

Mate Guarding across the Ovulatory Cycle

Are males more protective when their female partners are ovulating?



In the original article...

- “That a woman’s fertility status is detectable by men is also suggested by studies showing that men’s guarding of their mates increases when women are more fertile.”
- “Such changes are probably a result of multiple factors, including changes in both female physical traits as well as behavior.”



Hypotheses

- For pair-bonded women:
 - 1. Male sexual attractiveness moderates ovulatory shifts in female extra-pair desires.
 - 2. Male sexual attractiveness moderates ovulatory shifts in male mate guarding.
 - 3. Female physical attractiveness → male mate retention effort across the cycle.
 - 4. Cycle position affects relationship dynamics
- For pair-bonded & single women:
 - 5. Women's subjective feelings of attractiveness increase near ovulation.
 - 6. Near ovulation, women's desire to attend social gatherings where they might meet men increases.



Participants

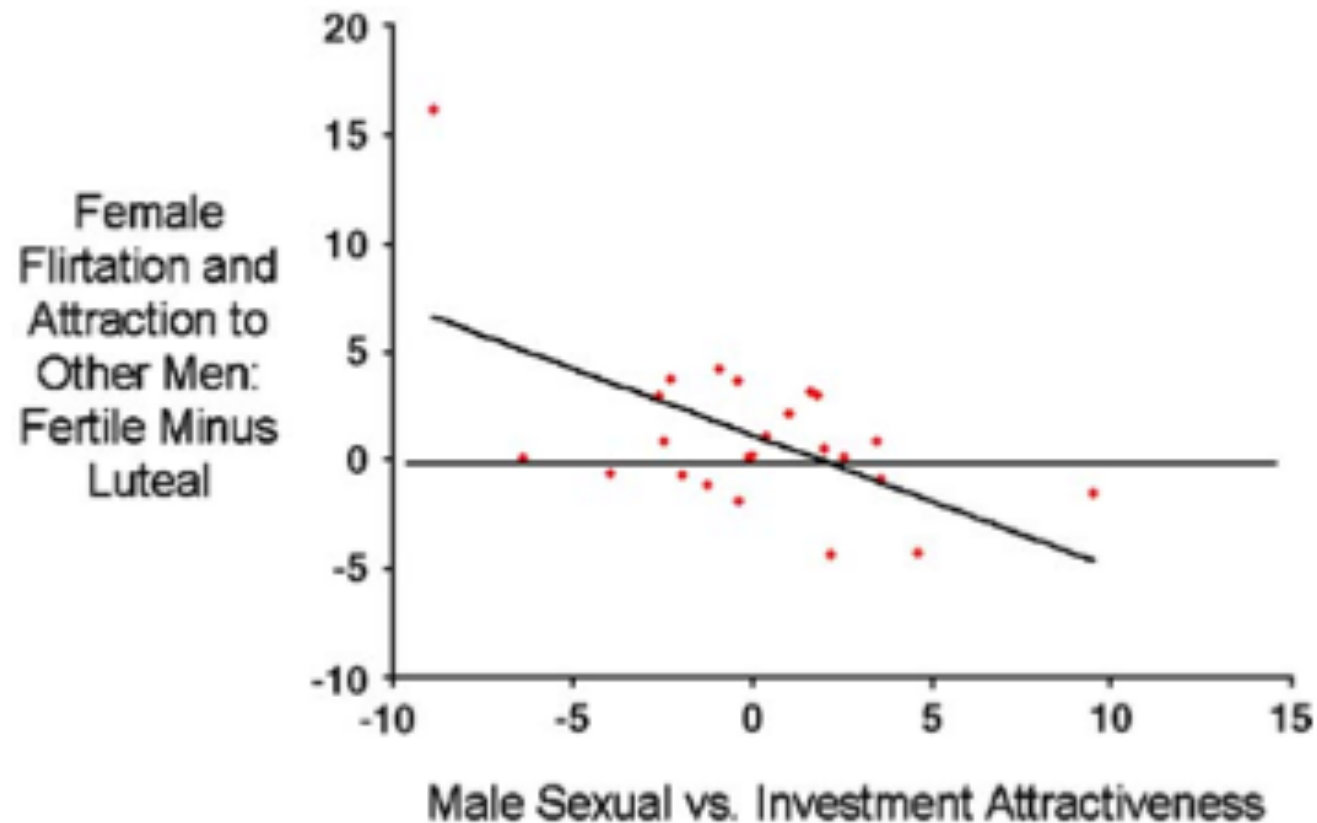
- 38 heterosexual, college women
- 25 are in a relationship
- 7 relationships break up during the study



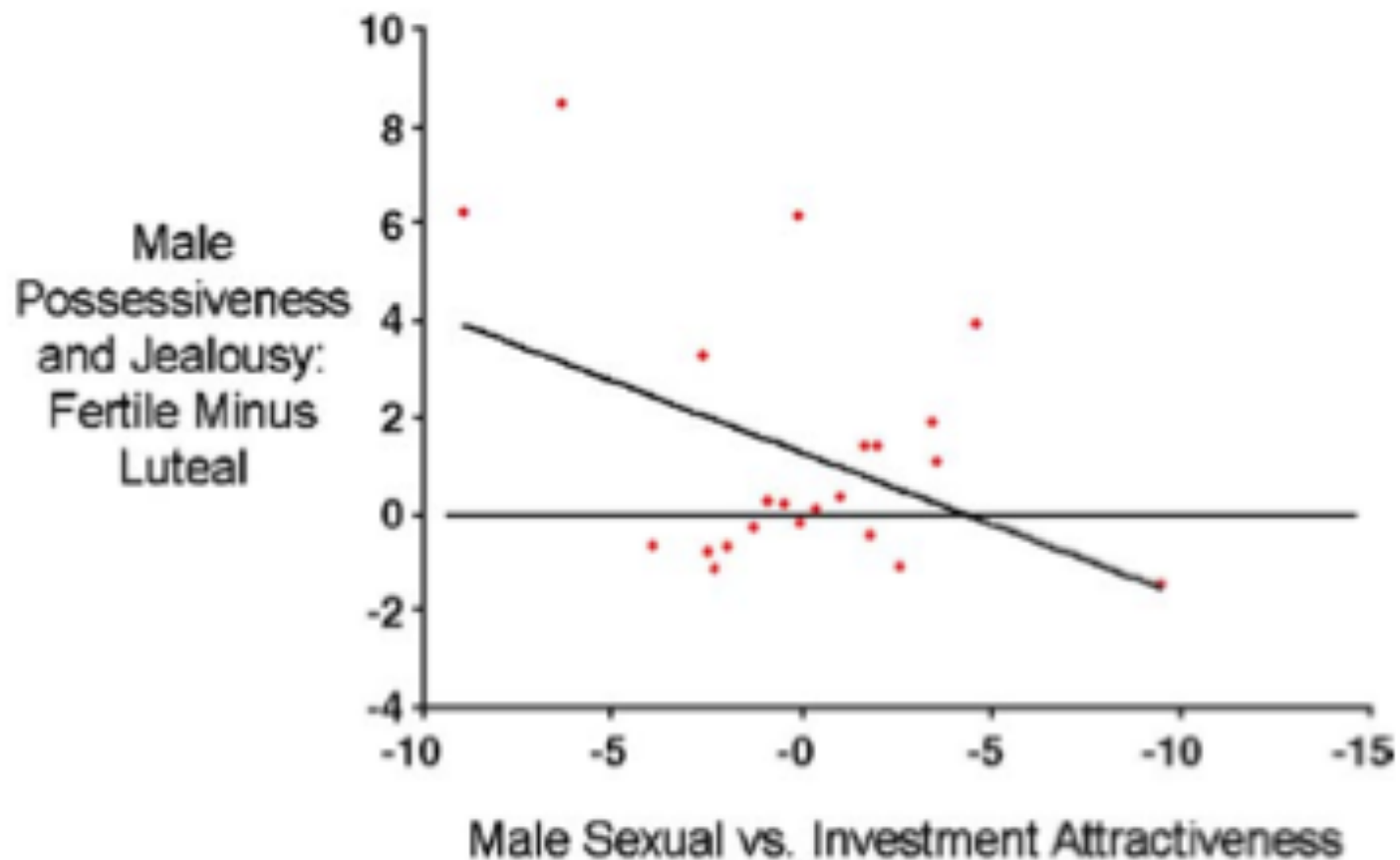
Procedures

- Initial questionnaire
- Experimenter & subject rated subject's attractiveness
- 35 daily questionnaires
 - Attractiveness
 - Flirting behaviors
 - Mate behaviors
 - Relationship dynamics

Only females with less attractive mates flirted with other men more



Not very significant; no correlation when looking at all males





More Results

- Women were more likely to flirt and attend social gatherings while ovulating
- Women reported feeling more control and power in the relationship, especially with low-attraction mates



Confounds

- Experimenter and self rating of attractiveness
- Rating of mate's attractiveness might have greater implications
- Only 35 days (~1 cycle)
- Behavior vs. fertility signals



Related article

- Flinn, M.V. (1988) Mate guarding in a Caribbean village. *Ethol. Sociobiol.* 9, 1–28
- Ethnographic study in Trinidad
- Similar results; similar confound



Implications for original article

- Relationship between ovulation & mate guarding is weak
 - Possibly weakens argument that ovulation is sensed by males
- “Only short-term but not long-term partner preferences tend to vary with the menstrual cycle.”
- “What is the influence of the pill on the ability of women to attract mates? Given that men prefer ovulating women...”
- Does not undercut arguments about female behavioral/preference changes during ovulation