free time should be spent with him. Manipulation behavior is one of the main forms of intersexual negative inducement, which in most cases involves using threats as a strategy to ensure fidelity. For instance, a woman may develop jealousy

after realizing that her husband has been out for dinner. In contrast, positive inducement can involve provision of material gifts, sexual favors, and displaying signs of affection. It may be demonstrated by a spouse striving beyond their ability to be caring and kind. Intrasexual manipulations include *public signals of possession* and *intrasexual negative inducements* (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Spouses who display public signals of possession express themselves to third parties in such a way that directly translates that they own a partner, such as bragging about one's spouse to peer groups (Miner et al., 2009).

Romantic relationships are considered a core aspect of many people's lives. Feelings of happiness, warmth, and a sense of belonging are common manifestations in healthy relationships. On the contrary, stress and anxiety are commonly exhibited in unhealthy or deteriorating relationships. According to Andersson (1994), all species, provided they are reproducing sexually, are faced with the essential challenge of attracting and selecting a mate. Since the value of potential suitors differs significantly from one mate to the next, selective mating is a better strategy than engaging in random mating (Williams, 1975; Symons, 1979; Buss, 2003; Kauth, 2006; Gray, 2013). This is because the quality of the spouse is determined by his/her ability to procure resources, which directly improve the chances of survival and mating success of offspring.

Successful partner retention is grounded on reducing the risk of losing a partner to a rival or the partner defecting to form another independent relationship. Schmitt and Buss (1996) and Buss (1988a) argued that there is a limited supply and high-demand of potential high-quality partners. This makes it important not only to attract a high-quality partner but also to keep them, thereby making mate retention tactics essential. The success of a mate retention strategy often depends on the degree to which rivals may seek to influence them to abandon their partners (Conroy-Beam et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2025)).

The retention of long-term relationships and elimination of infidelity have featured prominently as adaptive problems within the framework of natural selection (Buss, 1988). As shown by Hall and Fincham (2006), infidelity by a romantic partner poses a significant threat to the stability of the union. Tsapelas et al. (2010) associated infidelity within romantic relationships to heightened cases of violence, family stress, low self-esteem, and depression. Studies carried out by Holden et al. (2014) have also highlighted behavior such as violence toward one spouse as a tactic of retention employed in romantic relationships. Frequency of sexual intercourse during a romantic relationship has also been observed as a strategy of mate retention (Kaighobadi & Shackelford, 2008). Partner-directed insults and physical assaults and their role in mate retention by males have featured prominently in several studies (Shackelford et al., 2005; Kaighobadi et al., 2008; Kaighobadi et al., 2009; De Miguel & Buss, 2011; Shtaltovna, 2024). Investigations conducted by Starratt et al. (2007; Starratt & Shackelford, 2012) pointed out that the type of mate retention tactics utilized by male spouses is determined by the risk of their partner succumbing to infidelity. Kaighobadi et al. (2010) stated that mate retention behavior is stable over time. Furthermore, there is a correlation between the personal characteristics of men and the mate retention strategies they employ (Goetz et al., 2005).

Agreeableness and *neuroticism* are two personality dimensions that feature in mate retention (de Miguel & Buss, 2011). Social exclusion sensitivity is positively correlated with neuroticism and vigilance concerning potential threats to mate retention. According to De Miguel and Buss (2011), agreeableness is a positive trait since it incorporates elements of collaboration with minimal aggression. This results in strategies that are less preoccupied with the infliction of cost and, instead, enhance the process of retention in a positive way. De Miguel and Buss observed that the personality trait of *conscientiousness* tends to manifest in the mate retention tactics *enhancement of appearance* and *displaying of resources*. Atari et al. (2017) pointed out that to utilize conscientiousness as a strategy of mate retention it is imperative that the individual has acquired resources over a long period of time while pursuing hierarchy negotiations. Sela et al. (2015) also noted that conscientiousness is used in tandem with other benefit-provisioning behaviors of mate retention.

1.1 Mate Retention and Relationship Status

The degree of commitment, as demonstrated by the relationship status, has a positive correlation with the effort put into mate retention. According to Wiscombe (2002), the use of cost-inflicting tactics are common in short-term sexual relationships since the level of agreeableness is usually low; thus, partners will forgo benefit-provisioning tactics as an approach of mate retention. This is based on the premise that all potential suitors are not accorded similar values by their potential partners. Sugiyama (2005) sought to ascertain the evaluation criteria that results in some partners being considered more desirable than others. Research on the subject of partner valuation highlights the awareness of individuals as to whether they possess desirable traits, as well as the coinciding value of rivals (Miner et al., 2009; Salkicevic et al., 2014). Nedelec and Beaver (2014) highlighted the contribution of mate value and one's own value in influencing the behavior portrayed during mating. Outcomes such as lack of satisfaction, jealousy, empathy, and forgiveness in romantic relationships are attributed to discrepancies between each partner's value (Conroy-Beam et al., 2016; Salkicevic et al., 2014).

Kirsner et al. (2009) have highlighted the potential influence of mate value on the retention behaviors exhibited by partners in a romantic relationship. Higher value mates resonate with partners who are able and willing to provide significant benefits to their potential spouse, including physical protection, desirable and healthy genetic attributes, as well as financial resources. Lower mate values indicate the inability to provide significant benefits to potential partners; thus, such individuals will employ tactics centered on cost infliction. Although cost-inflicting strategies have been proposed as a tactic of mate retention for individuals with lower value mates, this approach affects and lowers the potential partner's self-esteem (Sela et al., 2017; Starratt & Shackelford, 2012). Women

who regard themselves as physically attractive are more inclined toward men with masculine, good-looking, and symmetrical physical features (Holden et al., 2014; Pham et al., 2015b; Sela et al., 2015; Zeigler-Hill & Hobbs, 2017; Eve, 2024).

An individual's perception of a partner's infidelity risk, as well as the strategy employed to thwart infidelity, is dependent on personality and other individual traits (Pham et al., 2015b). From an evolutionary perspective, social adaptive problems have played an important role in the development of personality dimensions (Michalski & Shackelford, 2010). Based on this argument, several studies have sought to examine how different personality dimensions relate to the frequency of different behaviors adopted in mate retention (Sela et al., 2017; Starratt & Shackelford, 2012). Thus, based on the Big Five model of personality dimensions, the current study sought to expand on the already established correlations between tactics of mate retention and personality features. We expect our findings to be consistent with other studies investigating personality dimensions and tactics of mate retention. We further predict that negative mate retention behavior, such as *intersexual negative inducement* and *direct guarding*, is the result of the emotional connection owing to the positive correlation between the constructs. On the contrary, intersexual negative inducement and direct guarding behaviors are negatively correlated with the agreeableness trait. The relationship between positive inducements and conscientiousness is expected to demonstrate a positive correlation. We expected that *extraversion* would show a positive association with *public signals of possession*, which is a product of intersexual negative inducement as well as positive inducement. Lastly, a negative correlation is expected between the *openness* personality dimension and tactics related to positive inducement and direct guarding.

Judge et al. (2012) concluded that women with a high level of agreeableness tend to maintain harmony in romantic relationships. There is also a positive connection between relationship satisfaction and emotional stability in women (Sela et al., 2015). Therefore, we predict that relationships aspects such as prospective marital quality and sexual satisfaction will show a positive correlation with agreeableness among women in relationships (Donnellan et al., 2004; Malouff et al., 2010). The sexuality aspect in romantic relationships, such as acquisition of numerous sexual partners and exploring different sexual position, relates to the personality dimension of extraversion (Nettle, 2006). Thus, we expected that the tactic of *sexual inducement* toward a partner will be predominant among individuals with higher levels of extraversion. Tamir (2006) pointed out that the mate retention tactic of increased vigilance of the social environment is a consequence of high neuroticism. Lund et al. (2007) observed that the strategies of successful hierarchy negotiation and acquisition of resources in the long-term are directly linked with the personality dimension of conscientiousness. Therefore, we predicted that resource display would be the most common tactic of mate retention used among individuals with high levels of conscientiousness.

1.2 Sex and mate retention

Sex differences are common in intrasexual competition, which is evident from the type and frequency of tactics used by men and women to derogate their competitors. Sprecher et al. (1994) pointed out that dimensions perceived to be of value by the opposite sex are often used as the basis for derogating competitors, such as men emphasizing the physical attractiveness of women. The same value dimensions can also be used by women and men to derogate their rivals, such as diminishing a competitor's physical attractiveness (Fisher & Cox, 2009). According to Buss and Dedden (1990), intrasexual competition involves intensive use of competitor derogation strategies. The most predominant strategy used by men involves derogating rivals based on aspects such as professional achievement and athletic prowess, which are desirable and valued traits among women (Shackelford et al., 2005). Previous studies have pointed out that male intelligence (Gangestad et al., 2010) and social status (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004) are valued traits among women that determine the likelihood of women mating with a man. Thus, these dimensions are commonly used by men for the basis of derogating their rivals. Chaudhary et al. (2018) also proposed other derogation tactics employed by both sexes that include defamation, such as spreading rumors, and direct attacks on social characteristics (Satia, 2025).

1.3 The Current Study

The current study was based on the model of mate retention behavior proposed by de Miguel and Buss (2011). We evaluated the correlation between mate retention tactics and an individual's personality. Mate retention tactics were measured using the MRI, and the Revised NEO-Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) was used to assess the five dimensions of personality. Moreover, the current research will integrate self-report data and information collected from spouses. The current study will also investigate the relationship between personality and the contrasting dimensions of cost-inflicting and benefit-provisioning behaviors in mate retention. Previous studies on the phenomenon of mate attraction and selection have paid limited attention to the strategies employed in the retention of mates (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Shackelford et al., 2005; Starratt et al., 2007; Li et al., 2013; Abdullah, 2018; Valentine et al., 2020; AL-Smadi, 2025). However, since most previous studies have relied on data drawn from American samples, the results are, therefore, difficult to generalize to other cultures. The current study investigates mate retention tactics in a sample from Saudi Arabia, to ascertain whether the findings from previous research can be generalized to the Saudi population. Additionally, the current study aimed to assess predictors of mate retention tactics, which has remained largely unexamined.

The decision to use a sample from Saudi Arabia was based on the country having undergone tremendous strides in terms of instituting measures to attain education and socio-economic equality. Saudi Arabia is now more aligned with other Arab/Islamic countries, making it a suitable population to study mate retention tactics in Arab/Islamic cultures? This provides an exceptional opportunity to study underlying elements of the psychology

of mate retention strategies. Additionally, the findings drawn from the study will be useful in understanding how different cultures use mate retention tactics, and the role of personality, in romantic relationships. An exploratory research technique will be conducted in the present study to establish the correlation between mate retention in Sudi Arabia in relation to the different dimensions of personality. Additionally, the currents study will also examine the role of gender and age. The following hypotheses were tested in the current study:

Hypothesis 1: The specific tactics used in mate retention by women and men will be predicted using the mate value.

Hypothesis 2: Compared to women, men will be more likely to use *submission* and *debasement* as a tactic to threaten their mates against infidelity.

Hypothesis 3: Among women, the most common mate retention tactics will be *possessive ornamentation*, *appearance enhancement*, and *violence against rivals*.

Hypothesis 4: Compared to women, men will be more likely to use intrasexual threats and violence as mate retention tactics.

Hypothesis 5: Conscientious will be positively associated with *resource acquisition* and *achievement*.

Hypothesis 6: Extraversion will be positively correlated with *love and care* and *intrasexual threats*.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Participants and Procedure

The current study included 375 participants (175 men and 220 women). The mean age of participants was 35.62 years (SD = 7.86). Male participants had a mean age of 35.31 years (SD = 7.99) and female participants had a mean age of 36.1 years (SD = 7.86). Participants were either married (94.1%) or divorced (5.9%). Individuals who had never entered into a relationship were excluded from the current study.

Participants were all undertaking bachelor, master, or doctorate level studies. Data was collected during the 2018/2019 academic year. Participants were given a web link to complete an online questionnaire within two weeks.

This study was approved by the university ethics review board. Additionally, the study conformed to the guidelines under the 1964 Helsinki declaration. All respondents provided signed consent forms prior to participating in the study.

2.2 Measures

Mate retention behavior was assessed with the MRI developed by Buss (1988). The five personality dimensions that form the Big Five model of personality were measured with the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

2.2.1 Mate Retention Inventory

The MRI was translated from English to Arabic using the input of a bilingual speaker from the psychology department at Saud University. The rationale for using the MRI was based on its demonstrated validity and reliability (Shackelford et al., 2005). InFor the present investigation, the researcher created twocurrent study, a different version of the MRI was created for both the male and female participants.

The current study sought to investigate the mate retention tactics performed by participants in their romantic relationships. Using a four-point Likert scale, participants were instructed to rate the frequency that they have performed specific mate retention behaviors over a one-year period: 0 = Never performed the act, 1 = Rarely performed the act, 2 = Sometimes performed the act, and 3 = Frequently performed the act. In the intersexual manipulation domain category, both positive inducements (portrayal of care and love) and negative inducements (punishment after threats of infidelity) were incorporated. Public signals of possession, physical violence, and verbal threats fell under the domain of intrasexual manipulations. The two overarching domains were classified into five subcategories: direct guarding, direct guarding, intersexual negative inducements, and positive inducements. These five domains were further divided into 19 specific mate retention tactics. For example, the tactic of direct guarding was divided into vigilance, time monopolization, and mate concealment.

2.3 Reliability of the MRI and NEO-PI-R

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to examine the internal reliability of each subscale in the MRI and NEO-PI-R (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the MRI and NEO-PI-R

Mate Retention Inventory	Cronbach's alpha		
	Total	Male	Female
Example of item			
Direct guarding	.92	.92	.92
Vigilance (called to make sure my partner was where he said he would be)	.68	.67	.71
Went through the personal belongings of my partner	.50	.47	.60
Mate Concealment	.35	.32	.39
Monopolization of time	.53	.55	.59
Intersexual negative inducements	.79	.79	.79
Jealousy induction	.41	.42	.39

Punish mate's infidelity threat	.36	.39	.48
Emotional manipulation	.44	.44	.44
Commitment manipulation	.52	.55	.45
Derogation of competitors	.52	.55	.48
Positive inducements	.61	.64	.57
Resource display	.42	.42	.40
Sexual inducement	.38	.46	.26
Appearance enhancement	.56	.57	.54
Love and care	.48	.51	.42
Submission and debasement	.37	.50	.26
Intrasexual negative inducements	.81	.82	.80
Public signals of possession	.72	.73	.70
Verbal signals of possession	.60	.63	.53
Physical signals of possession	.51	.50	.55
Possession ornamentation	.53	.59	.46
Intrasexual negative inducements	.57	.61	.48
Derogation of mate	.30	.38	.21
Intrasexual threats	.51	.54	.48
Violence against rivals	.46	.54	.30
NEO-PI-R			
Neuroticism	.39	.42	.33
Extroversion	.53	.58	.46
Openness	.48	.53	.42
Agreeableness	.53	.55	.50
Conscientiousness	.46	.54	.33

2.4 Data Analysis Strategy

Separate multiple regression models were conducted with each of the 26 mate retention tactic clusters as the dependent variable (Table 2). The following predictor variables were entered simultaneously: age, gender (female = 0, male = 1), relationship commitment status (engaged = 1, married = 2, and divorced = 3), neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Additionally, an exploratory analysis was conducted to examine whether age was related to tactics employed in mate retention. However, the current study lacked a hypothesis regarding the relationship between age and mate retention tactics.

3. RESULTS

Table 2

Mate Retention Tactic	R ²	Gender	Age	Commitment status	N	E	O	A	C
Intersexual manipulation	0.09	-0.08	-0.03*	-0.13	0.09	0.08	-0.04	0.02	0.13**
Direct guarding	.09	-.20***	-.12**	-.06	.12**	.09	-.10	.02	.04
Vigilance	.04	.11*	-.10*	-0.01	.10	.01	-0.03	0.06	0.04
Concealment of mate	.14	-.34***	-.04	-.03	.09	.04	-.08	-.08	-.03
Monopolization of time	.12	-.18***	-.13**	-.09	.07	.16**	-.09	.07	.09
Intersexual negative inducements	.04	-.04	-.06	-.01	.10	.02	-.02	.03	.13*
Jealousy induction	.05	-.07	-.02	.09	.04	.02	.03	.12*	.05
Punish mate's infidelity Threat	.11	.30***	.09	-.03	.06	-.02	.02	-.06	.05
Emotional manipulation	.05	-.08	-.04	-.07	.11*	.05	-.03	-.03	.10
Commitment manipulation	.13	-.26***	-.21***	-.05	.05	.06	-.06	.01	.10

Derogation of competitors	.02	-.03	-.01	.02	.07	-.05	-.02	.03	.10
Positive inducements	.09	.06	-.10*	-.09	.02	.13*	-.02	.02	.19***
Resource display	.07	-.09	-.09	-.09	.01	.10	.07	-.08	.17**
Sexual inducements	.08	.05	-.08	-.15**	.04	.07	-.06	-.02	.21***
Appearance enhancement	.06	.02	-.11*	-.02	.00	.10	-.03	.06	.14**
Love and care	.05	.01	-.10*	-.05	.01	.14*	-.04	-.00	.13*
Submission and debasement	.12	.24***	-.01	-.03	.02	.09	-.01	.13*	.08
Intrasexual negative inducements	.05	-.13**	-.02	-.00	.06	.09	-.02	.05	.08
Public signals of possession	.07	-.16**	-.05	-.01	.08	.06	-.02	.06	.12*
Verbal signals of possession	.05	-.12*	.00	-.00	.03	.05	.05	.06	.11
Physical signals of possession	.03	-.01	-.03	-.00	.09	-.00	.01	.07	.06
Possessive ornamentation	.12	-.27***	-.09	-.02	.07	.10	-.10	.01	.13*
Intrasexual negative inducements	.01	-.04	.02	.01	.01	.09	-.01	.02	-.01
Derogation of mate	.03	.09	.10	.02	-.02	-.01	.05	.06	.04
Intrasexual threats	.04	-.06	-.03	-.00	.07	.17**	-.06	-.02	-.09
Violence against rivals	.02	-.13**	-.01	.01	-.05	.04	-.01	.01	.05

3.1 Mate Retention Tactics: Relationships with Gender, Age, and Commitment Status

Table shows the results for the multiple regression analyses with each mate retention tactic entered as the dependent variable. The proposed first two hypotheses based on evolution were supported by the existence of gender differences in mate retention tactics. Male participants were more likely than females to use the mate retention tactics of punish mate's infidelity threat ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.0001$), vigilance ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$), and submission and debasement ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.0001$). Tactics of mate retention that were more common among female than male participants included direct guarding, concealment of mate ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.0001$), time monopolization ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.0001$), commitment manipulation ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.0001$), possessive ornamentation ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.0001$), violence against rivals ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.001$), public signals of possession ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$), and verbal signals of possession ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$).

Age was negatively associated with direct guarding, vigilance, time monopolization, commitment manipulation, appearance enhancement, and love and care. Male participants in less committed relationships were significantly more likely to use sexual inducement ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$) compared to their peers that were more committed.

3.2 Mate Retention Tactics: Relationships with Personality

The use of direct guarding ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$) and emotional manipulation ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$) as mate retention tactics were positively associated with neuroticism. Extraversion was positively associated with time monopolization ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$), intrasexual threats ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$), and love and care ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). The personality dimension of openness was not linked to any strategy of mate retention. Agreeableness showed positive associations with submission and debasement ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$) and jealousy induction ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$). Mate retention tactics in the domain of positive inducement were positively associated with conscientiousness: resource display ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$), sexual inducement ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), possessive ornamentation ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$), and appearance enhancement ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Mate Retention Tactics and Gender Differences

The current study examined the relationship between gender and each of the 19 types of mate retention tactics measured by the MRI. Female participants were significantly more likely to use nine types of mate retention tactics: direct guarding, concealment of mate, time monopolization, commitment manipulation, possessive ornamentation, violence against rivals, public signals of possession, and verbal possession signals. In contrast, males were significantly more likely to use three tactics of mate retention: vigilance, submission and debasement, and punish mate's infidelity threat. The mate retention tactics adopted and maintained by women indicates that retaining resources is their main strategy for retaining their spouse.

It has been observed that a woman's sexual attractiveness influences her male partner's perceived infidelity risk. Women who are regarded as sexually attractive are likely to be pursued by men other than their primary partner. A man who perceives his sexually attractive spouse as having more opportunity to engage in infidelity and, therefore, more likely to desert him, will heighten his efforts toward employing tactics of mate retention to reduce the chances of infidelity occurring.

The current study found a correlation between gender and mate retention tactics associated with sex differences. Mate retention tactics exhibited by men will increase in situations where his female partner demonstrates higher value, often denoted by her perceived attractiveness and youth. The findings resonate with a myriad of literature that emphasize the importance of women's reproductive value in mate selection, which is a critical aspect of evolution. Similarly, the literature highlights the development of psychological mechanisms in response to the reproductive value, which is also a constituent of evolution (Buss, & Shackelford, 1997).

The mate retention tactic of submission and debasement was predominantly used by men in the current study. This strategy incorporates actions such as changing one's behavior or conforming to a spouse's wishes in an effort to please them. However, Buss (1988b) observed that the technique of submission and debasement did not differ between men and women. Similarly, Starratt et al. (2007) observed that this strategy is frequently used by both men and women who are married or dating (Starratt et al., 2007). However, these studies did not investigate what influences men and women to choose one strategy and forgo the others.

Submission and debasement, together with vigilance, were the predominant strategies used by men in new romantic relationships and among newlywed husbands. The performance of mate retention tactics shows conflicting and parallel associations with gender differences. According to Buss (1989), women tend to choose a long-term partner who has a significant amount of resources, as demonstrated by their preference for driving men, which functions as a form of male resource display. Men place a high value on the physical attractiveness of long-term partners, which is consistent with the current study's finding that women were more likely than men to use appearance enhancement as a mate retention tactic.

The widespread practice of Islam in Saudi Arabia means that men and women are culturally prohibited from social or romantic interactions with a man who is not their husband or genetically related. The *burqa*, or veil and headscarf, is worn by women to reduce the extent to which men perceive them as physically attractive. Immense pressure is placed on Saudi women to maintain modesty in their appearance, and interactions with women who do not conform to such pressure is regarded as socially undesirable. Additionally, women are expected to not engage in any activity that might be regarded as sexual or explicit in nature, such as wearing fitted clothing and applying makeup. Therefore, the use of appearance enhancement, and other ostentatious forms of display, as a means of mate retention by women is greatly limited in Saudi culture. Saudi women are presented with the challenges of employing socially acceptable forms of appearance enhancement and sexual inducement as mate retention tactics. On the other hand, appearance enhancement and sexual inducement may be used by men in Saudi Arabia since they are not subjected to the same stringent expectations as women.

The rate of infidelity among men in Saudi Arabia is considerably high. Thus, Saudi women tend to punish the threat of their mate's infidelity as a mate retention strategy. The findings of the current study indicate a limited correlation between the mate retention tactics used by women and perceived risk of spouse infidelity. However, it has been observed that both men and women react negatively to infidelity, especially in the case of a serious romantic relationship (Buss et al., 1992; Lin et al., 2025)). It is commonly speculated that extra-marital sexual affairs are more common among men than women, whereas women tend to directly confront their partner's infidelity more than men (Buss, 2003). This sex difference may be responsible for determining the higher rate of punishing infidelity threats among women, since women are more likely to face this problem. Kardum et al. (2006) observed a positive relationship between a partner's proclivity for infidelity and punishment for infidelity, providing support for this assertion. However, there is a for more evidence-based research to support this argument.

4.2 Mate Retention Tactics and Relationship Commitment Status

The perception of infidelity cues, as well as the frequency of mate retention tactics used in response to perceived infidelity risk, is greatly influenced by personality differences, such as romantic attachment style (Barbaro et al., 2016). Grounded in an evolutionary perspective, Michalski and Shackelford (2010) argue that personality is considered a by-product of behavioral responses to recurring social adaptive problems. This assumption forms the basis for the majority of research on the correlation between mate retention behaviors and dimensions of personality. For example, Jonason and Buss (2010) found a positive correlation between the Dark Triad of personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and mate retention tactics.

Mate selection and retention form an important basis for social interaction and are linked to personality dimensions. A study by de Miguel and Buss (2011) found that agreeableness and neuroticism were the most influential personality traits in the process of mate selection and retention. They further argue that sensitivity to social inclusion, which is a common feature of people with high neuroticism, results in heightened cases of vigilance since the individual is afraid of losing their mate. Partners who portray a high level of neuroticism and agreeableness are more likely to provide benefits and pleasantries to their spouses.

Women who portray a high level of conscientiousness are cited as more reliable and, thus, are more capable of influencing their spouses to engage in positive mate retention behaviors, such as spending time alone with their male peers (de Miguel and Buss, 2011). Both the current study and de Miguel and Buss (2011) found that appearance enhancement and resource display tactics of mate retention were positively association with conscientiousness. Conscientiousness relates to long-term hierarchy negotiation and resource acquisition, which requires one to adopt behaviors that are more likely to successfully retain their mates. Agreeableness is associated with cooperation, as opposed to aggression, which influences the adoption of benefit-provisioning behavior.

4.3 Mate Retention Tactics and Age

The current study found that both cost-inflicting and benefit-provisioning mate retention tactics were negatively correlated with age after statistically controlling for education, relationship commitment status, and gender. This finding is consistent with a study conducted in Iran that highlighted a negative relationship between mate retention tactics and age among men (Pazhoohi et al., 2016). The negative relationship between age and mate retention behavior among men may emanate from the decline in testosterone that typically occurs with older age (Welling et al., 2008). Additionally, the negative correlation may be due to the fact that men tend to engage in romantic relationships with women around the same age. As men get older, the reproductive abilities of their female partner also decline with age and the risk of cuckoldry (i.e., devoting resources to another man's offspring) is highly reduced. Therefore, mate retention strategies are negatively correlated with age (Puts, 2010).

4.4 Limitations and Future Directions

The current study was susceptible to several limitations. First, this study relied on cross-sectional data as opposed to longitudinal data. Therefore, no inferences about causality can be drawn. Second, participants were asked to recall the retention tactics they performed over the preceding year. These responses could be influenced by recall bias or social desirability bias. Third, spousal attractiveness and perceived infidelity risk were not directly measured in the current study, and mate retention tactics may be a poor indicator of perceived infidelity risk.

The hypothesized link between enhanced mate retention tactics and increased perceived threat of infidelity requires a more appropriate model of hypothesis testing, due to the likelihood of spousal attractiveness being a mediating factor. This new hypothesis testing approach requires the indexes of mate retention and perceived infidelity to be measured in real-time, to avoid retrospective biases. Buss and Shackelford (1997) proposed the study of married couples using daily diary entries over several months. In this method, each partner would provide a daily account of their spouses' behavior and actions. This information is critical to test the hypothesis of a relationship between a male partner's increased use of mate retention tactics and his perceived threat of infidelity. Additionally, as there may be a link between a male partner's perceived threat of infidelity and his perception of his spouse's sexual attractiveness (Shackelford et al., 2005), future studies should include a measure of spouse attractiveness.

4.5 Conclusions

In the current study, cost-inflicting and benefit-provisioning were used as mate retention tactics by both men and women. Punish mate's infidelity threat, vigilance, and submission and debasement tactics were used by men more than women. In contrast, women were more likely to use concealment of mate, time monopolization, commitment manipulation, possessive ornamentation, violence against rivals, and verbal signals of possession. Individuals in less committed relationships tended to use sexual inducements more than their counterparts in more committed relationships. Individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tended to use direct guarding and emotional manipulation as strategies to ensure mate retention. Additionally, resource display, love and care, appearance enhancement, agreeableness, and possessive ornamentation were all positively correlated with conscientiousness. Lastly, cost-inflicting strategies such as submission and debasement and jealousy induction had a positive relationship with agreeableness. Vigilance, appearance enhancement, commitment manipulation and love and care showed a negative relationship with age.

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